



PRESTONWOOD STUDENT DEVOS



spring 2019



PRESTONWOOD
STUDENTS

Daily Devotions



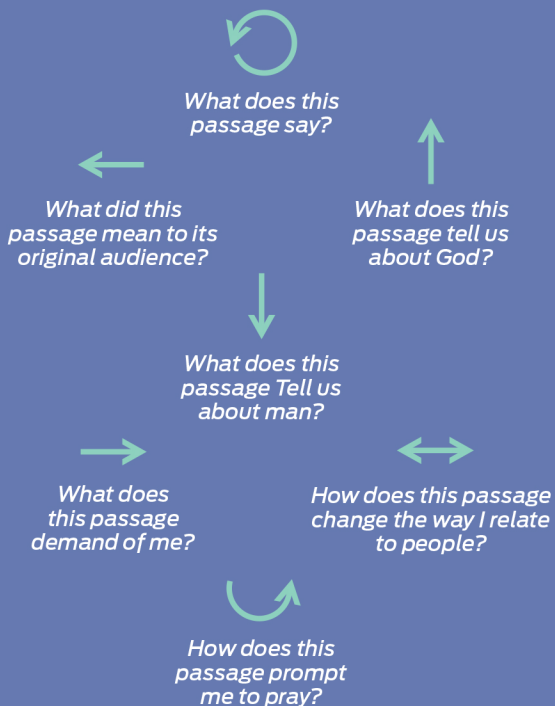
Week of January 7

Day 1

Hebrews 13:7-16

What an incredible blessing it is to have a new home at our Plano Campus for our Student Ministry. God is good! Why do we need to understand the importance of having a space at each campus to do student ministry? This is the space that God has set aside. In today's section of Hebrews 13, we see that through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, we should offer up praises to God. We pray at all of our campuses that our space would be a place where God's name is praised above all else. We also pray that we would share all our spaces. If we keep these amazing spaces to ourselves, we are not carrying out the vision to which God has called us. When we use our spaces to glorify God and share with others, we are making sacrifices that are pleasing to God.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



What can you praise God for today? List three things.

Why is it important for us to use our spaces to glorify God?

Day 2

Hebrews 13:20-21

God, the Creator of the Universe who brought Jesus back from the dead, equips His people with everything good. As we look at the beginning of this calendar year, let's reflect on how God has given us so much to be thankful for in life. We are thankful for the air we breathe every day. We are thankful for the forgiveness of sin. We are thankful for all the blessings He has given us. Do you realize that God gives us certain things to be used for His good? God has set Prestonwood Baptist Church in the suburbs of Dallas to be used to reach people all over the world. This is not something to be taken lightly. As we walk with Him and follow His will for us, we have the privilege of being used by Him. That's incredible! As we see in today's passage, God equips us for what He is calling us to. He has equipped us with top-tier facilities to be able to reach our community in a way that others can't. As this passage finishes up, we are also reminded that being blessed has nothing to do with us, but all the glory goes to God forever and ever!

List four things that you are thankful for when it comes to our student ministry.

Day 3

Matthew 28:16-20

Our Student Ministry exists to do three things: reach this generation with the Gospel, learn to grow in an authentic and visible faith, and to love those around with a biblically-based devotion to Jesus. The Great Commission is one of the best-known passages in Scripture behind John 3:16. These are some of Jesus' last words for us before He left the earth to be with God in heaven. He chose to give us a charge that forever changed the course of history. What we do with this charge is paramount in our lives as present-day followers of Christ. We are called to take the Gospel to all nations and, when others accept Christ as Savior, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then we are to disciple them by teaching them to obey all that God has taught us. This is a massive undertaking but one that we cannot deny or shy away from as believers. If God has changed your life, imagine how many lives He can change through you!

Who is the person in your life who has lived out the Great Commission and has told you about the Gospel?

Day 4

Hebrews 5:11-14

When we first accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are considered infants in our spiritual lives. Just as a newborn baby receives nourishment of milk from a bottle, new believers receive nourishment from simple biblical ideas. This passage addresses those who should be mature enough by a certain time to teach but haven't grown. They still need the basics of the Christian faith.

Would you consider yourself a newborn believer or a spiritually mature believer? Do you receive your nourishment from milk or solid food?

When babies grow to a certain stage, they begin to eat solid food. In our spiritual walk, we can become stagnant and are willing to remain baby Christians, settling for milk. We can settle for what we consider is sufficient knowledge and never move past that. We are not called to settle in our Christian lives though. We are called to grow. We are called to learn consistently. This is the second piece of our mission statement. We want all our students to be learners in their spiritual walks. A key example of this is why we provide a daily devotional for students. Staying in the Word consistently helps you grow beyond the milk to the solid food where you can learn more in depth.

Day 5

Acts 1:6-11

The second part of Jesus' last words on earth was His charge in today's passage. Jesus is literally about to ascend into heaven in front of many people, and He talks about how the Holy Spirit is going to come to the earth. When He does come, the disciples will be sent out like flaming arrows all across the world with the incredible message of Christ's death and Resurrection. The disciples wouldn't just be sharing the Good News to people across the world, they would also be sharing with their neighbors next door.

• Where have you been to share the message of Christ? List all the places you have taken the Gospel, whether another country or your neighborhood.

The last part of our mission statement is to love everyone we meet with the love of Christ. We can do this every moment of every day. Loving people is hard when we are selfish. This is why God calls us to die to ourselves and live for others. How can you love someone today by sharing the Good News of Christ?

Daily Devotions



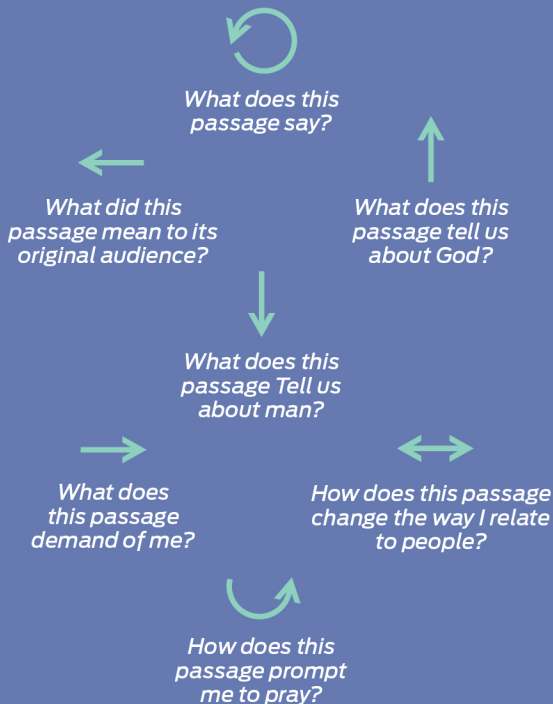
Week of January 14

Day 1

Hebrews 10:24-25

We want our Student Ministry to be known for seven key values. You learned about them yesterday morning, but we want to dig a little deeper into each one of those this week. Our first one is *community*. It is so important that we build community with others. Our next series, in fact, focuses on friendships and how we can be good friends. Many times in our culture, we trade personal communication for virtual communication. True community happens when you do things together and live life together. Shared experiences are some of the most memorable times you will have in your life. The author of Hebrews knew how important this is, which is why he focused on how we shouldn't stop meeting as a church or as a family of Christ-followers. We should encourage and meet together. Community is vitally important to our Student Ministry. This is why we believe in our Table Groups so much!

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



How do you experience community in your life?

What is your Table Group Leader's favorite beverage? Don't know? Text and ask him or her!

Day 2

Romans 12:10-11

The second value of Prestonwood Students is *passionate*. We want our students, staff, and Table Group Leaders to be known for their passion for “all things Jesus.” Paul, in talking to the church in Rome, tells us to be “fervent in spirit.” The word *fervent* means “to display a passionate intensity.” When we accept Christ as our Savior, we should have an intensity about us that is like no other. We can be passionate about so many things in life: sports, academics, theater, choir, band, etc. Often, we are more passionate about those things than we are about the one thing that has changed our lives for eternity. The fact is, Jesus has saved us from death. If we can’t have an intensity about this, then we can’t be passionate about anything. We really want our students to be known for their passion for the Lord. Where do you get this passion? It’s fed through a committed daily walk with the Lord and appreciation for what He did on our behalf on the Cross.

When looking at your life, what are you most passionate about?

Day 3

Deuteronomy 31:6

Empowered is our third value. We have been empowered by God to do His will every moment of every day. In Acts 1:8, we see how Jesus left the earth and sent the Holy Spirit to live inside of us. When this happened, God empowered us to be His witnesses across the whole earth. Get this ... we have been empowered by a holy God to be His witnesses, but we still don’t live like it. Why not? We let fear, doubt, worry and other things squash the power that we have. God addressed this early in the Old Testament when the passage we are focusing on today was written. We are to be strong and courageous in the face of all the fear, doubt, worry and other things. Even more encouraging is to know that He won’t leave us or forsake us. The fact is, we are empowered. We pray that our students are known as being empowered to live their spiritual lives without fear or doubt about what they believe.

What is one struggle that makes you feel restricted rather than empowered?

Day 4

Psalm 147:1; 115:1

Do you like to celebrate? So do we! Prestonwood Students wants to be known for being *celebratory*. In our Christian walk, we have a lot to celebrate: when students come to know Christ, when they move from death to life, when they decide to get baptized, when God calls them into ministry, and so much more. Throughout Scripture, we are told to worship and praise God for all that He has done.

What is one thing God has done for you that you can celebrate right now?

Many times we try to make what God does into something that we do. We try to take credit for it. God has a steadfast love and faithfulness that is unmatched by anyone or anything. Many times we don't celebrate enough in the church. We should celebrate and give God all the glory. God is incredibly good and we should never go without giving praise to Him alone.

Day 5

Colossians 2:6-7

When we accept Christ, we are to “walk in Him” afterward. This means we are supposed to have a daily relationship with Him by reading His Word and praying to Him. Paul says that we are supposed to be rooted in Christ. This is the fifth value we want our students to be known for ... being *rooted* in Christ. We pray Prestonwood Students are rooted in Christ so much that they are deep in their knowledge of Him and their walk with Him. They know what they believe and why they believe it. They can verbalize and tell others about their belief system.

Would you consider yourself to be rooted in Christ? Why or why not?

In order to be rooted, you must be willing to invest time, energy and effort into your walk with Christ. If you are hungry for the Word of God, passionate about your salvation, you will naturally find yourself being rooted in Christ.

Daily Devotions



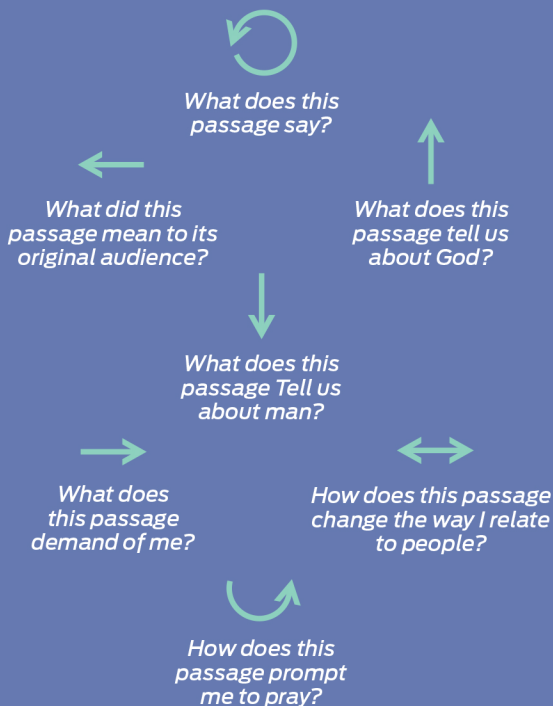
Week of January 21

Day 1

Galatians 2:15-21

Paul's letter to the Galatians reveals the great danger of departing from the true Gospel. By trying to add works to salvation, the Galatians were abandoning the grace of the true Gospel. As believers, we have the tendency to view our relationship with Christ through our own performance. We perceive that we are in right standing with God when we avoid sin, read God's Word, and pray on a daily basis. On the other hand, when we sin and fall short of what God has called us to do, we feel as if God's countenance toward us has changed. This mentality is contrary to the truth of the Gospel. We mistakenly think that right standing before God depends on our performance. What about saying this: Our right standing before God was accomplished by Christ on the Cross. Christ's blood covers our sins, and His righteousness is deposited into our spiritual bank account. We can completely rely on Christ for every aspect of godly living.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Do you find in yourself the tendency to rely on your own obedience for right standing with God? In what ways?

How can you guard yourself from departing from the grace of the true Gospel?

Day 2

Ephesians 2:1-10

In Ephesians 1, Paul reveals that the ultimate example of God's power is the Resurrection of Jesus. The second chapter considers this transforming power within the lives of believers. He describes believers' former lives as spiritual death, in which they followed the course of the world and lived under the dominion of Satan. They were slaves to their own desires; living in the passions of their depravity. As a result, they were completely deserving of God's wrath. However, God was not willing that they would remain dead in their sins, and chose to make them alive with Christ. Thus, it was solely the work of Christ that merited God's grace toward humanity. Throughout the chapter, Paul is compelled to communicate that God's rescue is for the undeserving. There was nothing within humanity that could pardon their transgressions. The work of Christ was in itself completely sufficient for the redemption of humanity.

According to verse 6, what is the end result of being made alive in Christ?

Day 3

Colossians 1:15-23

The supremacy of Christ is the centerpiece in the believer's life. When we lose sight of this, we begin to see our own role differently. We begin to resubmit to the pattern of the world, which is to worship the creation rather than the Creator. To live with no regard for the preeminence of Christ is to depart from the truth about reality itself. Paul understood that if the early church were to persevere in the faith, then the supremacy of Christ must be kept at the forefront of their minds. We live in a day where it is easy to affirm mentally the Gospel of Christ, but hard to live a life that actually reflects that truth. Paul's hope for the believer is that he/she would be grounded and steadfast, continually transformed by the revelation of who God is. In light of what has been revealed to us in Christ, we should continually fill ourselves with affection for Him; moving deeper and deeper into the truth that saved us.

According to verse 22, what has happened as a result of the reconciling work of Christ?

Colossians

2:6-15

It is clear that Paul's hope for the Colossians is that they would continue in the Gospel. Unlike the believers in Galatia, false teachers had not led the Colossians astray. However, it is clear that deceivers were among them. Paul was aware that the Colossians were at risk of being led away from the truth of the Gospel by persuasive words. In light of this eminent danger, Paul instructs the Colossians to walk in Christ just as they received Him.

According to verse 6, what is an attribute of those who are firmly rooted and established in faith?

Throughout history, thousands of people have departed from the truth of the Gospel for messages that are only similar to the one that Paul preached. As believers, we must always remember that Satan's primary tactic is to distort the truth. He will use men that are under his dominion to try to rob Christians of their purpose. Paul's hope for the Church is that we would combat the lies of the Enemy by growing in knowledge and discernment, so that we may be kept pure until the coming of Christ (Philippians 1:9–10). He knew that believers who walked in Christ just as they had received Him would persevere to the end.

2 Corinthians

5:11-21

Christ has not delivered us from our sin in order for us to find our own life. Christ died for us in order that we would die to self and live to God. If Christ is truly the center of someone's life, then he or she is a completely new creation. The tendency to live for ourselves is put away, and a new lifestyle is adopted. This new life is marked by a rejection of self, and a new role of reconciling others to Christ. This portion of Paul's letter should cause us to examine our lives in light of the incredible sacrifice that God made on our behalf. We must recognize the traces of the old self that are still active within our lives and put them to death. We must also recognize that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, so we should look for every opportunity to be ambassadors of Christ to the world around us.

How can you be an ambassador of Christ to the world around you today?

Daily Devotions



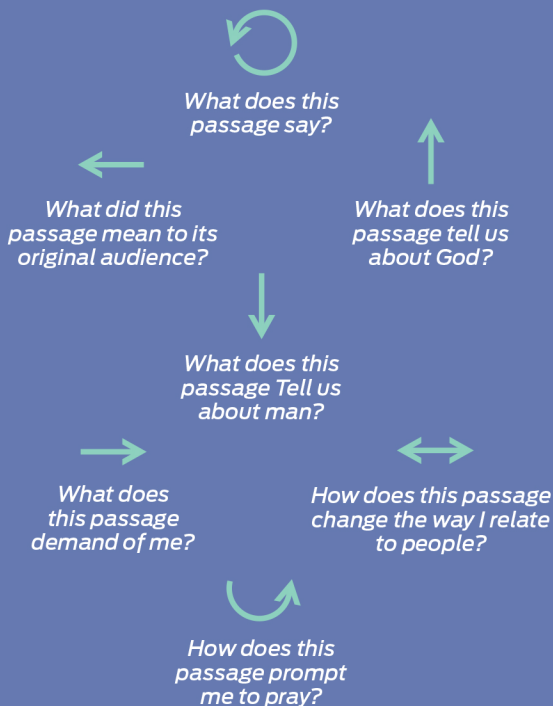
Week of January 28

Day 1

Matthew 4:12-17

One of the things that Christians all over the earth have allowed to happen is the decline of verbally proclaiming the Gospel. When looking in the Bible, we see a proactive and bold culture verbally expressing their love for Jesus. Today's Christian culture tends to find every alternative to spread Christ rather than verbally opening their lips. Christ is the perfect example (as in verse 17) when He bluntly states the need for our repentance. If you struggle to boldly proclaim Christ, follow David's example in Psalm 51:15. He states, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise." Christ brought praise to Himself by telling the people to repent because when they repent and follow Him, they bring Him glory. May we be a people who boldly proclaim Christ by using words, leading people to repentance, and seeking to glorify Christ.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



What do you think Jesus meant in verse 17 when He said, "For the kingdom of heaven is at hand"?

Pray Psalm 51:15 and ask God to help you declare praise from your lips.

Day 2

Luke 10:1-12, 17-24

We see three things in this passage that correlate to modern-day evangelism. The first thing that we see is motivation from Jesus. The second thing that is shown in this passage is the excitement that the disciples portrayed after going out and verbally proclaiming the Gospel. The last thing that we see is Jesus' rejoicing at the 72 disciples' great work of verbally proclaiming the Gospel. Even this day, Christ rejoices at the faithful work of His people who go and share. Christ calls us to die to ourselves and pursue the work that He has for us. The main body of work that He calls us to is making disciples. Making disciples begins with sharing the Gospel with the unbeliever. So we cannot keep Christ's command of making disciples if we are not sharing His name first. The great thing about this is that unbelievers are all around us. There is so much potential for us to have a lot of joy like the 72 who ministered. "The harvest" is those waiting to hear the Gospel in your schools, your neighborhood, and even your local coffee shops. Pray for boldness and allow the Lord to open your mouth.

What are some creative ways you can share your faith with a friend?

Day 3

Luke 12:8-12

What a scary thing to know that your tongue has so much power. Proverbs 18:21 states, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." What is unique about the Christian faith is the peace we are assured of when we go and share the Gospel as in verses 11–12. We are not to be anxious when brought before a hostile audience to proclaim Christ's name. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will give us the words to say. What a great comfort to know that God will provide us with the right words to say in the moment we need it the most.

What are some of your fears in sharing the Gospel?

When sharing the Gospel, we are not to fear, for Christ is always with us. Why are we so afraid of sharing Christ? The main answer typically given is the fear of rejection. Does this strike a chord with you? Typically in America, if people reject the Gospel, they just say no and move on, not giving it a second thought. That is harmless compared to what so many others go through to share their faith. Jesus tells us that He will give us the words to speak if we are just active in sharing our faith. Technically we are not even doing the work. All we have to do is be a vessel and rely on the Holy Spirit to use us.

Day 4

Acts 4:23-31

Suffering for the name of Christ is a blessing. Matthew 5:10 says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This blessing doesn’t resemble the world’s idea of happiness, which we tend to buy into even though we shouldn’t. This blessing is the result of being privileged to face suffering and persecution to bring honor to God.

What was the first thing the apostles did in their time of suffering?

We were designed to have fellowship with the Creator and walk in union with Him daily. There is a constant battle between flesh and spirit making it hard to obey the commands of Jesus, but as we see in this passage it is okay to ask for help. We have been given a difficult but rewarding task in going throughout the world and making disciples. When you are faced with a difficult situation in sharing your faith whether at school, practice, or whatever activity you are involved with, it is nice to know that you have a source to go to for strength and completing the work of Jesus. Pray for boldness and allow for Him to use you in incredible ways for His glory.

Day 5

Acts 10:34-43

Peter begins by stating that there is no partiality when it comes to Christ. There is no group that will receive more favor than another because of social status, race or age. Peter continues, boldly saying that anyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins. We need to pray for this same boldness as we also spread the message of Jesus and His forgiveness of sins. Sharing the free gift of salvation that rests within the Crucifixion, death, and Resurrection of Christ meant to Peter more than his own reputation, as it should to us. May we take Peter’s example and live it out in our own lives.

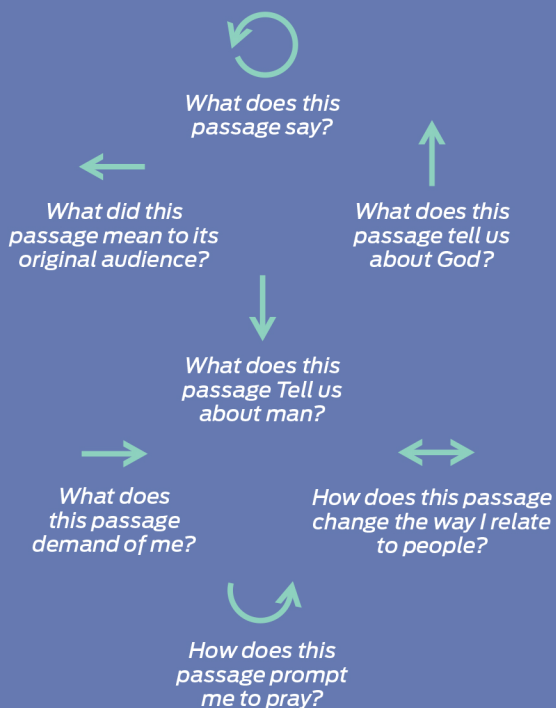
Does your thought about your reputation reflect Peter’s thoughts about his?

In reality there is nothing that we can do to make the Holy Spirit move; He operates on His own time. What we can do is make ourselves available to Him by doing the work of Christ, speaking boldly and praying that the Holy Spirit would use us. He will use those who are available and faithful, so why miss out on the opportunity of God to use you for something greater than yourself? Join Christ in completing His mission; open your mouth; and allow the Lord to use you in a way to best bring Him glory.

Daily Devotions



The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Week of February 4

Day 1

John 4:1-4

This is a day that forever changed the life of the Samaritan woman. This past weekend, we studied the encounter Jesus had with this woman at Jacob's Well. While we focused on her reaction to the living water, let's take this week and dig into the beginning of this story. Verse 4 shows us something that we must not glance over. Jesus had to go through Samaria. There were many different routes to take, no matter where He was going, but the most popular route from Judea to Galilee went through this area. Not only was the route shorter, there were people who needed to hear Christ's message in Samaria—The Samaritans were a people who worshipped foreign gods and had wandered away from the one true God. It was necessary for Jesus to travel this route due to the length and the opportunity for ministry.

Have you ever picked up on this point in John 4:4? Why or why not?

Why do you think it's important to notice things like this when studying God's Word?

Day 2

John 4:5-9

Once Jesus got into Samaria, He sat next to the well. Why? The Bible tells us He was weary. Weary means “physically or mentally exhausted by hard work, exertion or strain.” Basically, Jesus was tired and needed something to drink. When the Samaritan woman walked to the well, Jesus asked her for a drink. This is a big deal! Jesus, the Son of God, spoke directly to a Samaritan woman. Two things exist here that make it surprising. First, because of her ethnicity, she is considered a sinner, and Jews looked down on her people. Secondly, she is a woman. In Jesus’ time, men didn’t socialize with women in public. But it shows us that Jesus was there to minister to anyone and everyone. There are no prerequisites to meeting with Christ. In fact, all through the Gospel accounts, Jesus meets with people to whom most others wouldn’t consider speaking. He continually takes the message of salvation to those whom no one else will. Jesus is a Savior for all and does not shy away from anyone.

Is knowing that Jesus meets with sinners of the worst kind comforting or concerning to you? Why?

Day 3

Romans 5:5-11

Isn’t it awesome to know that while we are weak and sinful, like the Woman at the Well, God still sent His Son to die on the Cross. Notice that God also sent Jesus at the right time. Just as Jesus encountered the Woman at the Well at just the right time, God sent His Son at just the right time to save the world. We are all in need of salvation, no matter who we are. We all have that thirst for something deeper. We can be confident in knowing that God sent His Son at just the right time to quench that thirst.

What does Paul mean when he says, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”?

Our lives are forever changed by the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross—we see that in the life of the Woman at the Well. She came to the well simply for water and left a completely transformed person. She left with a joy and a love that comes from what Paul talks about in Romans 5. In our weakness, through Christ’s righteousness, we are made new. His perfection allows us to experience forgiveness. When we were weak, Christ came at just the right time. God’s love has been poured out on us. Now, to whom do we need to show His love this week?

John 4:14-18

At this point in the story, we see Jesus get blunt with the woman and call out her sin. Most people read this passage and think about how awkward that must have been. How awkward must the woman have felt when Jesus pointed out her sin?

Did you feel a little cringe inside when you read that part of the passage? Why or why not?

Can you believe that Jesus would be that bold to call out the woman's sin? Absolutely! You know why Jesus did this? Because He loved her. His love for her is more than His desire to avoid confrontation. We all say we want friends such as this who will call us out when we need to be corrected, but when it comes down to it, most of us cringe when it happens. We don't like conflict. Jesus wasn't going to shy away from the truth of who this woman was because it showed her need for the Living Water even more. She was trying to quench her thirst with relationships, and it wasn't working, which is why she had five husbands. Jesus was about to change her life, though. His desire to love her was more than His desire to avoid conflict.

Whom might you need to have a loving conversation with today?

John 4:27-28, 39-42

This woman's encounter with Jesus led to many other people's coming to Christ as their personal Lord and Savior in her city. The person who was considered a reject and an outcast, was the same person God used to spread the Gospel throughout Samaria that day and beyond. Just as Jesus showed through His compassion for this woman, we are not defined by our struggles and our issues. We must stop identifying ourselves with our past. We are not that person any longer when we enter into a relationship with Christ. We are not forsaken; we are not a loner; we are not a reject; we are not an outcast; we are not a worrier; we are not used; we are not worthless. We are a child of God. We are loved. We are cherished; we are healed; we are accepted; we are a treasure.

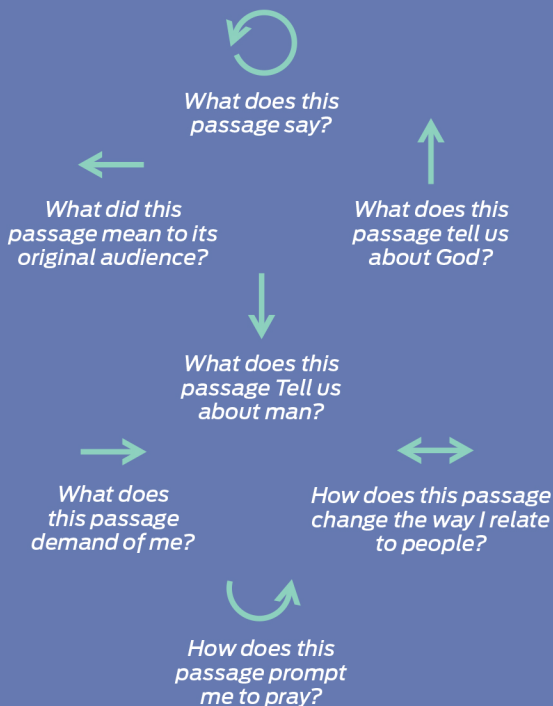
What lie have you been believing about your identity that isn't true?

When you truly encounter God each day, there will be a difference in your life that becomes evident to those around you. God uses you to do great and mighty things—things you haven't even thought of at this point in your life. He will use you to change many people's lives just like the Woman at the Well. Make the choice to listen to the voice of God and His promises and not the voice of the world and its destruction.

Daily Devotions



The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Week of February 11

Day 1

Proverbs 16:28

If you want to be a bad friend, one of the things you can do is tear down your friends with your words. Words are funny things. They can be either super encouraging or super destructive. You have probably experienced this in some way in your life. The old saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is a great saying but one that’s easier said than done. The truth is that words hurt ... a lot! This is why it’s so important to watch what we say and how we say it. Today’s passage talks about how a dishonest person spreads strife or conflict and how a whisperer (gossiper) drives friends apart.

When was the last time you were torn down by a friend’s words? What happened?

When was the last time you were encouraged by a friend? What did he or she say to you?

Day 2

Proverbs 12:18

Words are compared to many different things in Scripture to show us how powerful they really are. Today's passage compares reckless words to a sword being thrust at someone. These words have the power to cut and pierce, no matter how strong the person receiving them is. This is why we must think before we speak. We should never blatantly say things. The second part of this passage gives the correct way to use our words. What's the opposite of a destructive weapon? Healing! So using wise and thoughtful words will bring healing. This means that we need to be wise with everything we say. We need to heal instead of cause pain. If we can do this, then we have the opportunity to gain friends rather than push people away from us. Especially in a culture that seems to tear people down often, we should be a source of healing that brings people up.

How can you be wise in how you use your words on a daily basis?

Day 3

James 3:1-6

After James says that teachers will be judged with a greater strictness because they say and use words to point people to Christ, he gives three examples of the power of the tongue and our words. The first example is a bit that's placed in the mouth of a horse to guide it in the direction the rider wants to go. The small bit guides the horse's whole body. Secondly, the rudder on a boat steers the boat in the direction the pilot wants to sail. Thirdly, a small spark has the potential to set a whole forest ablaze. James is trying to warn us that the tongue is a small thing, yet it has the power to do irreparable harm to others and to ourselves. This is why we must pay careful attention to what we say and the words we use.

Think of a fourth example to add to James' three, where something small can control something major. Write it below.

James

3:7-12

The tongue is something that we cannot tame. James says that it is a “restless evil, full of deadly poison.” Why does he say that? Because we can use it to worship the Lord and then turn right around and destroy people with it. He uses two examples here of why that shouldn’t be the case. Fresh water and salt water cannot come from the same opening, just as a fig tree cannot bear olives. Our mouths shouldn’t be able to spout forth both worship and destruction.

Do you have a habit of praising God and then gossiping? Or praising God and then tearing someone down? Why?

How can we not allow this to happen to our friendships? We must be diligent to think through everything before we say anything. Even though it would be easy to say whatever we want, that’s not what we are called to in our relationship with God. We are called to a higher standard where we think before we speak. It always takes time to build friendships from scratch, but we can lose friendships very quickly with our words. Trust is another thing that takes time to build but can be quickly lost. Today, pay attention to what you say and how you say it. Maybe you even need to ask forgiveness from friends for things you have said to them or about them. Take five minutes today to say you’re sorry. Forgiveness brings healing.

Matthew

15:18

Jesus, teaching about things that defile a person, addresses what comes out of our mouths. He draws a direct line from the mouth to the heart because what we say comes from our heart. We can do a great job of masking our thoughts so that no one hears them or sees them. What we cannot do, though, is mask our words. When we have something on our heart, we are more likely to talk about it. When we bottle up those things, they begin to affect us in numerous ways, and that’s why our words flow out of our hearts.

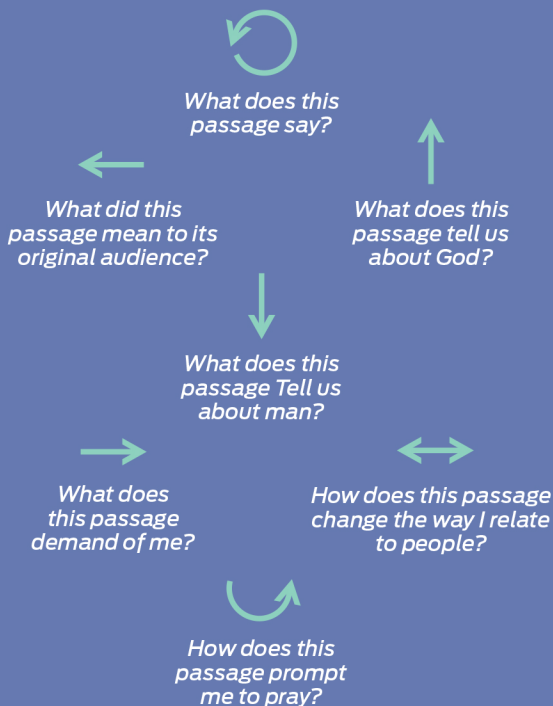
What’s on your heart lately that you find yourself talking about to others?

This idea can be pretty scary to some of us. When we really look at what and whom we talk about, it can shine a light into the darkness of our own lives. If a direct line can be drawn from our mouth to our heart, then we have to look at how we use our words. What is the current condition of your heart? What attitude comes out of your mouth that originates from your heart? Probably 99 percent of the time, the spiritual battles in our lives come straight from our heart!

Daily Devotions



The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Week of February 18

Day 1

1 Corinthians 15:33

If we want to be a bad friend, then we should lead our friends to make bad decisions. It's easy to mislead friends in our culture. Social media allows us to portray all kinds of false truths. For instance, anyone can post a picture of himself and make it seem like his life is nearly perfect, when deep down, he is struggling. We have become the kings and queens of presenting perfection when our lives are far from it. We mislead everyone around us. Paul encourages us not to be misled or mislead others. He quotes a famous poem by Meander, "Bad company corrupts good character." Paul is alluding to the fact that we shouldn't hang out with friends who pull us away from God; we need to distance ourselves from them. We should never let friends take us away from our relationship with the Lord.

How have you seen yourself corrupted by bad company?

Would you consider yourself to be someone with good character? Why or why not?

Day 2

1 Timothy 4:12

Paul, in his first letter to his disciple Timothy, gives a lot of instructions. In one section, Paul tells Timothy not to let anyone look at him differently just because he is young. No matter your age, you have the opportunity to be an example for anyone—a friend, or anyone you meet randomly on the street. We can see this most clearly on mission trips. When you go and serve someone, you immediately garner his or her attention. Paul wants Timothy to understand he can be used by God where he's at. How? Paul says by using his speech, conduct, love, faith and purity practically. All these things basically make up the way you live your life. Paul is telling Timothy to watch how he lives his life in every facet in order to be a shining example to those around him. We must do the same thing when it comes to our friends. As believers, there is no reason why we cannot be the example we need to be to all of our friends. This is what we are commanded to do!

How can you be an example to your friends today in your speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity?

Day 3

John 13:1-15

The ultimate illustration of how we should live our lives and be examples to our friends is Christ. Jesus, before He is crucified, takes the time to serve His disciples by washing their feet. This was a great example of servanthood because it was a disgusting job. People in the New Testament wore thin leather sandals and walked everywhere. Their feet became extremely dirty and grimy. Most often, the lowest servant or slave would be in charge of washing the feet of people before they entered a house. Jesus took it upon Himself to be that servant. He ends with the statement, "I have given you an example." The ultimate example we should model in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity is Christ. Then Jesus commands us to do the same thing He did. We should be the kind of friend who loves the way Jesus did. We should become so selfless that we are only concerned about others. Think about your friendships. How would they look if you lived like this all the time?

What's one way you can live a selfless life and be a good example to your friends today?

Day 4

Proverbs 13:20

This is a little piece of life advice that will benefit you so much in the long run of friendships. If you walk with the wise, you will be pushed to be wiser yourself. If you walk with fools, you will be foolish, and your life will be led to destruction. If you look at the lives of celebrities, you can see this firsthand. Whom you walk through life with is a great predictor of whom you will end up being.

Whom would you consider to be your wisest friend and why?

If you had a hard time answering the question above, you might find yourself in the foolish category. You might want to take a moment and evaluate your friendships and how they are molding you into a wise person or a fool. We should all surround ourselves with friends who are pushing us closer to Christ. If the majority of our friends are not the right kind of friends, we will find ourselves far from God. Not only do we want to surround ourselves with the right friends, but we also want to be the right friend to others—someone to lead them to wisdom rather than foolishness.

Day 5

Philippians 3:12-21

Paul starts off this passage by saying he isn't perfect, but he still strives toward what God has in front of him. In his pursuit, he becomes a pattern for others to imitate, and he calls everyone to imitate him. Even though he's not perfect, he still sets a standard. In essence, he is telling us to surround ourselves with others like him who can be examples in good conduct for us.

Are you a friend that others can use as an example? Why or why not?

After verse 17, Paul tells us that there are many who walk as enemies of Christ. Though they may seem as though they have their act together, they actually oppose God. In the long run, we should focus on and look to eternity with God in heaven. The things of this earth will pass away, including friendships, but what will remain forever is your relationship with Christ. Friends are not friends forever, contrary to the popular song.

Daily Devotions



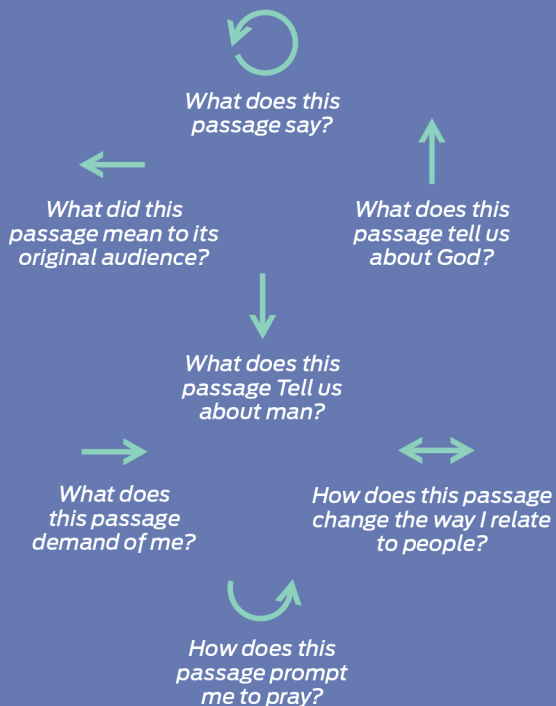
Week of February 25

Day 1

Romans 10:13-14

No matter who you are, no matter where you live, no matter where you come from, you have the opportunity to be saved. But how can people be saved if they don't know the truth of God's Word? Paul lays out plainly that if we don't share our faith, people can't hear. We are the ones who make the choice to share what we believe with those around us. As Christians, we should share the incredible message of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross for our sins. This task is ours! We must own it. We must share it. If we truly love our friends, we will be the ones to show them the love of Christ and not keep it from them.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



When was the last time you shared your faith with a friend?

What keeps you from sharing your faith with your friends?

Day 2

Proverbs 27:6

A friend will tell you something—even though it may hurt—in order to make you a better person. Let's say you are eating dinner with a friend and he or she gets food stuck in his or her front teeth. Do you say something? Yes! A good friend will always help a friend so he or she doesn't look like an idiot. Many times, this may feel like a wounding, but a friend has to do what a friend has to do. Friends have to be honest with each other in a loving way. This same principle can be applied to our spiritual lives. If someone feels guilty about something he or she has done, then we must be the one to say that the guilt stems from conviction. We need to be the one who loves a friend enough to share the antidote to guilt. When we keep the love of Christ from that person, we are keeping him or her from eternal life with Christ, which is the exact opposite of what we should want for a friend.

Write down the last time you were honest with a friend and it helped your friendship grow.

Day 3

2 Corinthians 2:14-15

Sadly, we are all a lot like Jonah. We tend to run from every opportunity, want what's best for ourselves, and live a life lacking in gratitude toward God. Why? Because we are spoiled and we worry what others may do or think if we were actually to take God's loving message to our friends. It's our job to represent Jesus to those who are suffering, though. You have probably heard the saying, "You may be the only Jesus someone ever meets." In a world so full of sin and nastiness and uncommitted church attenders, there is a sea of people drowning in sin and despair. You may be the only person with a life preserver to come their way. So the question remains: Will you throw the life preserver to them, or will you keep it for yourself out of fear and walk away?

Has God ever led you to share your faith and you didn't do it? Write the story below.

2 Corinthians

5:20

According to Dictionary.com, an ambassador is “an authorized messenger or representative.” When Paul uses this word to describe who we are, he is being specific. When we accept Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, we become officially approved to take the message of Christ to everyone. We are living and breathing on behalf of our King who reigns in heaven.

What do you know about being an ambassador? How would you describe what one does?

Part of our identity comes from the fact that we are called ambassadors for Christ. Our identity changes when we put our faith in Him. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are made new. We are adopted into His family. We are heirs to His throne. We are ambassadors, sent to share the message of Christ’s death on the Cross for our sins. There is no other message that comes close to the importance of this one, so it should be the message that’s on the forefront of our lips as we reach out to those who are lost and need Jesus.

Matthew

10:26-33

In this passage, Jesus teaches us not to have any fear. We shouldn’t fear what anyone around us says or thinks. If we are supposed to fear anyone, it should be God who has the power to destroy the body and the soul. So what happens if we aren’t obedient to the command of Christ on our lives? Jesus states at the end of this passage that whoever acknowledges Christ before people will also be acknowledged before God. The flip side is that whoever denies Christ will also be denied by Christ before God.

What does it mean that you will be denied by Christ before God?

We don’t need to fear the ways that sharing the Gospel might negatively impact our social life. All these things will fade and fall away in time. The thing that will stand for eternity is our love of the Lord and spreading His message to our friends. God has entrusted so much to us, but this trust comes with very real expectations and very real obedience. Christ, in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), gives us the command to share the message of His life with everyone. We are called to reach the lost, including those closest to us. Go and tell!

Daily Devotions



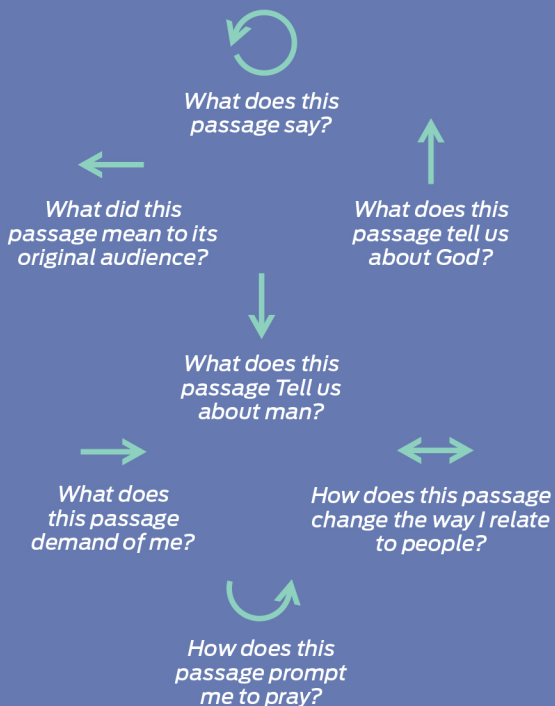
Week of March 4

Day 1

Ephesians 2:11-22

Yesterday morning we talked about loving our friends enough to hold them accountable. Accountability is a pretty intimate thing, though. You can't hold just anyone accountable for his or her life choices. You must have a relationship with that person first. Accountability can be very uncomfortable, but it's something that we all need in our lives. Many times we use the excuse of discomfort or not knowing someone well enough to excuse ourselves from holding others accountable. Scripture tells us, though, that we are no longer strangers. We are, in fact, all in a family. As we said yesterday morning, effective Christians are connected Christians.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Have you ever had someone keep you accountable and ask you the tough questions?

Who is someone you would trust to hold you accountable now?

Day 2

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

It's a simple fact that doing life together makes it easier to follow Christ. When we are connected to other Christians, it becomes infinitely easier to make the right decisions and love God.

Ecclesiastes was written to address head on some of the hardships in life. It's not a sugarcoated book of the Bible. It's a lot like Job in the way it handles difficult situations. Chapter 4 deals with how we handle evil. The author, in his wisdom, admonishes us to surround ourselves with people who will lift us up and help us. Two are always better than one. Just as a rope has multiple strands that makes it stronger, we, too, need others who will strengthen our walk. The more people you have in your life who love God and are seeking after Him, the easier it will be to love God and seek after Him. It doesn't mean you will be perfect from then on. But having people around you when you fall makes it easier to get up and keep going. Wise choices are the result of spending time with God and the people who are following Him daily.

Do your friends make you stronger? Why or why not?

Day 3

Galatians 6:1-5

Paul, in this passage, lays out what we are supposed to do if we find someone in sin. Since having friends makes us stronger, then we must use accountability to grow closer to Christ. As brothers and sisters in Christ's family, we should watch out for each other. Paul says that when someone sins, we should "restore (that person) in a spirit of gentleness" (v. 1). This doesn't mean that we yell or confront him in front of other people, but it means that we should gently and lovingly call out his sin to him privately, so he can seek forgiveness and grow in maturity. This requires tact. Tact is "skill in dealing with difficult or delicate situations" (Dictionary.com). How you say something is just as important as what you say. Your tone can communicate something your words don't. We have a biblical calling on our lives to help our Christian friends by holding them accountable.

How are you at speaking with tact?

Day 4

James 5:16-20

Here again we see that we are supposed to confess our sins to each other and then pray together. Praying together to seek forgiveness or just simply praying with someone bonds people. Accountability is not only sharing your failures with each other, but then praying for and with each other. This may be awkward at first, but, again, it's biblical.

When was the last time you prayed with a friend not during Table Groups or with your family at the dinner table?

Friends should be those with whom we do spiritual things, such as praying together. Prayer is such a huge part of our relationship with God that it should bleed over into our relationships with others. If you look at the early church, praying together was one of the things they did all the time. That's what bonded them together and helped them show love for each other. Our friendships should be no different. If you don't have a friend you are praying with yet, consider who that friend may be and begin this process.

Day 5

Luke 17:1-4

This passage is a stern warning about temptation. Jesus warns His disciples that they should never be the ones who tempt others to sin, and we shouldn't either. Why would we ever want to cause people we care about to do something wrong, something that will harm and destroy them? Next, Jesus instructs His disciples and us to rebuke or correct our brothers and sisters in Christ when they sin. We should also forgive them when they repent and apologize. Sometimes this is very hard to do, but we should not hold back forgiveness because God has forgiven us. Even when they keep hurting us, we keep forgiving. This kind of love and forgiveness can only come from God, so make sure that you pray for Him to work through you and help you forgive.

Is there an adult in your life you would be willing to ask to be your accountability partner? Send that person a text now and ask.

Daily Devotions



Week of March 11

Day 1

Psalm 8

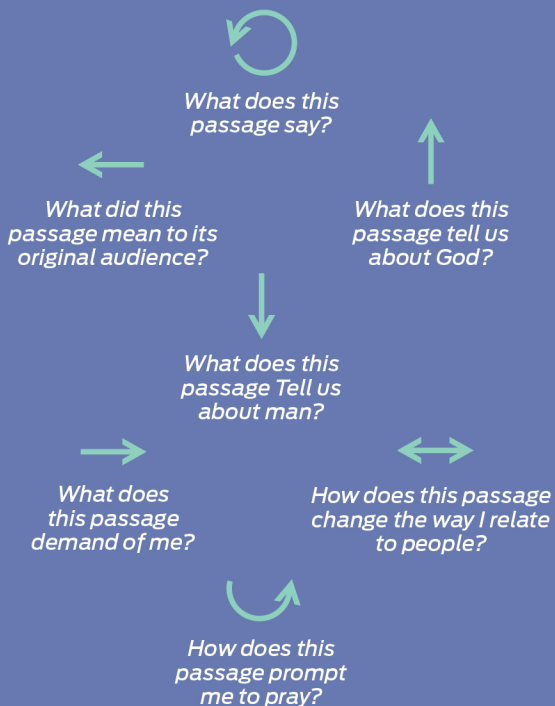
As a reflection on Genesis 1–2, Psalm 8 describes our worth and responsibility as human beings. Think about what this Psalm means for us as modern believers. Notice the first and last verses of the Psalm: God is the real focus here.

What are some examples where God has covered creation with His majesty?

After considering all God has made—the universe, moon, and stars, and so on—the Psalmist recognized that humanity is only a small part of God’s entire creation. Still, the author affirmed that God created humanity uniquely and set us apart from the rest of creation. This echoes the fact that we are made in God’s image and given the task to co-manage creation alongside God.

How can we honor and glorify God in the way we relate to other parts of creation?

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Day 2

Psalm 104

Consider the description of God in Psalm 104:1-9. Then, notice how the psalmist responded to God in verses 33-35. The psalms often use rich word pictures to communicate truth.

How did the author paint a picture using words?

The psalmist praised God through recognizing several occurrences within nature. Of course, this wasn't intended to be an exhaustive list of things in creation that reflect God's goodness and creativity.

What are some additional examples in nature that reflect God's goodness and majesty?

How do these examples draw your attention toward God in awe and wonder?

Day 3

Psalm 96:4-5

The Book of Genesis' original audience was the Israelites, who were on their way to the promised land. After living so long among the gods of the Egyptians and foreigners, the people needed to remember who the God of Israel was. He—not the gods of the Egyptians, Canaanites, or Philistines—was the Creator of everything.

We are no different than the Israelites. Though we may not be tempted to bow down to wooden statues, our hearts are just as likely to seek satisfaction things other than God. We ask questions like: *Is God real? Does He love me? Is He worth it?*

What connection did the author make between praising God and the fact that God created all things?

God owes His existence to no one and is in need of nothing, yet He decided to create everything, including you. The truth of this overwhelming love should give you the strength and desire to reject any idols that threaten your heart.

Day 4

1 Corinthians 8:5-6; John 1:1-3

God didn't just create everything; He created everything *through* His Son (1 Cor. 8:5-6). If you reread the creation account now, you might think, "I see the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters (Gen. 1:2) and God the Father speaking things into existence, but where is the Son?" We find our answer in the Gospel of John (1:1-3,14). Every time God spoke things into existence, the Son was there. God created everything through His Son, and all things exist and hold together because of His Son.

The Word of God creates. Sin destroys. This is true without exception. Even in our own lives, sin unravels relationships, pushes darkness into our hearts, and enslaves to addictions. Jesus, the Word, re-entered this dark, sin-filled, chaotic world. And that Word brought life and light again.

What might it look like for Jesus to re-create what sin has destroyed in your life?

Day 5

Colossians 1:15-18

When we read the last book of the Bible, we recognize that Jesus is both the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22:13). Every book of the Bible points to Jesus Christ, which is what Paul explained in these verses.

Creation has always been about Jesus. He is the center of it all. He was the Word with God in the beginning, spinning galaxies into existence. He will be the center when all is said and done. Since Jesus is the center, Lord, and goal of all creation, it makes sense that life works best when He controls it.

How does all of life change when Jesus is at the center?

What are some ways you see Him being at the center of your life today?

Daily Devotions



Week of March 18

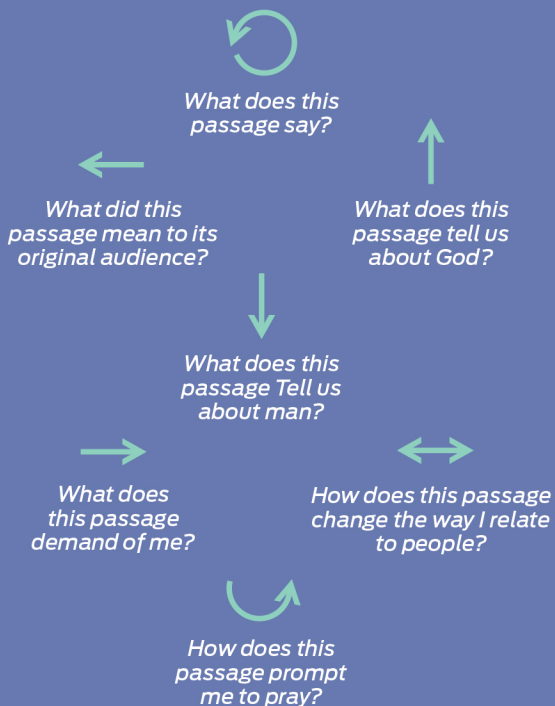
Day 1

Genesis 1:26-31

When we read the creation account in Genesis 1-2, we tend to focus on what it teaches us about God and humanity. And we should. Those are critical doctrines to the grand narrative of Scripture that follows this account as well as to our daily living. However, we cannot miss what this passage teaches us about creation itself too.

While God's creation is certainly majestic and it reveals much about the Creator (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:20), we know that we are not to worship creation itself (Rom. 1:21-25). But neither should we go to the other extreme and treat creation callously.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



How should Christians view and treat the earth?

What are some ways you can better care for God's creation?

Day 2

Genesis 2:1-15

There is an interesting detail about creation in Genesis 2:5: “When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground.” Notice the cause and effect. Shrubs and plants had not grown and sprouted because God had not made it rain and there was no man to work the ground. Both were necessary as part of God’s plan for creation.

Here in this cause and effect we find God’s intended purpose for humans to rule over creation. The roles God gave us were not an afterthought. He did not create the world then create people only then to figure out how we would fit within His design. From the very beginning, God’s intention was for people to work in concert with Him ruling over creation.

How can you reflect God in the way you work as a student, family member, athlete, band member, friend, and so on?

Day 3

Genesis 2:16-25

The end of Genesis 2 records the first marriage ceremony with God the Father giving the bride to the waiting groom.

In verses 24-25, we read something that further explains God’s design of marriage. In marriage a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife to become one flesh. This does not mean that a married couple severs all ties with their parents, but it does point to the primacy of the new relationship. While the parents have been the primary relationship of human love, support, encouragement, and help to this point, that all shifts to each spouse. God’s intention is for the marriage relationship to be one of deep intimacy and unity. Marriage like this is for our good and for God’s glory as it pictures the relationship between Christ and the church.

Even though marriage may be a distant reality for you, what are some things you can begin to pray for your future spouse?

Psalms

8:1-8

The majesty of creation is all around us—in what we can see and what we cannot see. From the thundering power of a waterfall or the terrifying brilliance of a lightening strike to the intricate design of the smallest of flowers or the gentleness of a butterfly's flight through the air, God has given us ample reason to stand in awe of His creation and more importantly of Him.

**What aspects of creation amaze you?
Humble you?**

As we consider our role in bearing God's image as rulers over creation, may we echo David's conclusion to this psalm: "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth" (Ps. 8:1)!

Hebrews

1:1-4

We cannot read the overarching story of Scripture without seeing God's ongoing desire for us to know Him. Every step we take away from Him is followed by Him taking multiple steps toward us as He relentlessly chases us down to restore us back to Him. Prophet after prophet was sent to warn the people of their sin and call on them to repent. Time and time again. No matter how rebellious the people were—how blatantly they sinned against God through idolatry—God continued to reach out to them.

**How does God's persistence in not
giving up on us motivate us to share
Jesus with those who need Him?**

Daily Devotions



Week of March 25

Day 1

Jeremiah 2:12-13

The fall shows that sin is rebellion against our loving and gracious Creator—the One who made us in His image and likeness. And yet, Adam and Eve chose to be their own authority instead of following the authority and wisdom of our loving Father. The world changed drastically from that decision forward.

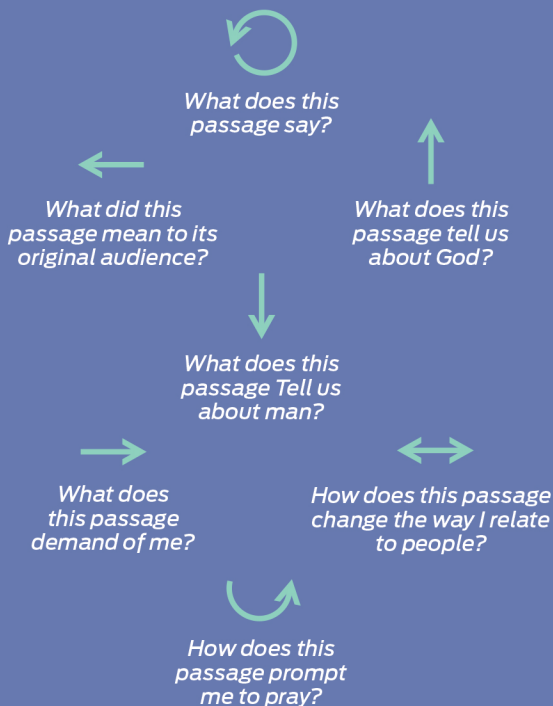
Jeremiah talked about another aspect of sin in this chapter, similar to Genesis 3. These verses are essentially saying Israel sinned in two ways: They turned away from God—the One who rescued them and poured out His grace and blessing upon them—and they sought joy and fulfillment in other things.

List some things Israel pursued other than God. What does the text say about these other things Israel pursued?

What are some things you are currently pursuing above joy and fulfillment in God?

The text is clear that these other pursuits failed Israel. They didn't deliver on their promise to satisfy the Israelites' thirst and fulfillment, because only God can do that.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Day 2

Genesis 4:1-16

The story of Cain and Abel follows the account of Adam and Eve's fall into sin. This story displays the depths of depravity within the human heart that resulted from the first act of rebellion.

Imagine Adam and Eve's mindset during this tragic event. Sure, they already knew all too well the consequences of their actions in the garden—they suddenly knew shame, relational conflict with each other and with the world around them, separation from God, and so on. But then, they witnessed one of their sons murder his own brother.

Reread Genesis 3. What are some common themes that come up between chapters 3 and 4:1-16?

How do these stories reflect your own battle with temptation?

Day 3

Genesis 4:1-6; Hebrews 11:4

Maybe you're wondering, "Why weren't Cain and his offering accepted?" Throughout the Bible, grain sacrifices were considered acceptable sacrifices, so it wasn't due to the type of sacrifice Cain offered. The problem doesn't seem to be with amount he offered either, rather something about Cain himself. We know this because of what the Bible says.

First of all, God approached Cain and asked, "If you do what is right, won't you be accepted?" (Gen. 4:7). Then, the author of Hebrews explained that Abel's offering was accepted by God because he offered it in faith, unlike Cain (11:4).

What happens when you only focus only on the behavioral aspect of sin and not on what takes place within the heart?

Cain's sin began internally—with jealousy and anger—and eventually he acted on those internal desires when he murdered his brother. If we only focus on sinful behavior and never address our broken hearts—where the sinful actions begin—nothing changes. We can easily become like the Pharisees who tried to look good on the outside but were dead on the inside.

Genesis 4:1-16

If we rushed through this story, we might miss the beauty of God's intervention. We might think humanity was a lost cause even then, but that's not what God is like. God is not indifferent to sin, because God is not indifferent to humanity. Love intervenes, which is why God approached Cain to warn him and offer him a way of escape from temptation.

How does God warn Cain and communicate His love and grace to sinful humanity?

Have you ever sensed God offering you a way out of temptation?

The God who shows mercy is the God who will keep His promises. God Eve promised a son who would crush the serpent's head. With Cain in rebellion and Abel dead, the situation seemed dire.

God gave Adam and Eve a son named Seth. Through Seth's lineage, Eve's promised Son would be born four thousand years later. At the cross, blood would be shed once again, not by sin; instead, Jesus' blood was shed for sin.

Genesis 5

Like Adam and Eve in Eden, we doubt God's goodness and His provision in our lives. We are afraid we will miss out unless we take control of our situation. We have made our happiness, pleasure, and freedom most important. And just like Adam and Eve, our sin exposes our desperate need of salvation from sin and ourselves, and shows our need for God's grace. We see this need in Adam and Eve. We see it in Cain. We see it in Lamech (Gen. 4:23-24). We see it in generation after generation that died as a result of sin (Gen. 5). Only when we look to God as the ultimate source of security and significance can we be freed to live as we were meant to.

What do you spend your first and best on? What gets priority when it comes to your time, talents, possessions, and money?

Daily Devotions



Week of April 1

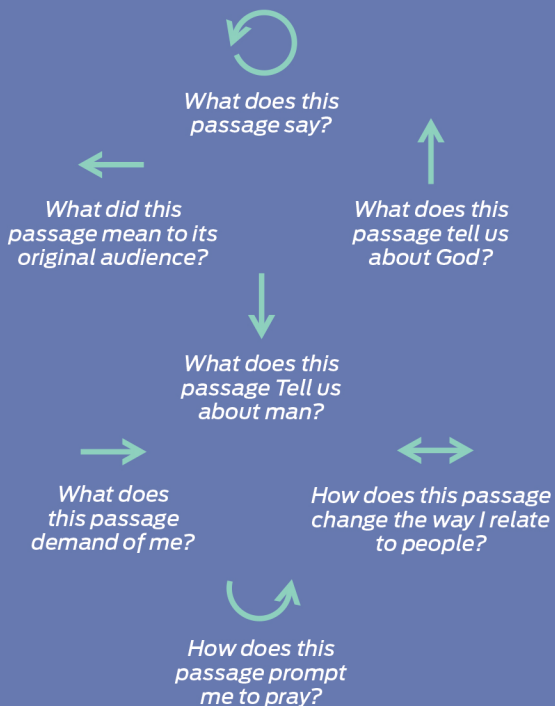
Day 1

Genesis 6:1-7

We are not even a dozen chapters into the story of Scripture and yet God's judgment of sin has reverberated on nearly every page. God judged Adam, Eve, the serpent, and creation in Eden (Gen. 3) and then Cain for murdering his brother (Gen. 4). Then we saw God's judgment echoing in the refrain "then he died" throughout the genealogy from Adam to Noah (Gen. 5). Now, we see God's judgment about to be poured out to wipe mankind off the face of the earth.

But if we look again we see God's judgment is not absent of love and grace. God was gracious to Adam and Eve not to take their lives immediately and to cover their shame with clothing made from an animal. God graciously placed a mark of protection on Cain. In the genealogy, we read of one man—Enoch—who did not die, showing us that there is a way to escape sin's curse. And even here, as God prepares to flood the world, we will see that He will graciously bring one man and his family safely through the waters of judgment.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Why should we acknowledge both God's judgment and His love and grace?

Day 2

Genesis 6:6

Not only should our hearts be grieved over the fact that sin almost led, justifiably, to the entire destruction of the human race, but they should also be grieved over the fact that the God who judges sin also grieves because of sin's presence in our hearts. This was true not only back then, but even now. God is still grieved at the sight of the rebelliousness within us.

When was the last time you felt heartbroken over sin in a friend's life? In your own life?

How does the truth that God is grieved by our sin influence the way you deal with personal sin and temptation?

Day 3

Genesis 6:8-22

Noah was not spared because of anything he had done, but because of God's grace alone. As such, Noah's only proper response to God's grace was to be complete surrender.

Think of it like this: Imagine you wake up in an ambulance and the EMT says to you, "You've been in a terrible accident. But we've got you. We're going to save you. Just let us work." They're not asking you to get up and assist them. They're asking you to surrender to them.

You say, Well, I'm mostly surrendered to God. But there is no such thing as "mostly surrendered." What good would it do to "mostly surrender" to the EMT? Yeah, I'll just pull out one or two of these cords. It's no biggie. I'm still "mostly surrendered." In the same way, mostly isn't enough for God—He wants our total surrender to Him, our loving and all-powerful God.

What area of your life is most difficult to surrender fully to God? Why?

Day 4

Genesis 7:1-24

There are naturally questions that come up in our mind as we read this narrative. For instance, one of them, found in 7:16, has to do with the fact that after Noah, his family, and the animals were aboard the ark, God shut them in.

We don't quite know how God performed this divine act closing and sealing the ark's door; however, understanding why, not how, is more important. This was God's way of affirming that salvation truly belongs to Him. Noah may have built the vessel, but with an open door it would not have weathered the storm and preserved his live and the lives of all the others onboard. Noah was saved not by his effort, but by a gracious act of God—as we are through Christ.

Where have you seen God's grace and goodness to you in your life lately?

Day 5

Genesis 8:1-22

In God's appointed time, Noah exited the ark and stood on land for the first time in a year. And the first thing Noah did was worship God by offering burnt offerings of some of every kind of clean animal and bird (8:20).

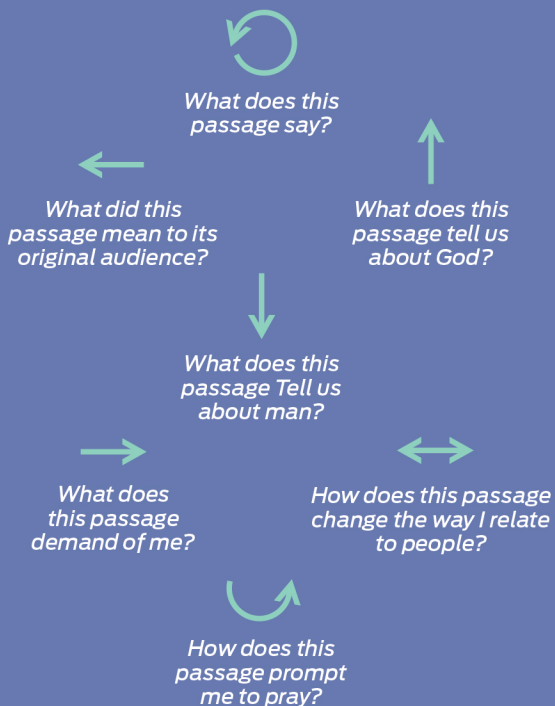
We might say that despite Noah witnessing God's judgment on humanity and experiencing adversity for such a lengthy period of time, Noah was able to find grounds to worship God. But it may be more accurate to say that Noah found reason to worship God through what he had experienced, not despite it. Being saved through God's judgment heightened Noah's awareness and gratitude of God's grace. That is why Noah worshiped, and that is why we worship too.

What are some current struggles in your life now? Why is it important to worship God even in difficult times?

Daily Devotions



The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Week of April 8

Day 1

Genesis 11:1-4

If you have ever attended or viewed a sporting event, then you have experienced humanity's hunger for unity. Tens of thousands of people who may have very little in common gather for a few hours around the common bond of sports. Before long, complete strangers stand and cheer together and high five each other in a powerful demonstration of our inner desire to connect with others.

This should not surprise Christians. We know God—in His Trinitarian nature—is relational. And He has created us in His image; we are wired for relationship with Him and others. The question is: Where will we seek the unity we crave?

The opening verses of the Babel account reveal how people often pursue unity in the wrong places—apart from God.

What are some wrong places you have looked for unity?

What are some specific ways you can pursue God in unity with other Christians this week?

Day 2

Genesis 11:5-7

It's difficult to stand at the base of the Burj Khalifa in Dubai (the tallest building in the world)—looking up toward its top reaching 2,717 feet into the sky—and not feel a sense of awe. Buildings like these testify to what humanity can achieve. And they also condemn us for how little we can achieve. All it takes is seeing a bird flying high above these structures to humble our thinking.

The structures we build are massive in our eyes, but they are tiny in God's. That is why He had to come down to see the tower in Babel. Our good works may earn others' respect, but they are small in God's eyes (Isa. 64:6). The problem is that we use the wrong standard, which leads to the wrong definition of "greatness." We are not our own measure—God is. This is what God would teach the people of Babel and what He teaches us.

What areas in your life do you tend to evaluate by the wrong standards?

**How would you define greatness?
How is that different from the way
God defines it?**

Day 3

Genesis 11:8-9

From the beginning, God's instruction to humanity was to spread out across the earth to subdue it and rule over it as His image-bearing representatives (Gen. 1:28; 9:1,7). One of the ways God was to be glorified was through people (the pinnacle of His creation) fulfilling the cultural mandate He gave them in every corner of the globe.

But the sin born in Eden continued to dig deeper into the hearts of people, and their rebellion grew. God's command to spread out was not misunderstood or even ignored—it was rejected outright on the plains of Shinar. But God's plan cannot be defeated. The people would not scatter across the earth, so He would do it for them. Instead of spreading out as one people of God, they did so as a broken, fragmented, and divided people—a people in need of someone to rescue them from this condition and restore them as one family of God. That someone would be Jesus.

**How has God worked in your
life and circumstances despite
your disobedience?**

**When have you seen people
and relationships restored
through Jesus?**

Day 4

Isaiah 55:1-13

Isaiah 55 is a call for all people—all the nations (v. 5)—to come to the Lord and experience the goodness of a relationship with Him. This is a picture of God satisfying His people; thirst-quenching water and the choicest of foods available at no cost.

Along with the invitation to come and experience the Lord's goodness, is also an admonition for how to do this—through repentance (vv. 6-7). All who want to come to God must turn from their wicked ways, abandon their sinful thoughts, and return to the Lord.

The reason this is essential: Because God's ways and God's thoughts are not ours (vv. 8-9). They are higher, loftier, and grander than anything we can dream up. True repentance requires us to grasp this: We completely forsake any perceived goodness in our hearts and desperately and completely entrust ourselves to God's mercy and grace.

When do you tend to place your trust in yourself rather than fully relying on God?

Day 5

Genesis 11:10-32

The genealogy in Genesis 11 serves as a bridge between Shem—Noah's blessed son (Gen. 9:24-27)—and Abram—through whom God would form the people of promise. Humanity's willful rebellion in Babel did not hinder God's plan for people to scatter and it didn't stop God's unfolding plan of redemption.

But we can't miss verse 30—it is quite important because it introduces the next "obstacle" God would overcome in the early stages of His plan to provide a descendant to rescue people from sin. The man and woman God would choose to form a nation—a family—would be barren and unable to conceive. Once again God would show that nothing is impossible for Him.

What are some surprising ways God has worked in your own life?

How can you use these stories to show others His power and grace?

Daily Devotions



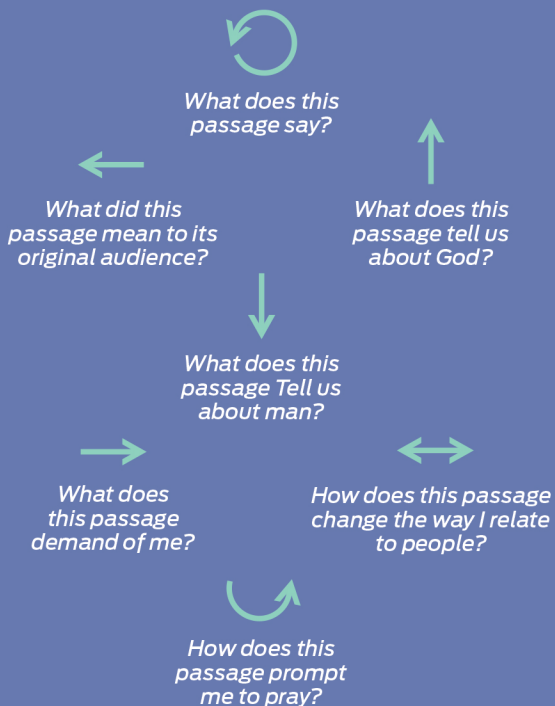
Week of April 15

Day 1

Job 1:1-22

We have all had difficult days, but few of us have had a day like Job's (1:1-22). Job's losses were staggering. He lost nearly all he had. Maybe even more staggering was the pace of the news. Back-to-back-to-back-to-back. In a matter of minutes, Job's world fell apart around him. As we consider our own suffering, and others', we need to remember pain often comes from what we experience and how and when we experience it. Sometimes what normally would not bring us to our knees does because of how or when it happens. In these times, we need to fight to remember that God is authoritative not only over what we experience but also over how and when as well.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



What struggles are you facing this week/month? Explain.

Where do you need help trusting in God's goodness and timing?

Day 2

Job 2:1-10

After Job's second round of adversity—when he became infected with terrible boils—his wife offered him some troubling advice. This may be the worst advice in a book full of questionable wisdom from others. Yes, this was terrible advice, but she deserves grace from us. We cannot forget that Job was not alone in his losses—she experienced them too. Here was a mother who had just lost all of her children. She was grieving too. She was struggling too. She was in pain too.

Sometimes, in our pain, we develop shortsightedness. Our suffering is so great, we turn our attention inward and forget that others around us might be hurting as well. The gospel pushes us to resist this. Jesus humbled Himself and suffered greatly all the while fixing His gaze on the Father's glory and our good. For that reason, we should also strive to live selflessly always, even when we are hurting.

Who around you might be hurting right now? How can you encourage and speak truth into their lives today?

Day 3

Job 2:11-13

After Job seemed to have lost everything—his wealth, health, and his precious children—he must have been comforted at the sight of three friends who intended to “show him sympathy and comfort him” (v. 11). They heard about their friend's suffering, and instead of wanting to avoid what might have been an awkward encounter, they journeyed to be with their friend. In fact, they loved Job so much that even from seeing him from a distance caused them to weep (v. 12).

One of the most comforting and gracious acts of these friends was their willingness to just be with Job. They weren't trying to talk or offering reasons and spiritual platitudes—although they eventually did—but were simply there for him. In fact, the text tells us they sat with him for seven days and nights without saying a word. This is a good reminder for us to simply be there for our friends and family who may be hurting or depressed.

Have you ever felt comforted by the presence of a friend when you were grieving? Who can you comfort this week by just showing up and being there?

Day 4

Job 9:1-35

While on the cross, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). This apparent cry for help came after Jesus had been on the cross for several hours and might seem like a lack of trust. But it is important to know where Jesus drew the statement from: the Book of Psalms. As He hung on the cross, bearing the persecution that He did not deserve, Jesus quoted from Psalm 22:1, which begins with a cry of desperation and ends with a cry of praise. Jesus knew the suffering He endured in that moment would not last, but more importantly, He knew it would lead to victory.

That first part of Psalm 22 is where Job lived for most of the book bearing his name. But in the end, he also saw how God used his suffering. Victory came through his pain. Job got to the end of Psalm 22 as well. And as we walk through suffering we can find comfort in Psalm 22, remembering God uses all things for His good.

What areas of suffering or challenge are you experiencing right now? How might God use this for His glory and your good?

Day 5

Job 40:1-5; 42:7-9

What a wonderful ending to Job’s story. Job received an even grander vision of God’s power and goodness through his suffering. God reminded Job of just how small he was in comparison to the vastness of God’s glory. What’s more—Job saw an even deeper level of God’s goodness and mercy through this entire experience.

If nothing else, Job learned that suffering reminds us that we are not ultimately in control over our lives—God is. Suffering can place us in a position to learn genuine humility.

Moments that allow us to see God more clearly, to be reminded of His vastness, and to be humbled in His presence—even though surrounded by unimaginable pain and suffering—are part of the process God uses to make us look a little more like Jesus day by day.

In what ways have you been reminded that God is God and you are not?

Daily Devotions



Week of April 22

Day 1

Matthew 28:1-6

The resurrection of Jesus Christ should give us joy—exceeding joy. The resurrection is what gives us life, when we trust in Christ, and hope—that Christ’s resurrection is the first, but not the last. One day all those who have died in Christ will rise as well. But as joyous as this is, there’s even more joy traceable to the risen Christ than we might realize.

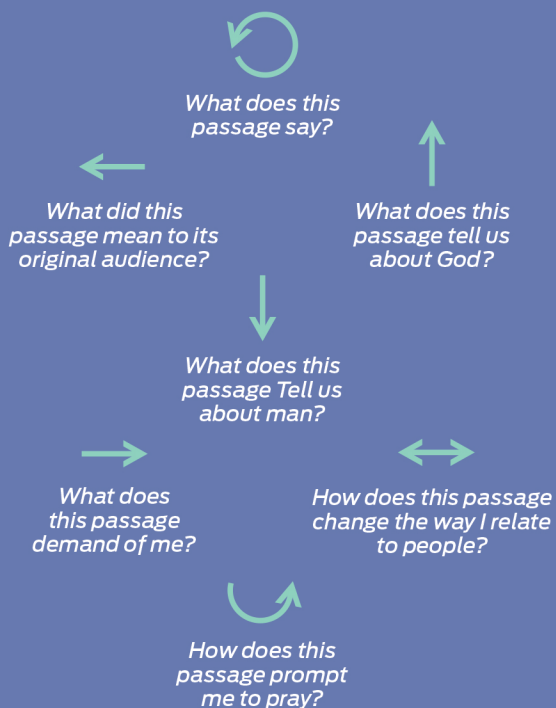
Think of all of the things that exist because Jesus didn’t stay dead.

If it weren’t for the resurrected Jesus, the New Testament wouldn’t exist. If Easter didn’t happen, Jesus of Nazareth would have faded into the background with all of the other people Rome crucified. But we know the name of Jesus because He isn’t like anyone else who was crucified: He didn’t stay dead, He rose again.

When we stop and think about it, we realize that everything in the Christian life comes back to the risen Christ. “For every one of God’s promises is ‘Yes’ in him. Therefore, through him we also say ‘Amen’ to the glory of God” (2 Cor. 1:20). All the promises of God are a mega-ton “Yes!” in Jesus!

What are some of the joys in your life that you can connect back to the resurrection of Jesus?

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Day 2

Matthew 28:7-8

Twice in these two verses we read the word “quickly.” The angel instructed the women to go quickly and then they departed quickly. The divine messenger had given the women good news—great news—to share, and their only proper response was to do as the angel instructed: to go in haste to tell others.

What about us? How quick are we to tell others of the good news we have received? Does the gospel continue to quicken the beating of our hearts as we consider how glorious God and His forgiveness through Christ is to us? And then does that quickening of our hearts quicken our feet? Let us never forget how beautiful the gospel is, and may we be ever-eager to share it with others. And at the same time, let us always remember that this is a message others around us are in desperate need of hearing. Let our love for God and gratitude and joy for what He has done for us, as well as our love for those who have not trusted in Christ, move us to act quickly in service to our King.

Who can you tell the gospel to this week?

Day 3

Matthew 28:9-10

The women didn’t seem to get very far in their mission to tell the other disciples about the resurrected Jesus. They departed quickly from the empty tomb, but “just then” Jesus met them and their mission changed—at least for a moment. It was no longer time to go quickly and tell; it was time to stop and worship. And that is what the women did—instinctively it seems. They went to Jesus and took hold of His feet, meaning they fell on their faces onto the ground in worship of the risen Savior.

In this moment, Mary and Mary Magdalene offer a compelling picture of worship, one we can strive to emulate. Their worship was genuine and spontaneous. It was a priority and unashamed. And it was given in humility and with great joy. This should be true of all of our worship—when we gather as a people and when we worship God on our own. May our worship continually be as if we are beholding the risen Christ for the first time.

What are some ways that you can keep your worship vibrant and meaningful?

Matthew

28:11-15

These verses provide the origin of the stolen body theory, one a handful of theories offered to explain away the resurrection of Jesus. The swoon theory suggests that Jesus did not die on the cross, He merely passed out. Then, He was revived in the coolness of the tomb, removed the stone, snuck past the guards, and escaped. The wrong tomb theory states that the disciples indeed found an empty tomb, because it was the wrong one; Jesus was still dead in another tomb. The hallucination theory holds that the resurrection appearances were just hallucinations.

The holes in each of these theories are not hard to find. If the disciples had conspired to steal Jesus' body and claimed He rose again, would they have continued to lie, even when most were tortured and executed for this claim? Could a severely beaten and crucified Jesus really have survived? And even if He had, how did He escape the tomb and sneak past the guards? Could the disciples really have gone to another tomb that happened to have Roman guards and a Roman seal on it? And if they had, why didn't the Jewish leaders present Jesus' body to stop the resurrection claims? Only a hard heart would neglect the obvious truth: Jesus rose from the dead.

Have you ever had to defend the resurrection to anyone? How did you do?

Matthew

28:16-20

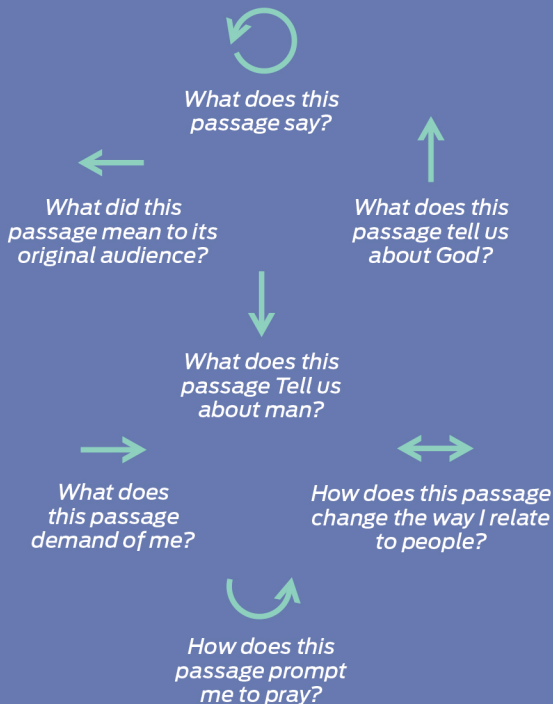
Take a step back and consider the narrative Matthew covers in the final chapter of his Gospel. In just twenty verses, with five of those detailing the leaders bribing the soldiers to lie, we read of the women going to the tomb and then leaving the tomb to tell others (v. 1-10), the eleven disciples traveling to Galilee where they saw Jesus (v. 16), and then Jesus commissioning them and sending them out to make disciples of all the nations (v. 17-20). What we read is almost non-stop movement, starting at the empty tomb, the epicenter of the gospel, and moving out toward the ends of the earth. This is the purpose and the power of the resurrection: it compels action. We cannot experience the glorious resurrection of Christ and stand still. We must act; it is what our overjoyed hearts yearn to do, and it is what our Lord has called us to do.

What are some actions you can take this week to carry the gospel further than you have before?

Daily Devotions



The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Week of April 29

Day 1

Genesis 13–14

The story of Abram and Melchizedek at the end of Genesis 14 is confusing. Melchizedek seems to come out of nowhere and is referred to as the king of Salem and a priest of God. But after this brief encounter where he blessed Abram and Abram gave him a tenth of everything, this important man disappeared from the pages of Genesis. So who was Melchizedek?

Many believe Melchizedek was a *theophany*—an *appearance of God in human form*. Whether Melchizedek was indeed a theophany or just a mysterious man sent by God, we cannot miss God's heart for Abram in this moment. God reached out to Abram in his moment of victory to encourage him and remind him who truly delivered his enemies—it was God Most High.

When has God met you in the highs and lows of life?

Why is it important to look to Him whether things are easy or difficult?

Genesis 15

We can surely relate with Abram in his moment of doubt and frustration. We have all been there. And this is even more challenging is when we see others around us experiencing the blessings we crave.

Watching your friends make the team while you're stuck in the stand isn't always fun. And it isn't fun to sit in the crowd while your friend sings or plays an instrument. Or to miss out on getting accepted to the university all your friends plan to attend. Or even having a family that just doesn't seem normal and leaves you wanting more—like what your friends have. Simply put: It's so tough to wait on God when we also want to be out on the court, up on the stage, attending college with our friends, or have a better relationship with our family.

We look at what God is doing around us and we always seem to be behind the curve. So we try to help Him. We try to step in and do what God seems to be neglecting or incapable of doing. But God is not looking for our help; He is looking for our humility. He wants us to wait on Him in faith, knowing He is good and believing in His promises.

In which areas of your life do you need to wait on God?

Genesis 16

God promised Abram that those who blessed him would be blessed and those who treated him hatefully would be cursed (Gen. 12:3). But we have to wonder if Abram considered that his actions had similar consequences as well. His obedience and his disobedience to God wouldn't just affect him, but others around him too. Our actions always affect others.

When Hagar became pregnant, Sarai became bitterly jealous, eventually leading to Hagar and Ishmael to be sent away (Gen. 21:8-21). But Abram and Sarah's act of doubt and disobedience did not end there. The descendants of Ishmael would plague the Israelites long after that time (Gen. 16:12).

Abram and Sarah failed to consider that their actions were not performed in a bubble. They affected many others. The same is true of us. We need to take care to consider whom we might bless by our obedience and whom we might hurt by our disobedience.

How might the decisions you are facing right now affect those around you?

Genesis

17

Twenty-four years after God initially called Abram in Genesis 12, God appeared to him again. God chose unlikely people—the broken and unworthy—but He did not leave them in the same condition they were in when He called them. In salvation, God gives His people a new identity. No longer are they marked by their sin and disobedience but by His righteousness. No longer are they unworthy, but they are fully accepted as His children.

While these truths become effective in the moment of salvation, God gradually works at changing His people in another way as well—experientially. God continues to grow His people and mold them in His image so that they live out their new identity (who they truly are), rather than their old identity (who they were). This process is called *sanctification*, where we are sanctified—or made holy—to live more as God intends each day.

How has God changed you since you first trusted in Him? How is He changing you now?

Genesis

17

As we read of God changing Abraham, we can't lose sight of the bigger picture. We need to step back and remember God was doing something larger, and Abraham was only one small part of it. God was on a mission to redeem the world. God was working toward redeeming what Adam lost in Eden to bring us a greater future than we could ever hope for. God blessed Abraham so he might become a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3).

When it comes to God working in our lives, we often focus on what He is doing, when He is doing it, and how He is doing it. But we often stop short of considering why He is doing it. We can make the mistake of turning our focus inward and thinking we are the end of His blessings in our lives. But we never are. Like Abraham, God's plan is to bring blessing to others through His blessings to us.

How does God's plan to use you as part of His story of redemption help you understand what He is doing in your life right now?

Daily Devotions



Week of May 6

Day 1

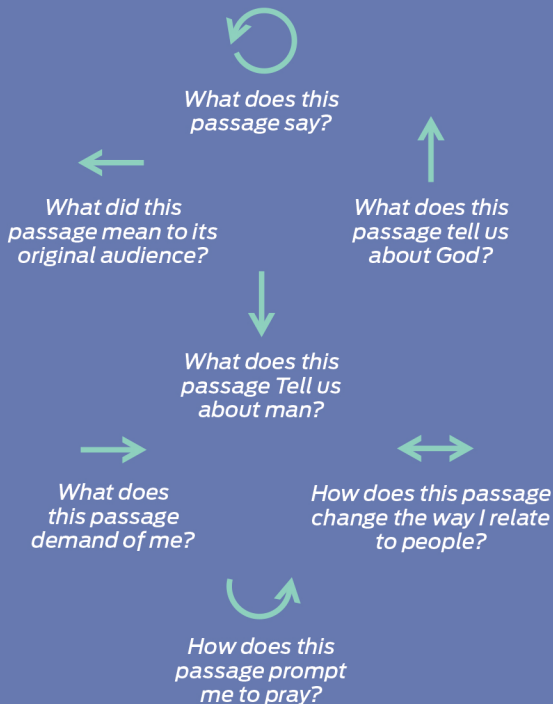
Genesis 18:1-33

Abraham interceded on behalf of the city when he learned that the Lord was going to destroy the cities because of the seriousness of their sin. Abraham's bold intercession teaches us two things about him. He understood God's character as a good and righteous judge. Abraham did not argue with God's right to judge the cities, but He did ask for God to be merciful on their behalf. Abraham also cared deeply for Lot and the people of those cities. Abraham did not just appeal for Lot to be spared—although he could have. He appealed for all the people in those cities to be spared. More importantly, Abraham knew God cared about people more than he did.

Both of these observations were revisited when God called Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Once again, Abraham trusted God's character—His faithfulness and power—and His love for him and his son as he navigated that challenging test.

Who can you pray on behalf of this week?

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Day 2

Genesis 19:1-38

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah can feel like an odd interlude in the middle of Abraham's narrative. In the previous chapter, the three visitors told Abraham and Sarah that they would indeed have a son within the year. Then, seemingly out of the blue, we are introduced to God's plan concerning the two evil cities.

God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah entirely, yet he spared one man—Lot—and his family. Lot reminds us of another one who was spared of God's judgment, Noah. And like with Noah, the message of Lot's salvation from destruction is one of grace. God saved Lot by grace. God saved Noah by grace. God was working in and through Abraham by grace. And God does the same for us—God saves us and uses us by grace alone.

How has God been gracious to you this past week?

Day 3

Genesis 20:1-18

For the second time in his life (Gen. 12:12-20), Abraham lied about Sarah being his sister, although he tried to justify his deception this time (v. 12). Once again, he was motivated by fear as he traveled in a foreign land; he was afraid someone else would kill him because they wanted to take Sarah as wife. Fear, not faith, controlled the patriarch in this story. God promised to bless those who blessed Abraham and curse those who treated him with contempt (Gen. 12:3). But Abraham either forgot or disbelieved God's promise in the moment.

But there is another troubling aspect to Abraham's deception. Just before this, God's messengers told Abraham and Sarah that they would have the son they had been waiting on (Gen. 18:13-14). But here, Abraham allowed King Abimelech to take Sarah, presumably to be his wife. Abraham's faithlessness in this moment dishonored his wife and God and jeopardized the promise.

Yet, God intervened and protected and preserved Sarah and the promise. Abraham's act of faithlessness almost caused much more harm than he could ever have imagined.

How are you struggling to trust God right now?

Genesis 21:1-34

God has a way of taking our moments of doubt and our failings and turning them around. When the three men visited with Abraham, Sarah overheard that she would have a son within the year (Gen. 18:10). The couple had waited twenty-five years for this promise. Instead of celebrating and worshiping God, Sarah laughed to herself (Gen. 18:12). When she was confronted for laughing, she denied it out of fear (Gen. 18:15). But within the year, Sarah would find out that nothing is impossible for the Lord (Gen. 18:14).

By Genesis 21, the Lord had fulfilled His promise to Sarah; she became pregnant and had a son at the appointed time (vv. 1-2). The couple named their son Isaac, which means *laughter*. Sarah declared that God had made her laugh and everyone who heard would laugh with her (v. 6). God truly turned Sarah's skeptical laughter into joyful laughter. Surely every time Sarah called her son to dinner or introduced him to others, she was reminded of how God turned her doubts upside down.

How have you experienced God's kindness and grace when you were doubtful or disobedient?

Genesis 22

We are familiar with the idea of a substitute. Substitute teachers take the place of our regular teachers when they have to miss a day. Subs come into the game to play in our place. Artificial sweeteners are substitutes for sugar in our tea. Substitutes are important when a teacher is sick or when a starting point guard can't get the job done; substitutes perform tasks for us when we are unable.

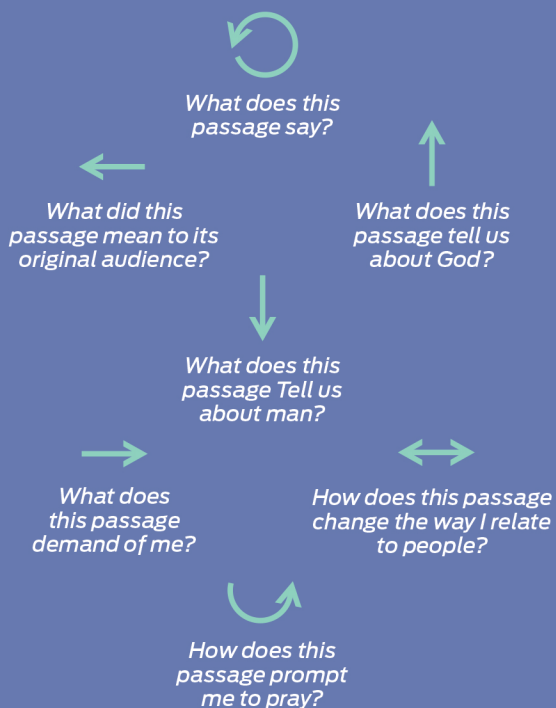
The theme of substitution is at the heart of Christianity, and the theme of the substitute lamb runs throughout the Bible. Abraham said God would provide a lamb. As we will see in future sessions, at the Passover a lamb's blood was shed as a substitute for the life of a firstborn son in Israel (firstborn sons just like Isaac). That sacrifice caused the death angel to pass over them. Also, on the Day of Atonement, animals were given in place of the Israelites as substitute sacrifices. All of these stories point forward to the moment when the Lord Jesus Himself would die as the sacrifice for our sins (1 Cor. 5:7). God provided His only Son as the substitute for the world.

How does this account strengthen your faith in Jesus?

Daily Devotions



The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Week of May 13

Day 1

Genesis 23:1-20

The entire chapter of Genesis 23 is dedicated to telling about Sarah's death and burial. This highlights her importance in the redemptive story unfolding in Genesis, but it also offers us insight into grief. Even for those of us in Christ—those of us who have the hope that death is not final—death still stings. We are to mourn and weep over our loved ones who have died, much like Abraham grieved over Sarah.

Here, and elsewhere in Scripture, we see that grieving is expected. Abraham was not scolded for his mourning and weeping. Mourning death is proper, because in our tears we communicate the value of the gift God has given us in our loved one.

How has the gospel impacted your view of death and your grieving?

Day 2

Genesis 24:10-27

Abraham's servant demonstrated great wisdom in the test he devised to find a potential wife for Isaac. Giving a stranger a drink of water was one thing; volunteering to draw water for ten thirsty camels was something else all together. Hospitality was at the heart of the servant's test. A woman who was willing to make such an effort to demonstrate hospitality revealed much about her character. And a woman of character was who the servant was after.

As followers of Christ, we have been likewise called to practice hospitality, even if it comes at great cost to us (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9). The reason is because hospitality affirms the gospel. It is compelled by humility and care for others, which Christ demonstrated perfectly for us.

How can you practice hospitality for people in your church and neighborhood this week?

Day 3

Genesis 24:28-49

We can't miss what caught Laban's attention, at least in part, in this account. We read that "as soon as he had seen the ring and bracelets on his sister's wrists" and heard what she shared, he ran out to meet Abraham's servant. Being intrigued by the potential wealth of this visitor doesn't seem out of character for Laban as we will see later in Genesis. This is important because it hints that the servant may have won approval for Rebekah to become Isaac's wife by focusing on Abraham's great wealth.

But that is not what the servant does. Notice that as he recounts what had happened, he is very clear to appeal to what God had done. That was what he stood on—God was clearly at work to provide Rebekah for Isaac.

While seeing what God is doing around us is sometimes difficult, there are times when we make what we know He has done difficult for others to see. Unlike Abraham's servant, we fail to tell others about His works when we have the opportunity. When we keep this to ourselves, we miss opportunities to declare His kingdom to those who need to hear it.

What has God done in your life recently and with whom can you share about this?

Genesis 24:50-67

Sending Rebekah to a foreign land to marry a man she had never met had to have been difficult for her family. There was no email, phones, and or even a postal system in place to communicate. Rebekah's family may have never seen her, or even heard from her, again. And yet, because they knew God was at work, they let her leave (v. 50).

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus said something interesting about family, specifically that following Him would bring divisions in families (Matt. 8:20-23; Matt. 10: 35-37; Luke 14:26). But when someone loses a brother or sister, mother or father on account of Jesus, he or she needs to remember that they gain 10,000 plus new ones.

But sometimes the gospel will separate a family for different reasons; when God calls a family member to the mission field, for example. Even if a family is united by the gospel, separation like this will be difficult, but we know it will all be worth it. Because Christ is always worth it.

How can you encourage missionaries and others you know who have been separated from family and loved ones for the sake of the gospel?

Genesis 25:19-26

Isaac was the child of promise who carried forward the promises of land, offspring, and blessing God gave to Abraham. But before the promises went forward, a crisis had to be addressed. Isaac's wife, Rebekah, could not have children. (A story similar to Abraham's wife, Sarah's.)

Rebekah's barrenness was not only tragic for the family, as painful as not being able to have children may be. In this case, barrenness was a cosmic tragedy because God had promised that the removal of the curse of sin and the defeat of Satan would come through the birth of a child (Gen. 3:15), and the restoration of the world would come through the Abraham's offspring (12:1-3). The fact that Rebekah could not have children again put those promises in jeopardy.

But Isaac prayed for his wife, and God miraculously opened her womb. Are you noticing the pattern here? God used unlikely pregnancies and births to keep His promises and deliver His people—and He asked His people to trust Him in the process.

What difficult circumstances in your life might be opportunities to trust in God?

Daily Devotions



Week of May 20

Day 1

Genesis 25:19-26

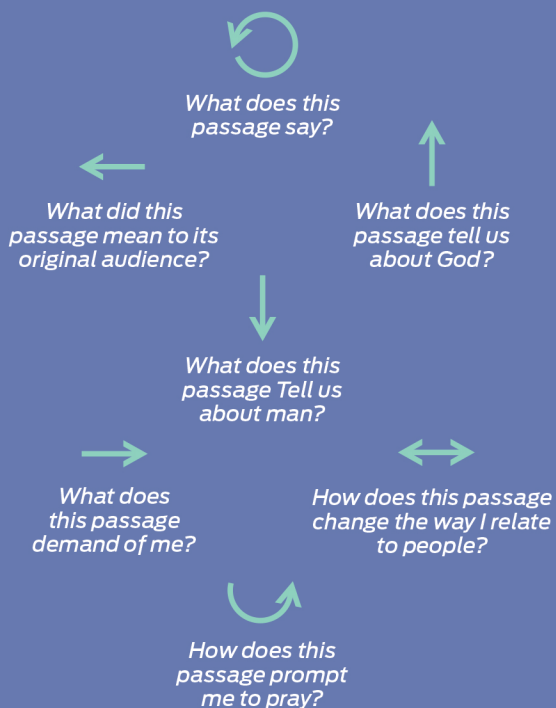
What we do instinctively in times of adversity—in the midst of life's trials and struggles—can be quite revealing. Do we wring our hands in despair? Do we make a plan and a task list to deal with the situation we are facing? Or do we turn to God?

As we read this passage describing Isaac and Rebekah's inability to have children, we are reminded of Abraham and Sarah's shared struggle with infertility (Gen. 15:1-6; 16:1-15; 18:9-15). It was no accident that the first two married couples God used to form His great nation faced this same challenge—God made it abundantly clear that His hand would be on the formation of this people.

However, when Isaac was faced with the same trial, he did not follow in his parent's footsteps. Maybe he heard the story of his birth time and time again from his parents, so he was more likely to turn to God instead of being discouraged or taking matters into his own hands. Isaac turned to God and interceded for his wife. This act of love for Rebekah and trust in God provides an example of what our instinct should be.

What is your instinctive response to adversity? How can you remind yourself to turn to God in these times?

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Day 2

Genesis 25:27-34

These verses serve two important purposes. They act as a hinge between the brief birth narrative of Jacob and Esau and what follows. The Lord told Rebekah that the twins would fight against each other, and she felt the truth of that as they grappled in the womb. Then, Jacob took advantage of his brother for rejecting the blessings that should have been his as the first born. These verses remind us of how different the twins were, which only added to their struggles.

These verses also reveal favoritism in the family, which would fuel their conflict later. In two brief sentences, we are reminded that this was a broken family. Despite their brokenness, God used them as He uses broken people like us today.

How has God used your brokenness for His glory in the past?

How might He use the brokenness you are experiencing today?

Day 3

Genesis 26:1-6

As we read Abraham's and Isaac's stories, we discover several parallels between them. Both had barren wives, and God intervened to give them sons. Both received covenant promises from God. Both set out for Egypt during famines. And both lied about their wives being their sisters.

It is important for us to understand the historical nature Abraham and Isaac's accounts. The shared patterns between the father and son remind us of God's authority and power, but they also show us how one generation influences the next—for better or worse. Like Abraham, we all leave behind a spiritual legacy. The question is, what will its quality be?

How have others shaped your spiritual life?

How are you shaping others' spiritual lives?

Genesis 26:7-11

Twice in his life, Abraham lied about his wife being his sister because he worried for his own life (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18). Abraham's deception was cowardly and showed a lack of trust in God and both times his lies were exposed.

In this passage, his son repeated his father's mistake—and once again the lie was exposed. Interestingly, the person who confronted Isaac for his lie was Abimelech, which is the same name of the king who confronted Abraham about the second time he lied about Sarah in Genesis 20. This could be the same man or this might be a descendant of the first Abimelech, sharing the same name. Some believe "Abimelech" may have been a title, much like Pharaoh.

Regardless of who this Abimelech was, the repeated deception by Isaac shows us the hopelessness of finding an upright man through whom God would form a nation. Like Abraham, Isaac was not the answer humanity needed—he was a sinful man in need of a Savior. Even the greatest of patriarchs needed another—like us they needed Christ, the righteous one.

How have you lacked trust in God this week? Confess those times to God and turn those situations over to Him.

Genesis 26:12-35

The LORD appeared to Isaac twice in Genesis 26, first in verses 1-6. God appeared to Isaac to give him direction during a famine, but His appearance and reassurance of His promises made first to Abraham set the scene for a similar situation where Abraham lied about Sarah being his sister. After that encounter, Isaac lied about Rebekah being his wife. Isaac lied because he was afraid for his life, even though God had just reminded him that He would be with him and bless him.

God's second appearance to Isaac followed his deception and a conflict over wells with the herdsmen of Gerar. This time when the LORD appeared to Isaac, He comforted him. Isaac did not have to be afraid; God was with him and would bless him. God's timing reveals His graciousness and mercy in His dealings with us. We might expect God to come in discipline. But He didn't. He came in comfort and hope, reminding Isaac (and us) that His promises are based on His character, not ours.

How has God been gracious to comfort you, even when you did not deserve it?



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