



# PRESTONWOOD STUDENT DEVOS



summer 2019



PRESTONWOOD  
S T U D E N T S



# Daily Devotions



Week of May 26th

Day 1

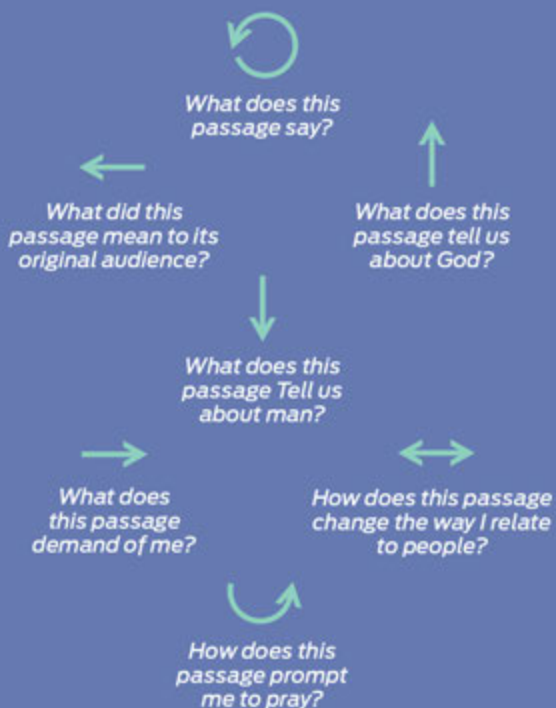
## Genesis 27:1-17

Throughout the Bible, we see how God designed the family to be the primary building block of the community of faith and society as a whole. The husband-wife and parent-child relationships are the two most vital human relationships, only becoming more important when we understand how each parallels our relationship with God.

It can be easy for us to look at the bigger picture of how God used this family—even through their adversity—to fulfill His promises and glorify Himself. That is certainly true, but at the same time, we need to step into this family's pain with them. We have to remember these were real people who were part of a real family falling apart at the seams. We need to remember this because it is the reality for many families today—maybe even your own. We have to remember God's ideal for the family and what we might experience are often driven apart by sin—ours and/or others. But at the same time, we remember reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel. Reconciliation between us and God, but also between spouses, parents and children, and siblings in broken families.

**Where do you want God to bring healing and reconciliation in your family or in other close relationships?**

## The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



# Genesis 27:18-29

We can see this family's dysfunction in the way the parents played favorites. Isaac loved Esau's "manliness" and appreciated his ability to bring back food from the hunt. Rebekah favored Jacob, so when she overheard Isaac's conversation with Esau, she came up with a plan to help Jacob receive the blessing instead of Esau.

The plot was to deceive Isaac into thinking that Jacob was Esau. Jacob would take goats from their flock so Rebekah could make a meal Isaac loved. Even though his father could not see well, Jacob knew that if Isaac touched him, then Isaac would realize Jacob was not Esau. Jacob was concerned his father would curse rather than bless him. But Rebekah had everything figured out. She clothed Jacob in Esau's clothes, she put the goats' skin on Jacob to make him hairy, and she prepared a meal her husband would like.

Despite all this scheming, God continued to be gracious. He kept His promises. His plan to redeem the world will not be overcome by human sin

**How does it encourage you that God can work sovereignly through your mistakes to bring about something good?**

# Genesis 27:30-46

A common criticism of the church is that it is full of hypocrites. One might respond by saying, yes, the church is full of imperfect people and because of sin, hypocrisy exists. Backstabbing, deception, lying, and pride can be on full display. And this can cause us to wonder how God could ever use the church. How can God use such broken people to bring His will to pass and glorify Himself? Maybe you've wondered that about yourself.

Yet the more we study Scripture, the more we discover the problems we have today are the same problems people have had throughout history. And more importantly, we discover in ourselves the same troubles we see in those around us. Others can look at us and ask the same exact question we are asking!

But as we read through the story of Scripture, we also see that God used these people—as broken and sinful as they were. This is good news for us, because it reassures us that He can also use us for great good and for His redemptive purposes. God still uses us to bring blessing to this world—not because of who we are but because of who He is.

**What makes you feel as if God cannot use you? How have you seen Him use you in surprising ways?**

# Genesis 28:1-9

It might be easy to miss the detail of Isaac finally coming around to God's plan of carrying on the promises through Jacob, not Esau. Just before this, Esau was angry and wanted to kill his twin brother. Just after this, we read about Jacob's first encounter with God during his travels. But we can learn a lot from Isaac's blessing here. Yes, Isaac made a mistake earlier in attempting to bless Esau despite God's revealed will for Jacob to be the son of promise. And yes, his family was divided and in strife. But here God demonstrated His patience and grace. God continued to work on Isaac's heart and gave him time to obey. And God is just as patient and gracious with us in our slowness and disobedience.

**What disobedience do you need to confess to God today? Repent and thank God for His grace and patience toward you.**

# Genesis 28:10-22

It is easy for us to focus on Jacob's flaws—he had a number of them, after all. But we can't miss his spiritual sensitivity in this moment. He encountered God and responded appropriately in worship.

How about us? How often have we missed God at work in our lives because we have been too busy, too distracted, or too blinded to Him? May we have the spiritual sensitivity to see God at work in the moment.

**How has God been at work in your life recently? How has He grown you, blessed you, and used you?**

# Daily Devotions



Week of June 2nd  
Day 1

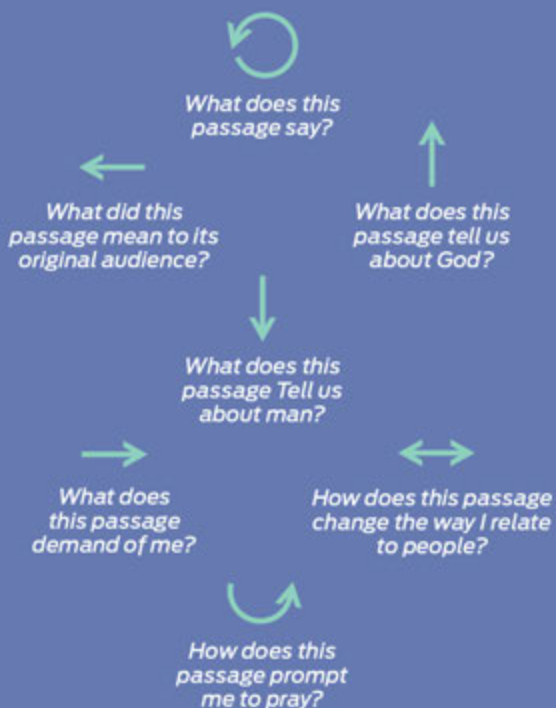
## Genesis 29:1-12

As Genesis 29 opens with Jacob reaching his destination of Paddan-aram. There he saw shepherds and their sheep around a well with a large stone covering its opening. In short time, Jacob met Rachel—the daughter of his uncle Laban—whom he would fall in love with and marry.

Despite Jacob's deception and shortcomings, God promised to carry on His covenant through him. God promised to be with him. And we can see God watching over Jacob, guiding his path, and caring about the details in the way He provided a wife for Jacob. This is the same lesson we learn over and over against as we read these biblical accounts—God loves His children and provides for them.

**How have you seen God guide, direct, and confirm your steps as you follow Him?**

## The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



# Genesis 29:13-30

What exactly was Laban thinking when he agreed to Jacob's request to work seven years for the right to marry Rachel? Did he expect that his older daughter, Leah, would be married before the seven years were up? Did he suspect Jacob's infatuation with his younger daughter would fade?

We don't know, of course—Scripture doesn't tell us—but this account, along with the ongoing motif of deception in Jacob's life reminds us of our need to live with integrity. God's people are called to speak the truth at all times—nothing we say should even look like a lie (Prov. 12:22; 2 Cor. 8:21; Col. 3:9; Heb 13:18). We live with integrity because we want to reflect God's nature to the world and because we find rest, joy, and salvation in His truth, Jesus Christ.

**What ways can you live with increased integrity at home, school, and in your community?**

# Genesis 29:31-35

Leah was in such a difficult position. She was married to a man who did not love her. A man who actually despised her most likely because of the deception she had been part of. And to make matters even worse, her husband was also married to her sister, the one he truly and openly loved, and the two would become bitter rivals (Gen. 30:1,6,8,15).

We should not gloss over Leah's pain here—a deep pain produced by sin, particularly Laban's and Jacob's. We need to remember that sin always has consequences—in our lives and the lives of others. But we shouldn't miss what God brought through Leah's adversity; the beauty He brought from the ashes. Leah's sons were part of the nation God built. Levi would be the one from whom the priests would come. And Judah, his kingly line would be the one from which the Savior of the world would come. Trials and pain often push us away from God, and the tragedy is that when they do, we can miss the beauty of God's work as they happen.

**How has God used trials, adversity, and pain in your life for good?**



# Genesis

## 30:1-43

For the third generation in a row, we encounter the theme of barrenness as God forms the nation He had promised Abraham. And once again, as Abraham and Sarah had done, we see people trying to take matters into their own hands. Echoing Sarah's demand for Abraham to have children with her maid, Hagar, Rachel demanded that Jacob have children with her maid, Bilhah. Abraham's grandson had two sons with Bilhah. Then when Leah stopped having children, she gave Jacob her maid, Zilpah, who also bore sons for him.

God used these sinful choices for His good, but they were not without consequences. Rivalry and favoritism would not be confined to Jacob and his four wives. It would spill over onto their children, as with Joseph.

Learning from our sins is important; it is one way we grow in holiness. But it is also important that we learn from the sins of others. Surely Jacob knew the stories of his grandfather. But tragically, Jacob chose to repeat their mistakes.

**What lessons have you learned from your failures and how can you encourage others by sharing them?**

# Genesis

## 31:1-55

Jacob traveled to Paddan-aram to find a wife and to flee from his older brother's wrath. Years later, he had that wife—and three others—as well as many children and considerable wealth because of a shrewd arrangement he had made with Laban. Once again the uncle and nephew found themselves in a match of wits.

But it was time for the wayward son to return home; God had told him so (v. 3). And so, as only seemed fitting, Jacob snuck away with his family and possessions, running from Laban without telling him. Of course this didn't go over well with Laban, who chased Jacob and his daughters, catching up to them a week later.

The interaction between Jacob and Laban reminds us that relationships, even within families, can be messy at times. And in order to experience the type of reconciliation the Bible calls for, it is also important to be reminded that both parties bring their individual sin into the relationship. So, we should constantly be asking ourselves, "How has my sin contributed to the situation? How can I try to make things right?" If Jacob or Laban had asked themselves that question, maybe their relationship would have been different.

**Are there any relationships in your life that need healing? What steps can you take toward reconciliation this week?**



# Daily Devotions



Week of June 9th

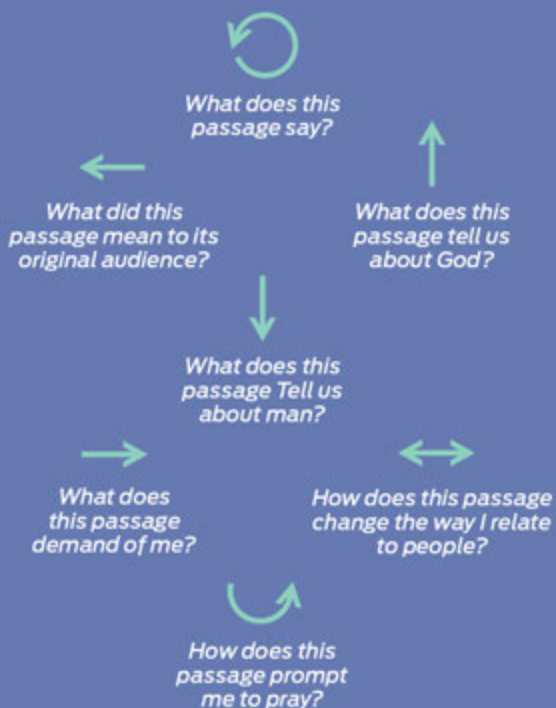
Day 1

## Genesis 32:1-23

We can learn quite a bit about others, and ourselves, in the prayers we say when we're distressed. As night fell on Jacob and his family, his face fell with it. Jacob knew he would face Esau the following day—only hours from then—and he was afraid. Esau had the clear advantage, forcing Jacob into a defensive posture, something quite unusual for the schemer.

Jacob began by recounting his history with God. God was the faithful God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, the One who told Jacob to return to his family's land so He might prosper him. It's not difficult to read between the lines. But then Jacob confessed his unworthiness of God's kindness and asked God to rescue him. Jacob was where he needed to be—he was desperate and humbled before God. Then Jacob closed by once again reminding God of His promise to prosper him. And with that, Jacob prepared messengers to greet Esau and settled in to rest for the night. But he would not get any rest; God would take the seeds of humility and dependence and plant them deeper in the patriarch's heart.

### The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



**What are your prayers to God like in times of distress and uncertainty?**

# Genesis 32:24-32

Genesis 32 should encourage us because it reveals that no matter how messed up our lives may be, no matter how many bad decisions we have made, and no matter how much we have wrecked the relationships around us, if we encounter the living God, then we can be given a new life. The New Testament teaches that we can encounter God through His Son, Jesus, and that in Christ we bear His name! So, our identity will no longer be wrapped up in our sin, rather our identity will be as beloved children of God.

God chose this man with all of his wretched past to be the agent through whom He would bring His saving blessing to the whole world. Because Jacob would have a son, and his son would have a son, until eventually a virgin peasant girl would have a Son named Jesus—the Savior of the world! Through Jesus, God can change your life forever and use you to bring blessing to the world around you. He will give you a new identity and a new purpose that fuels your life like never before.

**What ways do people around you see you live out your identity as a child of God through Jesus?**

# Genesis 33:1-20

The time had arrived. Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming—along with four hundred men. Jacob then went ahead of his family and bowed seven times. Even though Esau had traded the birthright—the position of family leadership to him—Jacob greeted his older brother in a posture of respect and humility. We can only imagine what raced through Jacob's mind in that moment. What he expected his older brother to do. But it most likely was not what happened next as Esau ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. The two brothers who once were bitter rivals wept together with joy.

We cannot miss what God did behind the scenes here. Just as He was at work in Jacob's heart, He was surely at work in Esau's as well. When we think of our lives and our relationships, we are right to focus most of our attention on God's work in our own hearts. But we cannot focus all of our attention there. We cannot forget that while God is working on us, He is working on others too. Broken relationships that may seem hopeless, are far from it when God is at work.

**What relationships do you need God to repair or strengthen? Pray first for God to work in your own heart, and then in the heart of others.**

# Genesis

## 35:1-8

Jacob was in Canaan, but God had something different in mind for the patriarch. So He commanded Jacob to get up and go to Bethel and settle there. Furthermore, he was to build an altar to God where he fled from his brother Esau so many years before.

So Jacob obeyed. But first, he told his family and all of the others with him that they had to do something. They had to get rid of their foreign gods and purify themselves. Everyone gave Jacob their gods and earrings and he hid them under an oak tree.

Once again, we see Jacob being changed before our eyes. He understood that God was calling him to increased faithfulness—not just in going where God wanted him to go, but also in casting aside other gods from his family's midst. Just as Jacob called on his family to purify themselves and change their clothes, God was doing the same in his life—purifying and changing his heart.

**How has God been at work purifying and changing your heart?**

**Where do you still need Him to work?**

# Genesis

## 35:9-15

Everyone wants God's blessing. That's why we pray and ask God for health or for provision or a thousand other things. Asking for blessing is not wrong, of course. It shows how dependent we are on God, and asking Him to bless us is one way of communicating what a good and gracious God He truly is. We ask Him to bless us because we know He delights in blessing His children.

The problem, though, is that many of us do not understand why God blesses His people. We want God to change our lives, but when He does we don't understand why or for what purpose He has changed us.

In Scripture, we see that God's purpose in blessing His people is not so they will hoard the blessing to themselves. God blesses His people so they will be a blessing to others. God changes people so they can be agents of change for others.

We see in Jacob's life that God blessed and changed him so Jacob—Israel—would be the means by which God brought change and blessing to the whole world.

**How can you use gifts and blessings from God to bless others this week?**

# Daily Devotions



Week of June 16th

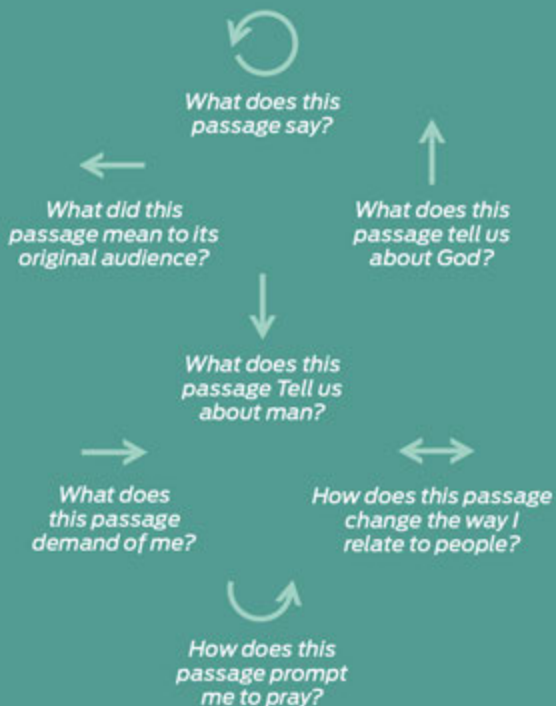
Day 1

## Ephesians 4:22-31

Paul has been encouraging unity and love over the past several verses as he talks about the Church, but we all know there are two sides to every coin ... a “head” and a “tail.” When we have unity, there is a potential for disunity as well. He goes on to talk about what could possibly kill the unity that we strive so hard to achieve. Simply put, unity is destroyed by not walking in holiness. What does this mean though? First, if we want to cause disunity, we first must live in our old selves that belong to our old way of life. Second, our old lives and flesh say we must not renew our minds. We shouldn’t take on the new attitude that comes from our relationship with Christ. Third, our old lives and flesh say we should refuse to put on our new self. Our new self is created, just as in the Garden of Eden, in the likeness of God. Our new self is also like God in true righteousness and holiness. This means that we throw away our old selves, renew our minds/attitudes, and jump into our new self in order to pursue the holiness of God. When we do that, we will be able to maintain the unity that God so desires from us.

**In verses 25-31, list the ways in which we can put on our new selves daily.**

### The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



# 1 Corinthians

## 12:11-14

First Corinthians is a letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. Paul writes to stress the importance of unity in the church and specifically addresses the areas of disunity within the Corinthian church. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you are an important part of the body of Christ. Differences can divide us, but the most significant commonality in every believer is Jesus. The Holy Spirit unites us across lines of class, status, race, age and social standing. It was vitally imperative for the early church to lay aside their divisiveness and remember their oneness in Christ for the advancement of the Gospel. It is just as crucial for each of us today to remember this truth.

**How can disunity hinder the sharing of the Gospel?**

**What stands out to you about the fact that the body of Christ is made up of many members?**

# 1 Corinthians

## 12:15-20

God has given every believer unique spiritual gifts for our good and His glory. In Corinth the church had begun to praise certain gifts over others, and people had become prideful of their gifts. In fact, everyone coveted the same gift and felt other gifts weren't as important. Paul seeks to remind the church that part of their unity in Christ is the necessary diversity of spiritual gifts. Each unique gift helps the body function not only properly but better! Spiritual gifts are given to build up other believers, build up the Church, create unity, express love, and reach new Christians.

**Why do you think it's important to have different spiritual gifts within the body of Christ?**

**What is your spiritual gift?  
(click here to take a test)**

# 1 Corinthians

## 12:21-30

President Theodore Roosevelt once said, “Comparison is the thief of joy.” To avoid comparison, some people have gone as far as trying not to see any differences in others, or to find all differences wrong. To compare simply means “to see similarities and differences.” The answer, then, isn’t for all of us to be exact same. Instead, we need to learn how God uses comparison. As believers we are set apart from the world; we are called to be different. We are united in the body of Christ, and we should rejoice in each different gift He gives within the body. Encourage one another to use the gifts God has given us! When we start to allow our differences to make us feel “less than,” we allow comparison to steal our joy. We’re putting our focus on how we look or what we have instead of seeing the bigger picture and God’s purpose. We don’t want to praise someone else’s gift of teaching because we are only focusing on our own lack of ability—instead of seeing the gift of mercy He has placed in our own life.

**Who can you encourage today who is using their gift for God’s glory?**

**How does 1 Corinthians 12 deepen your understanding of God’s call for unity?**

# 1 Corinthians

## 12:21-13:8

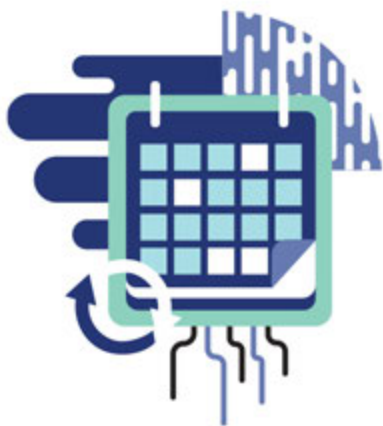
Much of the dissension within the church of Corinth was because of the people’s desire to puff up themselves coupled with a lack of love for one another. Paul shows them a more excellent way to be unified based in love. In our desire to stand out for Jesus, we must always remember that His love should be the common thread woven throughout all we do and say. We should always strive for holiness. We speak truth in love by allowing the Holy Spirit to daily work in our lives and staying deeply rooted in God’s Word. The more we look like Jesus, the more we will be unified and able to show God’s love to a world that desperately needs Him.

**How does God’s Word define love?**

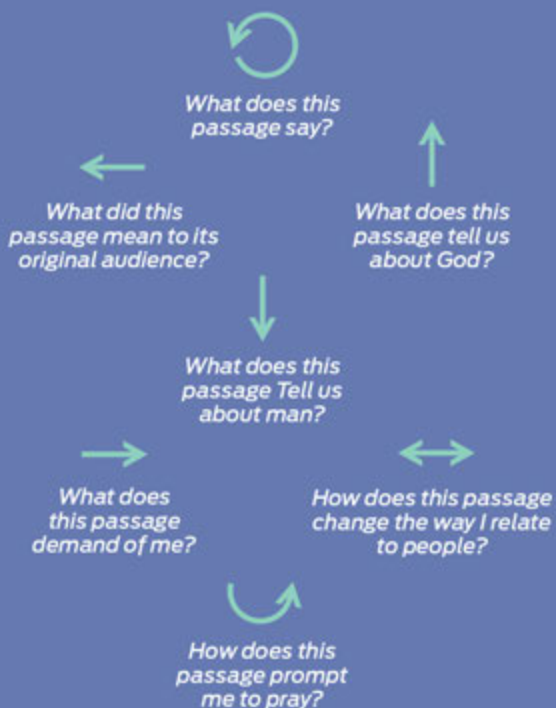
**How does love truly unite us?**



# Daily Devotions



## The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Week of June 24th

Day 1

## 2 Timothy 3:10-17

In this letter from the apostle Paul to his student Timothy, we get to see the authority that God's Word has for everyone's life. Paul wanted Timothy to know that the Bible is perfect for all situations in life, no matter the circumstances. The Word of the Lord can teach, train, correct, and give a person a good talking to! If we don't spend time in the Word of God, studying and learning it, we cannot be equipped to do the things we need to do for His glory. When we study the Word of God, we come to find out more and more that what the Bible says is true. It really is God's Holy Word! God has a purpose for everything in the Bible, although you may not understand it. As we spend time studying God's Word, we can learn how to better obey His commands, live a fuller life of freedom and be better equipped to serve Him.

**How does the Bible help you in daily life?**

**How do you feel after reading God's Word? Empowered? Or just the opposite?**



Day 2

## Psalm 119:9-16

In Psalm 119, the author realizes the importance of God's Word in his life. He knows that keeping God's Word leads to blessing and fulfillment. He has hidden God's wonderful laws in his heart and spoken them over and over again. The Word of the Lord is what he thinks about, so it affects what he does. He rejoices in the Lord, meditates on His Word, and delights in what he finds in the Word. This should be how we feel when we read the Word of God. Studying the Bible can be as easy as memorizing Scripture. We have the ability to memorize songs and phone numbers and addresses, but rarely do we apply that ability to Scripture. All we have to do is apply the principles found in Psalm 119:11. Read it several times, speak it out loud, and then think about it. As we place the Word of God in our hearts, it will begin to make more sense to us. We will then start to live out the commands we have recounted over and over again.

**How would hiding God's Word in your heart help you in your daily life?**

Day 3

## Hebrews 4:11-13

The Bible is more than just words in a book written a long time ago. God uses it to dig deep into our hearts to show us what we are really like. Nothing can hide from God's vision. There is a living power in the Bible that helps us to see what we cannot see. This passage also speaks of how God sees absolutely everything, even our deepest, darkest sins. There is nothing you can hide from Him, and you cannot fool Him into believing that you are being completely obedient to Him. God wants us to use the Bible so that we can take that sin out of our lives, then God wants us to fill that void with obedience to the Lord. Why study the Bible? Because it exposes our deepest thoughts and desires. With the help of the Holy Spirit, God's Word shows us our sin so we can repent (go in a different direction) and change. If we spend time with the Word of God, it will show us things we can't see about ourselves that need to be made right. We serve a Holy God who wants us to be holy (1 Peter 1:16). Studying the Bible will help you live a holy life that is pleasing to God.

**How is God's Word living and active? What does that mean?**

# Deuteronomy 30:11-14

God gives us commands that are not out of reach. We do not have to reach to the heavens or beyond the sea. But the commands He gives us are to be obeyed. The Word is very near to us, and we should never make the excuse that what God has commanded us to do is too difficult. God does not give us anything that He knows is too much for us. What God commands us should be in our mouths and in our hearts at all times.

**If God knows us better than we know ourselves, to whom should we listen? God or ourselves?**

God knows us better than we know ourselves, so therefore He knows our limitations, our strengths and our weaknesses. Because of this, God knows exactly what we can and cannot handle. God gives us the Word and speaks to us through it. The Word should be in our hearts and in our mouths so that we may obey it. By keeping it in our mouths, we should be speaking it. By keeping it in our hearts, we should be memorizing it.

# Deuteronomy 4:5-8

In this passage, we see Moses asking the people of God to obey the commandments they have been given in God's Word. Moses promises them that if they follow the ways of God, they will be a blessed nation among all the surrounding nations. He says that their wisdom and understanding will be shown to the other nations, and those nations will look on them in that way. He also reminds the people that other countries may have "gods," but none of them worship a real God who is intimate and personal, and hears their prayers.

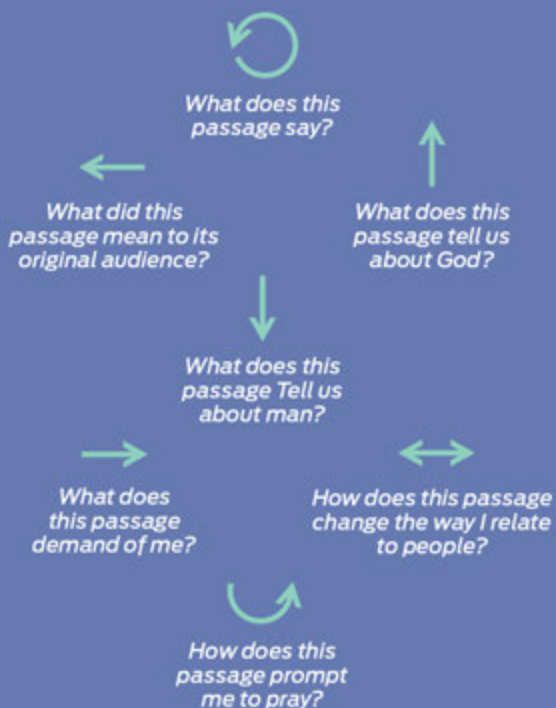
**Why does Moses want their new land to stand out to other nations?**

After you have set aside a specific time to study your Bible, you cannot begin without prayer! As Moses reminded the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4, God is near to us when we pray to Him. When you begin your time of study with prayer, ask God to speak to you. The promise is obvious in Scripture: He is near to us when we call on Him! So, ask Him to speak to you during your time of study. Ask Him to show you new things you have never seen before.

# Daily Devotions



## The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Week of July 1

Day 1

## Matthew 6:5-13

The Christian life has some elements that are private, and some public. Jesus points out here that our prayers should not bring attention to ourselves. Jesus illustrated the necessity of this several times in His time on earth. There are times to pray publicly in agreement with other believers, and other times that should be private and solely between you and your King. When Jesus commanded that you go into your room to pray, He was saying that it is crucial for you to separate yourself from everything else to spend time with Him. Just as you get alone to do your homework so you can focus, your time with God should be intimate and unhindered by distractions.

**Do you have a set place where you spend time with God in prayer? How much time do you spend there?**

**Are your prayers sincere and from the heart, or are they rehearsed with years of repetition?**

# Luke

## 11:9-13

In this passage, Jesus is talking to the disciples about being persistent in their prayers. We should not simply ask God for something and then sit back and relax. God wants us to consistently bring the issues of our life to Him. Just as a kid asks for something from his parents over and over, we should continually bring our requests to God. Jesus tells us that all we have to do is ask, and when we do, we should expect God to respond. His response may not be exactly what we want or what we expect, but He tells us that when we come to Him, He responds. Knowing that our prayers are not going unheard should give us confidence. Philippians 4:6 says we should present our requests to God. If you were to request a bathroom break from your teacher and she denies you, hopefully she's not doing that to be spiteful. Though your request seems valid, she understands the bigger picture that if you leave, you may miss the next important part of class. Just as we don't always understand why God doesn't answer every request we present to Him, we need to remember that God has the big picture in mind. His denials simply mean He has something better than our plans.

**Is there something that you have been praying for consistently? Are you praying that God will answer it the way you want, or the way that He wants?**

# Acts

## 2:1-19

This account of Peter's escape in the book of Acts is supernatural. Peter is in prison, but there are people praying for him. This story gives evidence of the power of prayer. It is humorous that Rhoda, so surprised that their prayers had been answered (Peter had been released), left Peter just standing at the door because she could not believe that it was actually him! The people themselves, who were at that moment praying, were in disbelief.

**What is the significance of the word but in verse 5?**

A good story can serve as great motivation. That is exactly what this account does. It shows that there truly is power in prayer. Peter was headed to his death, but God's people were praying. Do you believe that the same power in their prayers is the same power you have in your own?

**Is there one thing that you wish God would do in your life, but cannot imagine it ever happening? What would it be?**

Day 4

# 1 Timothy

## 2:1-8

Paul is encouraging the people to pray for leaders so that their lives may be quiet, godly and dignified. Read Ephesians 6:10–12. Whether we like the leaders (parents, teachers, police, coaches, etc.) above us or not, if we believe that God is in control and nothing happens outside His will, we know those leaders were placed there by Him. Those leaders face temptations and trials from Satan just as we do, if not more. If God has placed them in a position of power, and the Enemy is attacking them, shouldn't we pray for their protection and guidance as they lead? Ephesians is clear that the Devil will do anything he can to attack us, and our biggest weakness is our inability to see the attack. Praying for the peace and guidance of leaders is a huge asset in the ongoing supernatural fight.

**What leaders are in your life who need prayer? Reach out now and ask how you can pray for them.**

Day 5

# 2 Chronicles

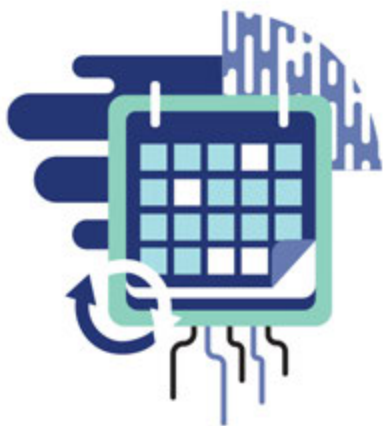
## 7:12-16

Solomon was commanded to finish God's temple, and when he did, God spoke to him. Verse 14 says that if God's people turn from sin and wickedness, He will hear them and heal their land. God calls for purity in our lives. There is no formula to get your prayers answered. Nothing says, "If you do this and this and don't do this, then your request will come true." There are, however, things that prohibit our prayers; pride and sin are two of them. We can't live in sin and disobedience and then turn to God and expect Him to make it better. The sovereign God of the universe is not your maid or genie. He is the gracious Lord of creation, deserving of our affections, time, hearts and lives. For us to think otherwise is a lack of humility on our behalf.

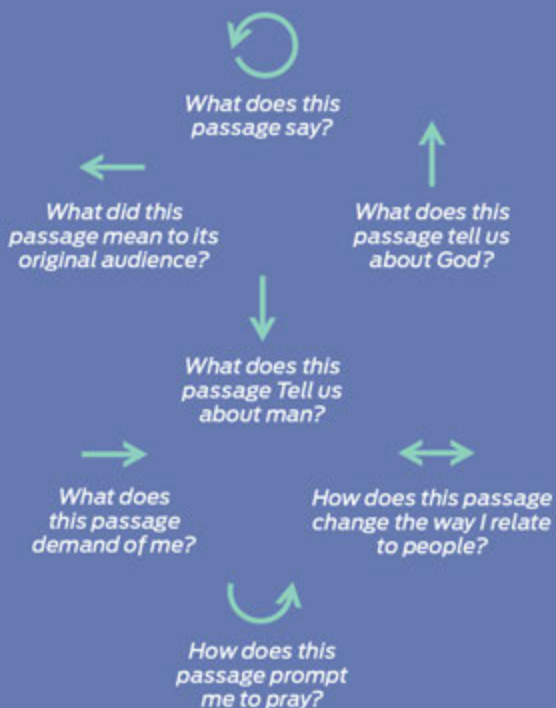
**Do you think God is worthy of all of you? Why?**

**Why does the world say you need to be prideful and the Bible say you need to live humbly?**

# Daily Devotions



## The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Week of July 8

Day 1

## Matthew 6:16-18

One of these important spiritual disciplines is fasting. To fast is to abstain from food or drink for an allotted time for a defined “spiritual” purpose. It helps the Christian to focus on Christ to satisfy his/her every need. Jesus tells us in verse 18 that our focus should be placed on our Father who is in heaven, that our reward might come from Him, and not the praise of man. The entire purpose of this spiritual discipline is to recognize our need for the Lord. When Jesus tells us to do this in secret, He does not mean that nobody can know. As a matter of fact, it would be helpful and wise to make sure you have an accountability partner through the process. Fasting is not a way to diet, lose weight, or make you look physically better. If these are the motives, then not only have you become the hypocrite, but you are endangering your body. Practicing the act of fasting in secret means that your focus through the process is solely on the Lord, relying on His strength to get you through the day.

**Why does Jesus want us to fast in secret?**

**Have you ever fasted? How did you grow through the process?**

# Matthew

## 4:1-4

We see that when someone has been anointed with the Spirit of God, Satan wants to steal, kill, and destroy his/her ministry. Jesus is tempted with food, a natural substance needed to sustain the physical body. However, Jesus understands that the spiritual is more important than the physical, and His teachings as well as His lifestyle clearly show this. Jesus, although fully God, was also fully man and thus felt what we feel. Naturally, after His 40-day fast, He was hungry. Satan tempts Jesus to do a miracle in order to feed Himself. Interestingly, Satan is indirectly acknowledging the deity of Jesus, that He truly is God! Jesus rebukes Satan by using Scripture from Deuteronomy 8:3, showing that His strength truly comes from the God and not from food. The central idea of fasting centers around placing our focus on the Lord. Jesus, in the midst of temptation, needed to rely on the strength of His heavenly Father to carry Him through the difficult trial. This passage speaks volumes about God's honoring our faithfulness.

**Read verse 4 again. Why does Jesus use Scripture to answer the Devil?**

# Zechariah

## 7:1-7

Zechariah was a prophet chosen by God to instruct, warn, and correct His people. Unfortunately, God's people refused to listen, thus bringing about God's punishment (see verse 13). The people questioned whether or not they should continue their scheduled fasts since the temple they were building for the Lord was almost complete. It's as if they were saying, "We've got it from here, Lord, no more need for us to rely on You." God instructed Zechariah to ask the people why they ever fasted in the first place. Were they doing it for Him or for themselves? The people had been in a healthy routine of fasting, but they became mere creatures of habit, fasting only because it was what they were used to. Sometimes we start things out by doing them for the Lord, but our selfishness can get in the way. Like the people in the book of Zechariah, we fall into unhealthy habits even though we started on a healthy routine. We can go to church week after week, but it does not reflect a strong relationship with the Lord. Jesus is not so concerned with what we are doing as He is with why we do what we do. The motive of the heart is what should drive the Christian to want to please the Lord in all we do. Fasting should not be done unless the purpose of doing so is to bring glory to God.

**When was the last time you sat in solitude and evaluated the spiritual state of your heart? Read 2 Corinthians 13:5. Why does Paul tell us to examine ourselves daily?**



# Esther

## 4:15-5:8

Esther, a beautiful woman, was the niece to Mordecai, and also happened to be one of God's chosen people, selected to be the new queen of Persia. She discovered an evil plot of Haman, an official to the king, to destroy Mordecai and kill the Jews. When the Jews found out, they began to mourn over the bad news, but Mordecai asked Esther to intercede for them. However, if she did so, she would be risking her life. So before she decided whether or not to intercede, she asked Mordecai and the people to fast on her behalf. Esther showed the significance of fasting, that by abstaining from food for an allotted period of time to ask God to answer their prayers, the Lord would be faithful in return. Esther, Mordecai and the Jews were relying on God's power to lift them through this difficult period. The fasting of God's people paid off as Esther's life was preserved, the evil plot found out, Haman put to death, and the people rescued.

**Have you ever fasted as a result of bad news? If so, how did the Lord prove faithful? If not, then what is keeping you from doing so?**

When trials come your way, what is your initial response? Like Esther, our first response, no matter how difficult, should be to hope in the Lord. Many of us will never face death as a result of an evil official to a foreign king, however this does not minimize our struggles. What we go through as Christians may very well be painful and fearful.

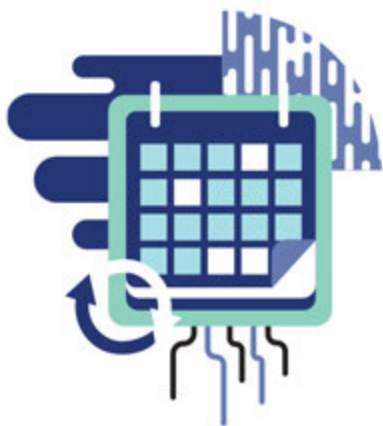
# Deuteronomy

## 9:9-11

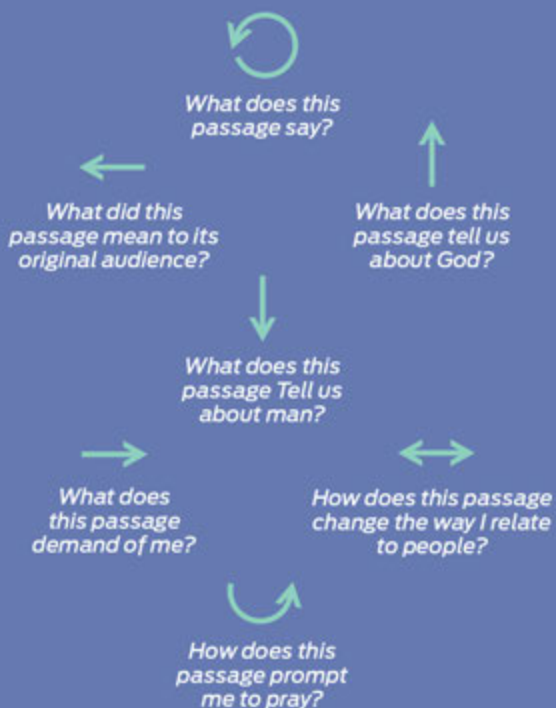
In this passage, Moses participated in one of the most intense fasts on record. This proved to be a supernatural sustaining by the Spirit of God, because Moses fasted not only from food, but also from all liquid. Through this incredible communion with God, Moses was given a clear word from the Lord to such an extent that it established the entire law for the Hebrew nation. When was the last time you really received a clear message from the Lord? Not a simple inclination or feeling, but instead, an undeniable conviction that impressed itself so heavily upon your heart that clarity was inevitable. You don't have to fast to receive this type of clear reception from the Lord, but many times when you do fast, God blesses the focus of your mind and spirit with clear communication. God is always talking to us, but many times, the clutter in our lives blocks our ability to understand it. Therefore, a fast can remove the clutter by clearing a pathway to your soul so that His message is clear.

**How many people in Scripture who fasted can you name? Describe how they heard from the Lord and what they did for the kingdom.**

# Daily Devotions



## The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Week of July 15

Day 1

## Matthew 19:16-24

For us to be saved, we need to understand our need for a savior. Jesus exposes this man's need for a savior by showing him that his money and possessions were his idols, and he was breaking the commandments. Because he was wealthy, he had a hard time understanding his spiritual need for Christ due to his ability to provide for all of his physical needs and wants. The point of this passage isn't that Christians should give away everything they own, but rather recognize that all of our possessions are rubbish and worthless compared to the spiritual gift God offers through Christ. Without Christ, people are spiritually impoverished, regardless of their physical circumstances. While we don't have to sell all our possessions to follow Christ, we should be willing to give up whatever God asks of us. As Christians, we should not love anything on earth more than we love God. Sometimes the Lord will ask us to give up things so that our hearts will be completely His. Everything we have comes from God, and we are mere stewards of it. If the rich young man had understood this, he would have found it much easier to follow Christ.

**What are some things in your life that would be hard to give up if Jesus were to ask you?**

**Why is it so hard to trust God and give Him complete control of our life and possessions?**

# Luke

## 12:13-21

Jesus warned the crowd against greed, then told a story about a rich farmer who had an abundant crop, to illustrate the kind of danger associated with greed. God was not pleased with the farmer, and He called the man a fool. The farmer was already rich but failed to acknowledge where his wealth and blessing came from. Farmers are dependent on God for the proper weather for great crops. When the farmer had more than enough, he did not stop to consider why God might have blessed him with more than enough. He failed to consider that God might want to use him to bless others. Instead, the farmer decided to squander this blessing on his selfish living. Jesus pointed out that people who would get the farmer's wealth after he died would be more blessed by his death rather than his life. The farmer had forgotten who the provider of his wealth was and failed to consider why God had blessed him with more than enough. He was blessed with more than enough in order to bless others. However, he was too focused on accumulating earthly wealth, rather than building a rich relationship with God.

**How can you stay focused on building a rich relationship with God rather than building earthly wealth that won't last?**

# Mark

## 12:41-43

In the Lord's eyes, this poor widow gave more than all the others put together, even though her gift was by far the smallest. The value of a gift is not determined by its amount, but by the spirit in which it is given. A gift given grudgingly or for recognition loses its value in the eyes of the Lord. Jesus watched the people's giving, and then explained to His disciples that giving depends on the state of your heart.

**What does the widow's gift say about her dependence on and trust in God?**

The rich people gave out of their abundance while the widow gave sacrificially. What a great picture of Christ's gift of salvation for us. It cost Him everything. When giving, we should have the same heart as the widow. The widow invested all she had in the kingdom of God, knowing that God would take care of her. Many of us can't even imagine how it would feel to give away something when we had close to nothing at all. When you give, remember gifts of any size are pleasing to God when they are given out of gratitude and a spirit of generosity. There are many people around you who would benefit greatly from you and what you have to give—whether time or possessions.

# Luke

## 12:22-34

Jesus has just told His disciples not to worry about building up earthly wealth, but to focus on building a rich relationship with God. Here He goes on to tell them that their lives should not be consumed with a daily focus on physical needs, because He is the provider. He has provided for all creation, yet we are His masterpiece. He emphasizes that if He takes care of all creation, how much more will He care for us who were made in His image?

**Are you more consumed by desires for earthly gain or by desires for God to move in powerful ways through you? Why?**

Many times the reason we are so focused on possessions is because we forget that our God owns everything and that He will provide for us. Our God's power is so great that doing something so supernatural as adding a single moment to a person's life is a little thing. He feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, which is a great reminder that God will take care of us as well. Those who do not know God are focused on gaining these earthly needs, but we should be different because we know our Father will provide. Not only will He provide, He says it gives Him great pleasure to give us the kingdom. Our focus as believers should not be so focused on the temporary earthly goods, but instead our lives should be based on building God's kingdom. The issue here is far more than possessions. It is about our hearts.

# 1 Timothy

## 6:3-10

In this passage, Paul is speaking of those who would teach messages that said if people were godly enough and had enough faith, then it would be evident by the way God blessed them financially. These were the "health and wealth" preachers of that time. They taught that following Christ would mean financial blessings. Paul made it clear that true godliness lies in learning to be content with whatever God has given us. When we long to be rich, we are in danger of falling victim to many traps that can lead us to destruction spiritually and, at times, physically.

**What is the danger that comes with wanting to be rich? What does it mean to be content?**

Because we come into this world with nothing, and leave with nothing, it is a reminder that everything this world offers is only temporary. Only the things of God are eternal. Many times we fall into the trap of thinking that if we are obedient to Christ, He will bless us with earthly possessions. While He does take care of our every need, our reward for following Christ is in heaven. Too often we fall into the traps of earthly gain, rather than being content with all God has blessed us with.

# Daily Devotions



Week of July 21st

Day 1

## Genesis 37:1-11

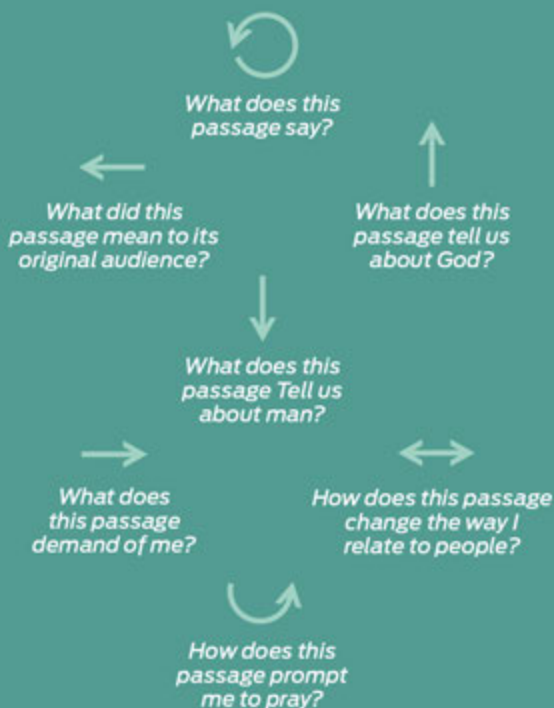
You would think Jacob would have known better. He had seen how favoritism could tear apart a family. It was the story of his upbringing in a home where his father favored his brother, Esau, and his mother favored him.

And yet, the only thing Jacob seemed to learn from that was *how* to play favorites. He played favorites with his wife, Rachel, and his son, Joseph. It is no surprise to see the results were the same: a divided family.

As we consider a father's (Jacob) unequal love for his children, we should be drawn to delight in the Father's (God) equal and steadfast love for His children. God does not play favorites within His family. All who have trusted in Christ are invited to approach God as our loving Father. As we do, we should be drawn toward one another as well. We are to seek to love all of our brothers and sisters in Christ as God does, with the love He gives us.

**How might you show the sin of favoritism toward some of God's family at times, either in your heart or through your actions?**

## The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



# Genesis 37:12-22

Jacob was apparently clueless about the sinfulness of his favoritism of Joseph, but that was not all he missed. He also seems to have had no idea how deeply his favoritism wounded his other sons. Jacob used Joseph sort of like a spy to report on his older brothers, causing Joseph to bring back at least one bad report (37:2). Jacob was most likely clueless to the danger he placed Joseph in when he sent him to check on his brothers again. He had no idea what destruction his poor decision would cause; how Joseph would be rejected by his brothers, betrayed, and nearly killed.

But there is a Father who did know the perils His Son would face because of His decision to send Him to His own. He knew His Son would be rejected, betrayed, and would not escape death, but would be executed while His people mocked Him. Of course, we are talking about God sending Christ Jesus. Not as a clueless Father, but an all-knowing Father who working providentially to bring the cross to pass so we might experience salvation from our sin.

**How does God knowing what Jesus would experience and working to bring it to pass deepen your understanding of the gospel and love for Him?**

# Genesis 37:23-28

Joseph's brothers were so wounded by their father's favoritism that they wanted to kill their younger brother. It was only because of Reuben—the oldest brother who probably felt some sort of responsibility—that the brothers backed off of their plan and threw Joseph into a pit instead.

But a new opportunity presented itself. When Judah saw a caravan of traders approaching, he asked his brothers what they would gain by killing Joseph. Instead, they chose to make a few bucks off of their brother and sold him to the Midianites.

Sin was wreaking havoc in yet another generation of this family, but there was a way to break the chain. God worked in Joseph, and later his brothers, to change them. Sin is inherited and many sins are learned behaviors. But God's grace and mercy made known to us in the gospel is greater. Christ has crushed sin under His heel, and in doing so, He has freed us from its power in our lives.

**What sins do you feel enslaved to?  
What do you need to repent of and  
trust in Christ for deliverance?**



# Genesis 37:29-36

One of the wonderful things about the Book of Genesis, and the Bible as a whole, is how raw it is. We see this in Jacob's response when his sons told him Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned for days—this was expected. But when all of his sons and daughters tried to comfort him, he refused. Instead, he was determined to carry his grief all the way to the grave. This is how death affects people. Apart from the gospel, this is how death would affect us; death would be a crushing blow, leaving us without hope and without joy.

Since Christ has gone before us in death and has put death to death, we can respond differently, especially when it comes to grieving the death of a fellow believer. Death does not have the final word. Death is not victorious. We grieve death, but not without hope; we do not mourn the way the world mourns (1 Thess. 4:13). Instead, we grieve with the hope and assurance that death is a temporary separation; this separation will be removed for good when Christ returns.

**How do you tend to see death, through the world's lens or through the gospel's?**

# Genesis 38:1-30

Genesis 37 ends with a cliffhanger. Joseph had been taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar. But when we turn the page and begin reading Genesis 38, we read of a shameful account of Judah. Why this interlude? Why tell us about Tamar tricking her father-in-law and having his child? Maybe because there is something we need to learn about Judah when he comes back into the story.

Remember, it was Judah who had suggested the brothers sell Joseph into slavery. It was an action of a man who didn't appear to care much about anyone other than himself. Yet, look at how Judah responded when Tamar provided evidence showing he was the father of the child growing inside of her. He abandoned his call to put her to death and didn't try to find a way to cover his sin, as he had done before with the rest of the brothers. In this, we find a hint that God might have been at work in Judah, growing him, and changing him, just as He did with Joseph.

God was not focused solely on Joseph in Egypt. He was also at work in others preparing them for their reunion a couple of decades later. We have to remember this today too. Yes, God is at work in us, but not only us. He is also changing others, for His glory and our good.

**Who do you see God working in? How can you pray for that person?**



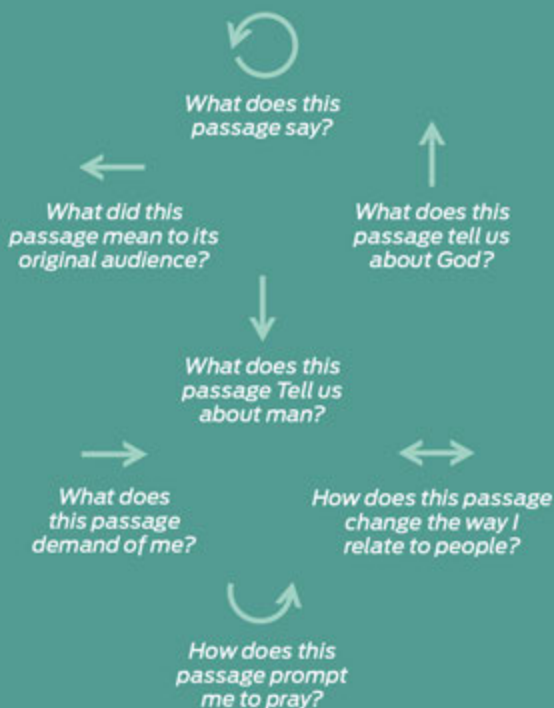
# Daily Devotions



Week of July 28th  
Day 1

## Genesis 39:1-6

### The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



We shouldn't read past verse 1 too quickly. Instead, we should sit with it for a few minutes and consider how this affected Joseph. He was a 17-year-old pampered boy, all alone in a foreign land. True, his eleven brothers were not fond of him, but they were his family. Before he had lived with his people in his land. But because of his brothers' betrayal, he was a slave in a distant land with a people not his own. We need to appreciate the loneliness Joseph probably felt. When we do, we can see the beauty of verse 2: "The LORD was with Joseph."

We all feel alone at different times, but the amazing promise of Scripture is that followers of Christ are never alone (Matt. 28:20). We may feel like Joseph did because we are also away from our families. But the truth is that we are not alone: God is with us. We may relate to Joseph because those we care about—those we thought loved us—betrayed us and wounded us deeply. But God is with us. We may feel like Joseph did because we cannot relate to anyone around us. But God still is with us.

**How has the promise that God is with you comforted you through times of loneliness?**

# Genesis 39:7-23

In Genesis 38, we learned that Judah's wife, Shua, died (v. 12). Some time later, he saw a veiled woman he thought was a prostitute and went over to her and asked to sleep with her (38:16). This account of Judah seeking comfort by seeking out a prostitute is contrasted with Joseph in Potiphar's house in the next chapter. Joseph surely needed some comfort after all he had been through. The potential comfort was seeking him out in the form of Potiphar's wife, who was making advances toward him. But Joseph did not give into the temptation. Day after day he refused, appealing to his respect for Potiphar and more importantly his reverence for God, which eventually cost him greatly.

Because of sin, our hearts are hard-wired toward moralism. We believe that if we do good things, if we obey God, then we will experience good things in life—He will reward us. But moralism tries to define what is good. Sure, when we obey God with the right motive—out of love—good will result. The problem is that sometimes what God calls “good” and what we call “good” are not the same. When that happens, our dictionary is the one that is off.

**Like Joseph, we may suffer for our obedience in this life. Why is this better than prospering in sin?**

# Genesis 40:1-2

God was used all of these letdowns in Joseph's life for a greater good. All of his pain and adversity would be redeemed one day. Each apparent setback moved him one step closer to Pharaoh's court.

As we try to be faithful to God, we need to remember this too. Sometimes our faithful obedience will lead where we expect; we will see God bring good from it. At other times, our faithful obedience will lead where Joseph's did—we will experience adversity because of it, but in time we will see how God used it for His good. But there is a third way God might use our faithful obedience. We might experience adversity because of it but never see God bring good from it in this life. During these times we need to be careful to understand that God has promised to work all things together for His glory and our good, but He has not promised we will see how He does that. As God's people, we must seek to serve God and trust Him, whether we see gain and reward or not.

**How has God brought good from adversity you have experienced because of your obedience?**

# Genesis 41:1-36

Two years had passed since what may have seemed as Joseph's greatest opportunity to be released from prison. The cupbearer had forgotten Joseph. But one day, Joseph was summoned from prison. The cupbearer remembered after all, and Joseph was to appear before Pharaoh to interpret his dream.

Joseph then shared God's interpretation of the dream. Joseph did what Pharaoh asked of him, but then he continued. In a bold move, the Hebrew slave offered counsel to the king of Egypt. Pharaoh didn't bring Joseph in for his advice. But Joseph offered a solution to Pharaoh's problem rather than just describing the problem—presumably with wisdom God gave him.

God has sent Christ-followers to live on mission for Him in our culture. Our role is similar to Joseph's—we are to be prophetic voices pointing people to coming judgment. At the same time, we are called on to provide the answer—the gospel—that people need to trust in to be delivered from that judgment.

**What opportunities has God given you to share the gospel with boldness? How can you use those opportunities this week?**

# Genesis 41:37-57

When we were first introduced to Joseph in Genesis 37, he wore a robe of many colors given to him by his father. But that robe was stripped off of him (37:23), and for the next thirteen years, Joseph would wear the clothing of a slave and a prisoner.

After over a decade of adversity, where each day seemed to bring only more bitterness than the day before, Joseph was clothed in fine linen garments (v. 42). His story came full circle. God restored Joseph, not just to a context as good as before, but to one even better.

This is God's heartbeat. We see it here with Joseph. We saw it with Job. Most notably, we will see it again when Christ returns and makes all things new. Christ's work of reconciliation will purge every last semblance of the Fall. He will return creation to its condition before the Fall. He will usher in His kingdom where everything is even better than before. This is our hope—a hope greater than Joseph ever dared dream—our hope in Christ.

**When you think of the new heavens and new earth, what excites you the most? Why?**

# Daily Devotions

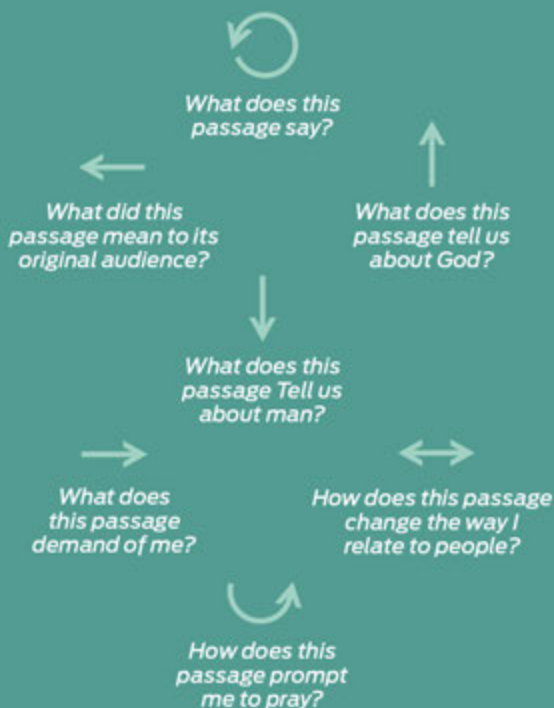


Week of August 4th

Day 1

## Genesis 42:1-38

### The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Joseph was a smart guy. We see this in how he managed Potiphar's house, the prison, and the distribution of grain in Egypt. More importantly, we see this in the way Joseph trusted God. We see this in how God blessed him and gave him wisdom in what he did. Surely, then, Joseph connected the dots of his life. Surely, he understood how God used each link in the chain of events of his life—even the painful ones—to bring him to his position of authority, beneath only Pharaoh.

And yet, when Joseph saw his brothers, it appears that his reaction—treating them like strangers and speaking harshly to them—was instinctive. It was his gut response—or more aptly his heart response—to seeing his brothers who had hurt him so deeply. Twenty years had passed, but the wound was deep and seeing them reopened it.

As we continue reading through Joseph's account, we will see God working on his heart, to bring it to the place his mind surely was. This is the beauty of God's work in us—He is after our complete, not partial, transformation by the power of the gospel.

**What are some areas of your life—thoughts, emotions, or behaviors—where you recognize your need for the gospel to change you?**

# Genesis 43:1–44:34

Joseph's test was nearly complete. He had placed his older brothers in a position where he would see how they treated their younger, favored brother Benjamin. Joseph already could have noticed a hint at what they would do: They had all returned with Benjamin to the city after Joseph's cup was found in his sack.

Then Judah, speaking on behalf of the brothers, went a step farther. They would all stay in Egypt as Joseph's slaves. They would not abandon their father's favorite son this time.

But then, when Joseph refused this offer, Judah went one more step farther. Judah, the one who had played such a significant role in betraying Joseph before—the one who had suggested selling him as a slave—stepped forward as an intercessor. He would take the place of his brother. He would offer his life as a slave instead of Benjamin.

This sacrificial action by Judah was Joseph's breaking point. He could no longer keep his test going. Any lingering resentment within him was crushed. It was time to reconcile with his brothers. This is the power of a selfless mediator. This is the power of Christ. This is the power of the gospel.

**What ways has God positioned you to live sacrificially for someone else?**

# Genesis 45:1-28

It's important to pay attention to the reason Joseph gave his brothers for not being grieved or angry with themselves—the basis of the forgiveness he extended toward them. It was not because of the changes he saw in their behavior. Yes, Joseph was testing them to discern if they had changed, but the forgiveness he extended to them was based on something else. It was based on his understanding of what God had done (vv. 5-8). Joseph was able to see his situation from God's perspective, to realize God was the One who was at work behind the sins of his brothers. That is why he forgave, and why we should forgive as well.

Our forgiveness can sometimes look more like the world's (conditional) forgiveness than God's. We might be willing to forgive if the person who wronged us is contrite or at least apologizes. Sometimes, we want them to make restitution as well; and then we will forgive. But God calls on us to forgive in light of the gospel—in light of the forgiveness we have received in Christ.

**Do you need to extend forgiveness to someone? What step will you take to do that?**

# Genesis

## 46:1–47:31

Can you imagine what it must have been like for Jacob as he traveled from his home to Egypt where his beloved son, the son he thought was dead, awaited him? The excitement? The nervousness? The agony of each mile passing by too slowly?

As they drew close, Jacob sent Judah ahead to prepare for their arrival in Goshen. In this simple act, we see a beautiful picture of grace. Judah, the son who had played such a significant role in tearing the two apart was given the opportunity to play a role in bringing them back together. Judah was no longer the agent of their separation, he became the facilitator of their reunion.

We don't know why Jacob chose Judah for this task. He may have consciously given this to his son as a gift of grace. Or it may have been for another reason. But what we do know is that this is what God affords us, in Christ. We too were once estranged from God our Father, in open rebellion against Him and His Son. Yet, in Christ, we have been given the privilege of declaring the gospel to the nations—to be used by God, because of His grace, to play a role in seeing people reconciled to God.

**Who do you know who you can share the gospel with this week?**

# Genesis

## 48:1–50:26

In the closing verses of Genesis 50, we read of Joseph living more than fifty years after his father's death. God gave Joseph a long life of 110 years—long enough to see multiple generations of his descendants. But then, when he was about to die, he called his brothers together and he told them something prophetic. God was going to come to their aid and bring them from this land back to their homeland. Then he made them promise to take his bones with them.

This postscript links ahead to the Book of Exodus. But it serves much more than that, it reminds us of the central truth of Joseph's life: God's sovereignty over all. Joseph knew God had worked providentially in his life, and he knew God was not done. God would continue working His plan to redeem His people—from Egypt, yes, but in an even greater way in Christ—as had been promised so long before to their ancestor Abraham and to Adam and Eve before that.

**In what ways do you need to trust in God's sovereignty in the days ahead?**



# Daily Devotions



Week of August 11th  
Day 1

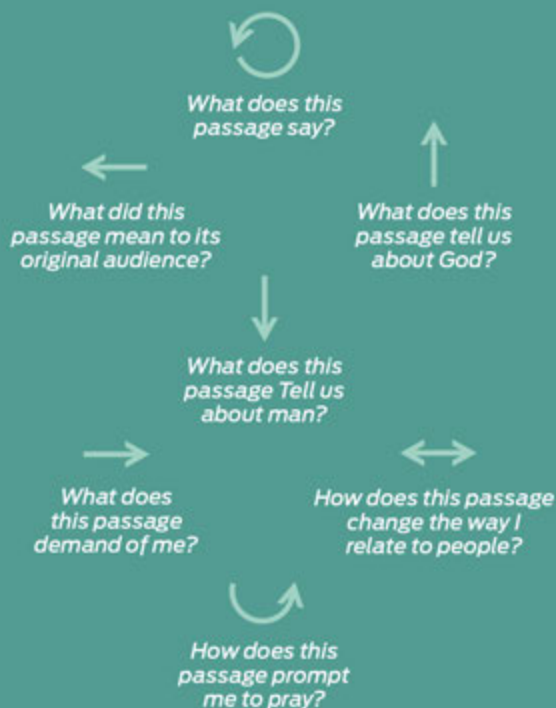
## Exodus 1:1-22

The disobedience of the midwives presents a fascinating and important ethical issue for believers. Were Shiphrah and Puah right to disobey Pharaoh's edict? If so, why? We know from this passage and others—Daniel's refusal to not pray (Dan. 6:10) and Peter and John's refusal to not abstain from preaching the gospel (Acts 4:19-20)—that we are to follow the laws of our nations unless those laws expressly violate God's law.

While this is important for us to know—and there may be times when we must put this principle into practice—for most of us it is more academic. Few of us will ever be in a situation where a law of the land is in direct conflict with God's law. But that does not mean this principle isn't relevant and helpful for us. It's relevant for a larger reason. Notice why the midwives knew what to do in this situation: They feared God. The same was true with Daniel, Peter, and John. The fear of the Lord is what gave them the wisdom to navigate what can be an ethical dilemma and follow God, even if it put their lives at risk.

**What ways have you disobeyed God, been slow to obey, or obeyed with the wrong heart? Confess these to God and ask Him to help you fear Him.**

### The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading





# Exodus 2:1-25

As you read through Exodus 1, you might get the impression that God was, well, absent. The God who was so involved in orchestrating Jacob's family coming to Egypt seemed awfully quiet, four hundred years later. Jacob's family was small, but powerful as Genesis concluded; then they became large and powerless. The Pharaoh of Genesis was kind to Jacob's family, but the new Pharaoh didn't even know of them.

But then, we read of a mother who placed her baby along the bank of the Nile out of desperation (Ex. 2). What happened after that could only be explained by God's hand. The baby was discovered by Pharaoh's own daughter who had compassion on him. If that isn't amazing enough, Pharaoh's daughter agreed to have Moses' mother nurse him until he was weaned (when he was about 3 or 4 years old). With this account opening Exodus 2, ideas of God being distant or disinterested in Exodus 1 fall apart. God may *seem* quiet at times, but He never *is* quiet. God was at work behind the scenes in Exodus, just as He is at work in our lives today—whether we see it or not.

**What area of your life do you need to trust that God is working in and through?**

# Exodus 3:1-10

The burning bush worked; Moses was drawn to it, just as God intended. He had to go closer to see why it wasn't being burned up. This was exactly what God was guiding Moses to do. But there was another part of the equation. As Moses approached, God stopped him and told him to take off his shoes because he stood on Holy Ground. This is a picture of God's immanence and transcendence intertwined. God draws us to Himself because He is a personal God who wants us to be in relationship with Him. At the same time, He is holy and set apart from His fallen creation, including the rebellious people He loves. This is why Moses could come closer to God—even still in sin—but not too close.

This is what God does. He makes holy what He possesses. We see it here with a patch of ground. We will see it later with the tabernacle, namely the Holy of Holies. We also see it in our lives. As Christians, we are a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9). Because of God's presence in us, we become holy at the moment of our salvation. Only through the ongoing work of God in us and through us can we live holy lives as an accurate representation of our new, true identities in Christ.

**Why is it important to remember that God makes you holy and you cannot be holy on your own?**

# Exodus

## 3:11-22

We can't blame Moses for asking the first question he asked God, "Who am I to do this?" It's a question saturated with humility, so in many ways, a fitting question to ask God. But as you read God's response to this question, notice that God didn't answer it, at least not directly. God told Moses He would be with Moses and He gave Moses a sign of His authority. But within this apparent non-answer was the answer Moses needed.

God placed the emphasis on himself. So, God redirected Moses to the One he should have been focused on: God. In essence, God was saying, "Moses, you missed it. It's not about you. It's not about what you can do or might do. It's about Me. It's about what I can do and what I will do." That is what Moses needed to understand in this call, and it is what we need to understand as well. Christians' service to our King is not based on who we are. It's not based on how smart we are, how dedicated we are, or how talented we are. Sure, God has given us all those gifts to be used by Him—but that's the point. God is the primary actor, not us.

**What are some ways you tend to rely on yourself instead of God?**

# Exodus

## 4:1-31

God had been so patient with Moses. But at some point questions and concerns give way to excuses. "Who am I?" was answered. "Who are You?" was answered. "What if they don't believe me?" was answered. "I can't speak well" was addressed. Then, Moses crossed the line. "Please, Lord, send someone else." He addressed God with a term of submission in "Lord," but his heart was far from submissive. He was out of questions, out of concerns. Now he put it on the table: He just didn't want to obey.

So God's anger burned against Moses. When we read this at the beginning of verse 14, we might be tempted to see God in the Old Testament as a temperamental, volatile God. But that notion is quickly put to rest in the latter part of the same verse. Even in God's anger, He continued to be patient and kind with Moses. He provided Aaron, who was already on his way to Moses, showing God's sovereignty and goodness.

**What sincere questions might you be holding back from God? What excuses might you be offering Him?**

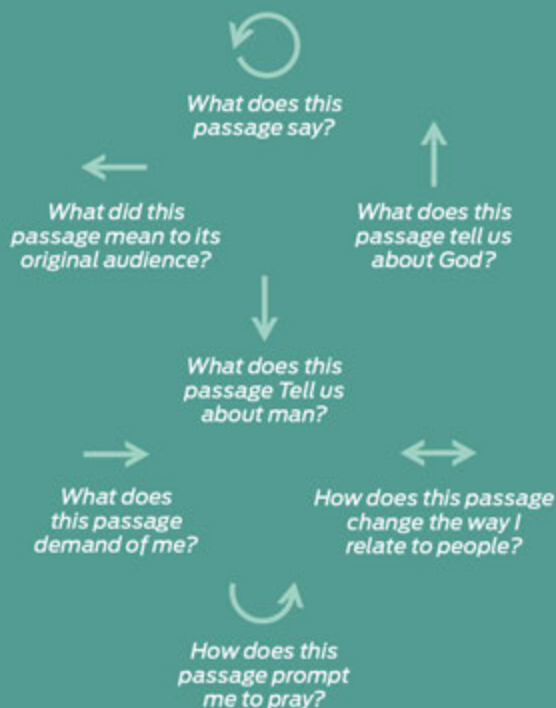
# Daily Devotions



Week of August 18th  
Day 1

## Exodus 5:1–6:27

### The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



When Moses first addressed Pharaoh and said God wanted the Egyptian to let His people go, Pharaoh's response was to immediately question who God was and what authority He had (5:2). It is a response of open defiance against God, a posture of the mind and heart that Pharaoh would come to regret. When we read this, we are right to pause in disbelief. How foolish of Pharaoh! But, thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, we should be quick to recognize that we are prone to echo Pharaoh in our sin. There are times when we stand before God in defiance and ask Him who He is as we arm wrestle Him for control of our lives.

This is why the gospel is such good news to us. This is why God's unending mercy and grace is so critical—not just as the pathway to salvation, but for the journey forward from the moment of our salvation. This is why it is so vital for us to understand Christ has given us His righteousness. Even in Christ, we want to resurrect our old, dead, fallen selves and live in rebellion. We would rather live as a fraud, than live out our new, true identity as children of God.

**In what ways might you be living in open rebellion against God?**

# Exodus 7:1–8:32

Imagine if Pharaoh's heart was not hardened. Maybe he would have let God's people go sooner and likely would have tried to take credit for doing so. After a few difficult plagues, surely the people would have been grateful for their leader's wisdom. However, that isn't what happened. Instead, there was an even greater purpose in Pharaoh's hardened heart. Each of the plagues was designed to confront a different false god. Because Pharaoh's heart was hardened, God was able to strike down ten false gods, including Pharaoh himself. God did not just beat one Egyptian god, or a couple gods—He defeated ten of them and showed that He, the One true God has all authority and power. He can do what many different Egyptian gods were supposedly needed to do.

This was the wisdom of God, this was the heart of God, in hardening Pharaoh's heart.

**Why is it important to hold God's sovereignty and your responsibility in balance? Do you tend to lean one way? Why?**

# Exodus 9:1–10:29

The Nile had turned to blood. Frogs, gnats, and flies had invaded the land. Livestock had died and people and animals had suffered festering boils. God then promised destructive hail. God had revealed His amazing power, and He would continue to do so. But don't miss what He told Moses to pass along to Pharaoh before the hail: "For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth" (9:15).

The power the Egyptians and Israelites were seeing was a sliver of what God is capable of. The same God who created the universe by His words could also speak the Egyptians out of existence. Egypt was not seeing God's full power for one reason: grace. It was God's grace that withheld the rightful judgment the Egyptians and Israelites deserved. This same grace holds His judgment today. This is the message of the gospel. God is holy and powerful, and we deserve judgment. At the same time, God is loving and merciful, so He withholds His judgment from us and placed it on His Son instead.

**How aware are you of God's grace day-by-day and minute-by-minute?**

# Exodus

## 11:1–12:28

Four days. That is how long the Israelite families were to take in the lamb they had chosen for the Passover. Why four days? Why not choose this lamb right before the Passover? One reason seems to be allowing time for the families to observe the lamb and notice any defects that would disqualify it from being a worthy sacrifice. But there is another potential reason: attachment.

God may have wanted the families to get to know this lamb. Perhaps even to love it. Because in doing so, they would appreciate the sacrifice of this lamb all the more. Saving the life of the firstborn came at a cost—and it wasn't paid by just a lamb pulled randomly from the flock—it was by a lamb that they had come to know.

If so, this is yet another layer of complexity and beauty of the picture of the gospel the Passover painted. Our salvation did not come from a random person. Our sacrifice was provided by the spotless Lamb of God who we know and love.

**How does your love for Christ deepen your appreciation of the cross?**

# Exodus

## 2:29–51

As we read through Exodus 12, we might be overwhelmed with the rush of details leading up to Israel's departure from their Egyptian captivity. The details of the Passover observance are rich and theologically weighty. The death and wailing through the land is sobering. The release and plundering are affirming. So it is easy for us to miss a detail that seems small, but is quite significant. As Pharaoh told Moses to take his people and leave, he asked Moses to bless him (v. 32). This is important, because blessings always move from the superior toward the subordinate. By this simple request, Pharaoh acknowledged what God wanted him to learn all along—that God was greater.

We cannot go too far and see this as a salvific experience for Pharaoh: After this, he chased Moses and the Israelites, intending to slaughter or recapture them. But this request is further evidence of God's wisdom in hardening Pharaoh's heart. Through his hardness of heart, Pharaoh—and no doubt many other Egyptians—finally saw and acknowledged God's glory.

**In what ways might God be using you to reveal His glory to others—even through your suffering and adversity?**

# Daily Devotions



Week of August 26

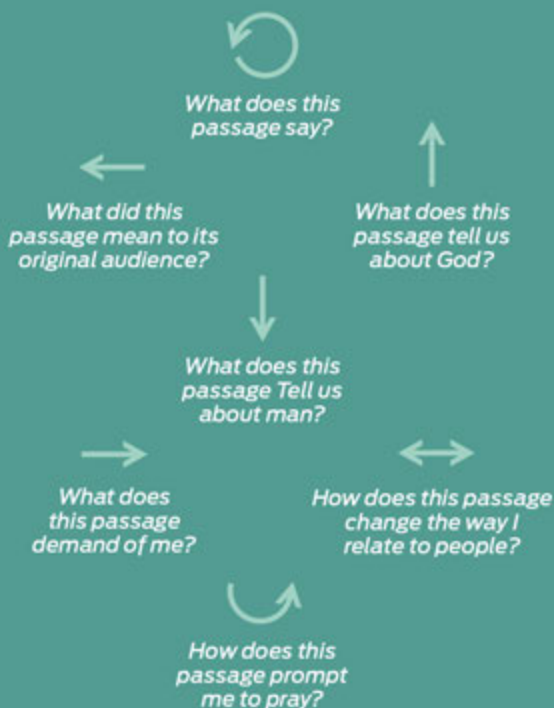
Day 1

## Luke 14:28-33

Have you ever made a trade that you regretted? Maybe you traded a Pokémon card with someone and immediately regretted it, or traded something of value for something that—later—you realized was not worth it. Jesus talks to His followers about “counting the cost” of following Him. Have you ever thought about what it would cost to really follow Him with your life? Following Jesus costs something. In Luke 14:33, Jesus even says it costs everything. Have you ever made a trade that you were excited about and didn’t regret? Maybe you got a great deal or purchased something on sale that was much more valuable than what you gave in exchange. In Matthew 13, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God as a treasure and a pearl of great value. In both cases, the people gave up “everything they had” to get it. For the man who found the treasure in the field, Jesus said he sold all he had with great joy! Following Jesus has a cost, but when you begin to experience the kingdom of God in your heart and in your life, you begin to realize that the cost is nothing compared to the peace, meaning, and joy of following Jesus with everything. Jesus said “whoever wants to [follow Me] must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Me.” Make the decision to follow Jesus with everything you have and all that you are. It’s not easy, but it’s always worth it!

**What is the biggest thing you’ve held on to that is keeping you from following Jesus with everything?**

### The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading





# Psalm 34:8

As a child, you may have said a blessing before dinner: “God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food. Amen”—a simple prayer that we recited without giving much thought or consideration. And then there’s the simple line in the middle of the prayer: “God is good.” Have you ever questioned God’s goodness? Have circumstances in your life had you asking if God is good, then why do bad things happen?

As we hit those rocky places or events that make us question God’s goodness—and it’s guaranteed that we will have trouble in this world—we need to take a step back. We need to stop focusing on the bad in our lives and in the lives of those around us and begin training our brains to focus on the good and be thankful for it. We take so many things for granted that God, in His goodness, has given us with each new day.

We live in a world that has been broken since the Fall of man in Genesis. God created us in His image, but has given us the free will to make choices, good and bad. We all experience the consequences of our choices. Some of us experience the consequences caused by others’ choices. And because of this brokenness, God, in His goodness, sent His Son to be the sacrifice for our sin and allow us to once again have a relationship with Him.

**What circumstances have you experienced that have caused you to question God’s goodness?**

# Romans 12:1-2

Quickly! What are the first things that come to mind when you read these words: Cell phone. Social media. Clothes. Food. Movies. Have you ever paused to consider why you prefer an iPhone or a Samsung or why you choose the restaurants you eat at? Perhaps it’s because these things stand out to you in all the best ways possible. They’re different than all the other options. In the same way with God, He calls His followers to live differently.

When we look at Romans 12, we see Paul encouraging believers to surrender as a response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That’s the beauty about living differently. It’s saying yes to Christ and allowing Him to lead, guide, and transform. This is what makes Christians “set apart” or different.

This world wants to make you give in, dictate the way you think, and influence the decisions you make. While the things of this world may say “stand out” for various reasons, Christ transforms His followers and gives life to new thoughts, attitudes and choices that ultimately bring glory to Him. Take a moment to evaluate your desires, the things you truly crave/want. The desire to be in the Bible every day. To spend time in prayer. Ask God to give you an increased desire for more of Him.

**Are you desiring more of the things in this world or desiring the things God would have for you?**

# Proverbs

## 2:1-12

In 2002 Paul Marcarelli started appearing as the "Test Man" character in Verizon Wireless commercials. He made the question "Can you hear me now?" a household phrase. Have you ever had someone ask you that question? Some days we have so many different things trying to speak into our lives that the loudest voice is the only one we are able to hear.

**What two things can you turn off this week that will allow you to focus your attention on what God has to say to you?**

With so many different sources trying to tell us how to live or what we should or shouldn't be doing, how do we decide who or what we are going hear? We spend time with it. We make it a priority. It's the first person we hear in the morning or the last thing we listen to before we go to bed. Is that person or thing God? If so, you have your priorities straight. If not, what can you do differently to hear from Him? Look at your daily schedule. Have you designated a time with God when you can be uninterrupted? Do you regularly spend time reading His Word or praying to Him? Do you attend church or Bible study? Have you ever asked Him to speak to you? If not, to whom have you been listening? If you've watched TV lately, then you know the Verizon guy has switched networks and is now touting the competition as the best cell service provider. Sales pitches change, people change, friends change, music changes, ideas change, but God never changes.

# Psalms

## 1:1-3

What is success? Will you ever make enough money, drive a nice enough car, have a big enough house to make you feel successful? Will you always want more? In a culture that is always striving for more, it is hard to be satisfied with what God has laid before you. We constantly are thinking about what we could have when what we do have is so good. The world's definition of success often involves fame, fortune or power—true success means becoming the people God wants us to be and reaching the goals He has set for our lives. Read Hebrews 12:1.

**Does your definition of success match up with God's plan for your life?**

Here, we get a good idea of what success looks like. First, it is important for us to look around and see the way others live for Christ every day and be encouraged by how God is using them. To see how people have followed God's direction and experienced His faithfulness allows us to know that God is for us and that we can do it. When we rely fully on God and put aside stuff that keeps us from Him, then—and only then—will we find true success. Success doesn't come in moments, but it grows throughout a lifetime of walking with God each and every day. Today spend some time asking God what it is that He would have you do, then do it.





**God's Plan | 3 Weeks**

*God grows His covenant people*

**Unity | 1 Week**

*beach camp*

**Disciplines | 4 Weeks**

*spiritual disciplines*

**Redemption | 5 Weeks**

*God redeems His people*

**Kickoff Sunday | 1 Week**