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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 35 | AUGUST 29–30



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

Genesis 1:27; 2:18

Genesis 2:18 says, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” This shows us that God is a relational God; therefore, we were created in His image as relational beings. One of the worst punishments people can receive in prison is solitary confinement. In confinement, prisoners are often placed indefinitely in a space with very limited human interaction. The reason this punishment is so harsh is we were not created to live this way. The greatest commandment given to us is to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul and mind; and the second is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37–39). This requires us to be in community with God and with others. The Creator of the heavens and earth desires an intimate and personal relationship with you.

Describe a time when you either lived in community or lived in seclusion.

If you have been living a secluded life, what can you do to change that?

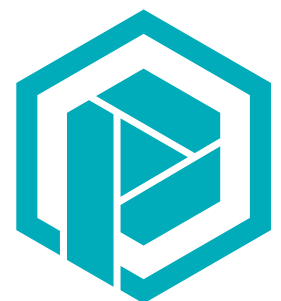


Day 2

Genesis 4:8

Cain and Abel were brothers. They were friends. Because of sin, Cain killed Abel. Because of sin, a friendship was broken. Sin can quickly blow up a relationship, and we see this happen in our world all the time. Have you ever met someone and immediately became friends with him or her, and then, a week or two later, you realized it was a bad idea? This happens in Scripture, too. We see friends turning against friends and relationships being broken, and it's all because of disobedience. Sin destroys relationships, but Jesus can restore them. When we recognize Jesus and ask Him into our friendships, a cycle begins. Jesus heals our friendships; He uses our friendships to make us better people; and He uses our friendships to draw us closer to the Father. If you want life-giving and not life-draining relationships, allow Jesus to be the center of it all.

How have you seen sin come alive in your friendships?



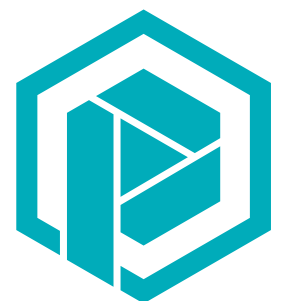
Day 3

Proverbs 13:20

Whether you realize it or not, the people who surround you have certain levels of influence on you. A common adage says, “Show me the top five people you hang around, and I’ll tell you the type of person you are.” First Corinthians 15:33 tells us “Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.” What a wake-up call! Friends have such a huge influence in our life! God wants the best for us. God wants to be the most important relationship in our life. He doesn’t want to fight for control of your heart. He wants all of your heart, but He also wants you to have great friends who build you up, not tear you down.

Take time to examine your friendships. Are they healthy ones that help you draw closer to the Lord?

What are practical steps you can take to surround yourself with godly community?



Day 4

1 John 1:7

Being created to be relational means being created to be vulnerable. But, being vulnerable involves risk. There is a difference between transparency and vulnerability. Transparency is like a window; you can see everything at a surface level, but you don't get to fully experience it behind a window. You don't get to smell fresh air outside or touch the soft grass on the ground. When you are vulnerable with someone, you are allowing that person to really know you. Being vulnerable involves sharing something about yourself that is deeper than surface level. First John 1:7 says, "If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another." We can't have true community or relationships while walking in the dark. To be relational means to be known. Vulnerability should be a pillar in your relationship with God and with others.

What are some things in your life that you haven't brought into the light?

Whom can you confide in for a godly, vulnerable relationship? (List two or more people.)



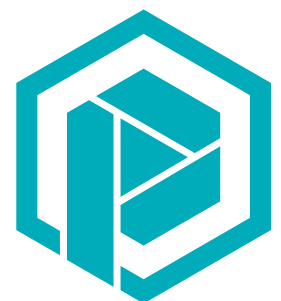
Day 5

Matthew 22:35–39

The “love” Jesus describes in this passage is agape — unconditional love. Jesus told us to love the Lord with all our hearts, souls and minds. Agape love is “the commitment of devotion that is directed by the will and can be commanded as a duty!” Jesus knew that sometimes we weren’t going to feel like loving God or people, and that sometimes, we would have to choose, with our will, to do so. Unconditional love is impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit. When you have a relationship with God, His Spirit lives in you, enabling you to love in a “supernatural” way. Without Him, in and of ourselves, we cannot love unconditionally. To know Jesus is to know what true agape love is.

Consider some people in your life who are hard for you to love.

Now what will you do to love them better?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 36 | SEPTEMBER 5-6



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

Proverbs 27:17; 22:24–25

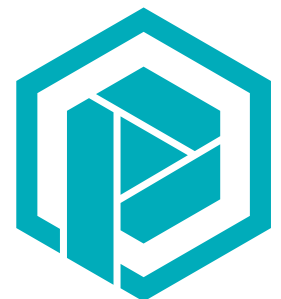
Last week we learned that God created us for a relationship with Himself. Not only did He do that, but He also created us to be in relationship with others. These relationships affect the quality and direction of our life. These relationships, however, don't promise that our life will look exactly as we want it to look.

The people around you will shape you. The question is, will you allow them to sharpen you by making you look more like Jesus? Or, will you surround yourself with people who will push you in the opposite direction?

Surrounding ourselves with believers who desire to see us live a life that honors the Lord may not be easy or natural, but it's worth it.

How have you seen friends negatively affect the direction of your life?

How have you seen friends positively affect the direction of your life?



Day 2

Proverbs 12:26

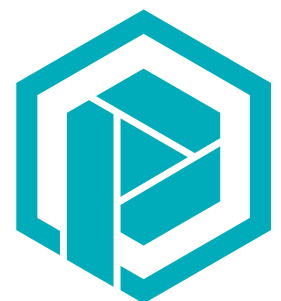
Start off today's devo by reading Proverbs 12:26 in at least three different translations.

Our friends affect the quality and direction of our life not only through what they do, but what they say. The problem is, we haven't just given authority in our life to our closest friends, but also people far outside our sphere of influence. We are tempted to allow classmates, social media followers, teammates from three years ago, and fourth cousins to influence us in the same way we allow our best friends to influence us.

It's up to you to choose who will influence you. Not everyone in your life has to be given the power to influence your life. It's up to you to choose people who will influence you by pointing you back to the truth of who God is, and what His Word says.

What types of people should have friendship authority in your life?

Whom have you given friendship authority to that you shouldn't have?



Day 3

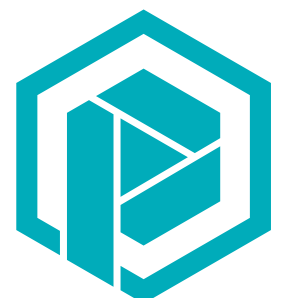
1 Samuel 18:1–5

Now that we have established the impact friendships have on our life, let's look at an example in Scripture that shows us how this influence can play out. In the book of 1 Samuel, we come across two friends, David and Jonathan. David, God's chosen man to be the next king, was the son of Jesse. Jonathan was the son of Saul, the current king. From a legal state, Jonathan would be next in line to take the throne. However, God hadn't chosen to continue His reign in Israel through the line of Saul, but through the line of David.

How could a friendship emerge between these two men who both seemed to have a lot on the line? Stay tuned for the next few days as we see their friendship unfold.

Why would Jonathan want to befriend someone who could potentially take his place?

What does this tell you about Jonathan's character?



Day 4

1 Samuel 19:1–7; 20:1–11

Have you ever known people who are completely unpredictable? One day they are in the best mood ever and the next you didn't want to be around them? In our two passages for the day, we see Saul portray the definition of unpredictability. Saul planned to kill David, then he decided to spare his life, then he planned to kill him again. Jonathan knew this about his father and because of this, knew exactly how to serve David in this season.

Jonathan fought for David. Jonathan called out the good in David. Jonathan did whatever he could so that David could live out what the Lord had called him to. Jonathan embodied the faithfulness of a friend who was willing to put the needs of others before themselves.

When are you tempted to put your needs above others?

What do you think it means for a friend to help you live out God's plan for your life?



Day 5

1 Samuel 20:18–42

This week we learned that friends affect the direction and quality of our life. While we have seen evidence of this throughout our study of 1 Samuel the past two days, today's passage undeniably communicates this.

David was the man the Lord had chosen to rule over Israel. David wasn't in this calling alone. David relied on Jonathan to help him achieve all that the Lord had called him to. Friends affect the quality and direction of our life, and this life the Lord has for us cannot be achieved on our own. Friends not only begin this pursuit, but also are faithful to follow through on it. They also hold us accountable to what the Lord has for us and not just what we want for our life.

What stuck out to you the most about Jonathan's character from this passage?

How did the friendship between David and Jonathan affect the quality and direction of each of their lives?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 37 | SEPTEMBER 12-13



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

1 Corinthians 13:4

Last week we learned that our friends can affect the quality and direction of our lives, meaning that our friends carry a lot of weight on who we are and what we do, if we let them. Have you considered that you, too, have this impact on others? While it's easy to evaluate those influencing us, are we as quick to evaluate how we are influencing others?

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul is challenging a group of believers about what it looks like for them to love people. This passage speaks to our lives as well, challenging us to love people in a way that is far beyond our current understanding of love.

Start this week by reading 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 at least three times to get a broad view of Paul's view on love, and therefore God's view on love.

- **Write down every description Paul uses for love.**
- **What ways does the world use to describe love that Paul doesn't? Why do you think these weren't included?**



Day 2

1 Corinthians 13:4

Have you heard the saying, “Don’t pray for patience”? Usually it’s followed by someone’s saying, “Well, if you pray for patience, the Lord is going to give you a way to learn it, and you’re not going to like it.” But, why would we flee from a Fruit of the Spirit? Why don’t we want to learn it? Why don’t we like the process of learning patience when the result is always worth it? Following through with this process leads to glorifying the Lord by bearing the Fruit of the Spirit.

So, what does patience look like in friendship? Patience means loving your friends right where they are, not when they become who or what you want them to be. Patience means we remain committed to our friends when it’s inconvenient, choosing to put the love and commitment of Christ before our feelings.

Was there a time when you chose not to pursue patience? Why?

Which friends require the most patience for you? How can you be patient with them this week?



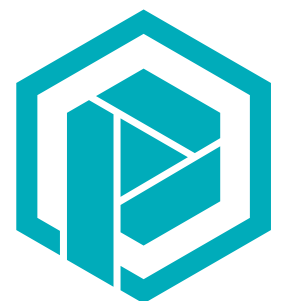
Day 3

1 Corinthians 13:5

We've all heard the Golden Rule: "Treat others the way you want to be treated." But what if it were possible to take it a step further? What if the way we treated others actually had nothing to do with us at all? What if we looked beyond ourselves, choosing not to "insist on our own way" and treat others not how we want to be treated, but how *they* want to be treated instead. A love that is genuine seeks any way to put other people before itself, not just in the big things, but even in the simplest of things. This love is one that is not rude, does not insist on its own way, and is not irritable or resentful, according to 1 Corinthians 13:5.

Reflect on a time when your own feelings or desires got in the way of loving someone well.

What situations might you encounter today that would cause you to put yourself first? How can you prepare yourself to prioritize others?



Day 4

1 Corinthians 13:6

Loving our friends well requires putting the truth of God's Word, and the standard with which it calls us to live, above our desire to make everyone happy. True friendship comes with the responsibility to encourage one another to live out the truth of God's Word.

So, what do we do when our friends aren't honoring the commitments to walk according to God's Word? We could rejoice at it by laughing at it, joining in on it, or even encouraging it. But, to love our friends well means to call them out of it, not encourage them in it. Love them well by rejoicing in the truth of God's Word unapologetically, showing them the life-giving nature that it provides to them when they live it out.

What scares you the most about confronting friends about behaviors that are causing them not to walk as they had committed to?

Reflect back on times when your friends have confronted you. How did they do it in love? When did they fail to be loving?



Day 5

1 Corinthians 13:7

Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't know all the details? Did some of these details make you more pessimistic than optimistic? In the gaps, we are quick to doubt and fill them with suspicion. It's in our nature. But in friendships that start with love as the foundation, this can no longer be an option for us. Instead, we have to choose to fill the gap with trust. In moments of uncertainty and unknown, choose to trust before you let your mind go to the deep and dark places it wants to. Being a friend requires us to lean in with trust and hope instead of giving way to skepticism.

Which friendships have been filled with skepticism instead of trust and hope?

What situation are you going through right now in which you need to choose to trust?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 38 | SEPTEMBER 19-20



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

Matthew 18:15–17

If we are honest, we have all had a relationship in our life that wasn't easy. Maybe for you, it was a family member or a friend who hurt you. They pushed you away with their actions or words. It's easy to just give up on them in those moments, but God calls us to restore our relationships. There is beauty in the restoration, and God can work within you and your relationships to heal and mend hearts. Maybe a friend seems distant, but remember, you could be the one planting a seed that could turn into something far greater. This restoration process isn't going to happen overnight, but great strides are made when you recognize there is an issue. We have to acknowledge our issues so we can then begin to understand how to restore the pain they caused.

What relationship do you recognize in your own life that needs restoration?



Day 2

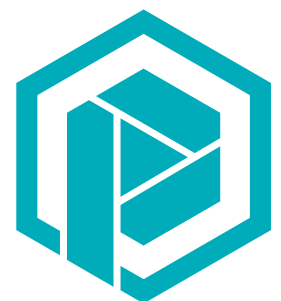
Matthew 18:21–35

Forgiveness can be a hard pill to swallow within our friendships. Maybe you struggle with forgiving others or maybe even forgiving yourself, but there's no doubt we have all had times when forgiving wasn't easy.

Within Matthew 18:21–22, we read “‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

This Scripture reminds us how vital forgiveness is and how no great relationship in the world has survived without the power of forgiveness. We are all sinners and have all fallen short, and it is because Christ has forgiven us that we are called to forgive our brothers and sisters. Daily we must forgive one another, for forgiveness is a part of our daily walk within our friendships.

Whom do you struggle to forgive? How can Christ's selfless forgiveness help you forgive?

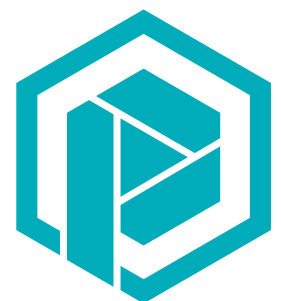


Day 3

1 Corinthians 15:33–34

Pointing out your own issues is not fun. No one wants to be the reason a friendship is failing, but before you give up on a relationship, make sure you aren't at fault. A relationship takes two people, and often, we can get caught up in other people's mistakes and fail to recognize our own flaws. This process starts with making sure you first have a healthy relationship with the Lord in which you are confessing sins and asking God for forgiveness. Your personal relationship with Him must be right before trying to fix your relationships with others. God is the One who will ultimately do the healing and restoration within your friendships, but we can be the reason the restoration doesn't happen. When was the last time you looked inward at your own heart? Take time to do that now.

Are you looking inward before blaming others?



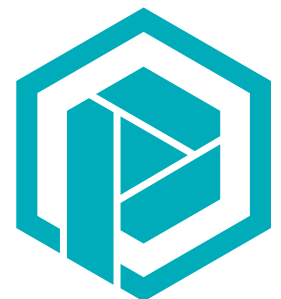
Day 4

1 Corinthians 13:4

When trying to restore a friendship, you can sometimes find yourself with a hard decision to make. You've forgiven that person; you've gone before God with your issues and flaws, but no matter what you do, the friendship continues to fail. Do you just give up? First, ask yourself, "Did I show them Jesus in every way I could?" We aren't called to be friends with everyone, but we are called to love everyone. The greatest demonstration of love is Jesus Christ. Before leaving a friendship, make sure he or she has seen the love of Christ through you. Remember, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." In all you do, show that person love.

Do you have a friend who needs to be shown God's love?

How can you go about showing that person His love?



Day 5

Ephesians 4:32

Within this week's devotionals, we have unpacked the beauty in restoring a friendship. We now understand that we are called to love everyone, even if we aren't called to be friends with everyone. We know that forgiveness isn't always the easiest thing to give to people, or even ourselves, but when we humble ourselves to reflect a Christlike forgiveness full of His patience and love, we can see friendships restored. This restoration takes time, but when something the world views as bound for destruction is restored and healed into something much greater than we imagined, well, that's just another testimony of God's work. Forgive as Christ forgave you, for friendships can be restored.

What relationships have you seen God heal in your life?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 39 | SEPTEMBER 26-27



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

Philippians 4:6–9

Anxiety can be defined as a state of excessive worry where one's mind and emotions are distracted from the truth. When we are faced with anxiety, we need to pursue three things in order to find God's peace. The first is prayer. When we experience anxiety, we either obsess over the source of it or avoid it all together. Prayer turns our minds to God instead of ourselves and our problems. The more we pray and make it part of our daily lives, the more we can overcome anxiety.

The second is focusing our minds on the good. Think about a bucket full of dirty water. If you start filling it with clean water, the dirty water gets pushed out. Paul encourages us to fill our minds with good, pure, and honorable things because that will push away the anxious and distracted thoughts. Paul also talks about not conforming to the world but experiencing transformation as a result of renewing one's mind (Romans 12:2). If we think like the world, then our thoughts will be riddled with anxiety and fear, but the Lord wants our thoughts to be transformed to be more like His thoughts.

The third thing we need to pursue is good practice. Paul instructs us to follow his example and live according to what Scripture teaches us. Combating anxiety is a daily fight, and it takes time to learn to train our minds and to depend on God for strength. Be encouraged. Many people struggle with anxiety, so if you do, you are not alone. You can rest assured that the God of peace will always be with you.

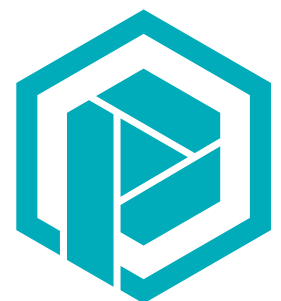


Day 2

Psalm 34:4

At the root of all anxiety is irrational or rational fear. There are different levels of fear; some are paralyzing, and others come on like a slight breeze and then quickly vanish. In Psalm 34:4, David writes that God delivers him from all of his fears. It was in seeking the Lord that David was freed of his fears. We can often look to ourselves, others and the world to rid us of our fears. When we seek deliverance from fear through those sources, we either come up empty-handed or are left with a temporary solution. This verse points us to our Creator God as the deliverer from all fears and, therefore, the deliverer from all anxiety.

How can you begin to seek and trust that God can both answer and deliver you from all your fears?



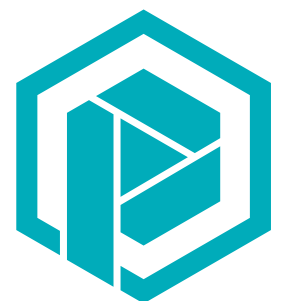
Day 3

Matthew 6:25–34

If we're honest with ourselves, there's a lot we can worry and grow anxious about. We worry about our health, reputation, material possessions, grade point average, the girl or guy we have a crush on, along with many other things. Our days can sometimes feel consumed by worry. Your anxiety may be so intense it keeps you awake at night! You might even experience panic attacks, or your anxiety might only show up in certain situations. Often, worry and anxiety rob us of joy, peace and contentment. Matthew understood the natural tendency to be anxious about these things, but he also understood that being anxious about those things doesn't add a single hour to our day.

If the Lord takes care of His creation that is not made in His image (such as a bird or a flower), how much more do you think He'll take care of His people who are made in His image?

How does thinking about God's care for all His creation help us overcome anxiety?



Day 4

1 Peter 5:6–7

Peter tells us to give all of our cares, concerns, and anxieties to God because God cares for us. But sometimes that seems easier said than done. Why don't we give our anxiety to God? There are two main reasons. First, pride can keep us from giving our anxiety to God. We convince ourselves that we're fine and we don't need any help. But this is a prideful mindset. We falsely believe that when problems arise, we are the only ones who can fix them instead of being humble enough to admit that we are totally dependent on God. We can begin to experience freedom from anxiety when we acknowledge that God is in control and we are not, and we give over to Him everything that causes us anxiety. When we learn to walk in humility, we are able to be transparent and trust the Lord with our concerns and worries. We no longer need to put up a façade (false appearance; putting up a front) of self-reliance.

The second reason is that we may want help, but we have no idea how to find it. We may want to give our anxiety to God, but we don't know how to do that. Whatever the level of your anxiety is, there are people who can help. Counselors are available to talk with you and guide you through your questions. Please speak with a staff member if you are interested in counseling. In addition to staff members, there are others in your life who are strong in their faith and can help disciple you and teach you how to trust in the Lord. Look for those people in your life and ask for their help.

Today, what anxieties do you need to cast onto the Lord in humility?



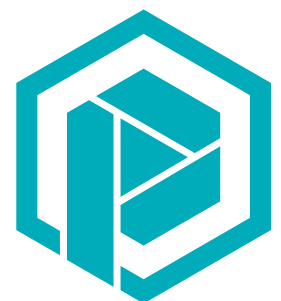
Day 5

Proverbs 12:25

Imagine running two miles. For the first mile, two 10-pound weights are attached to your ankles. For the second mile, those weights are removed. How much more efficiently do you think you'll run the second mile? In Proverbs 12:25, Solomon reveals that "anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down." If you've ever experienced some form of anxiety, you know that it is a heavy burden to carry – usually *too* heavy of a burden. Solomon writes that a "good word" makes an anxious man's heavy-laden heart *glad*. Regardless of your struggle or lack of struggle with anxiety, we probably all know someone who deals with anxiety.

Today, be an instrument of healing and encouragement to those around you.

Choose to focus your attention outwardly and speak a "good word" into the life of someone who struggles with anxious and worrisome thoughts.



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 40 | OCTOBER 3-4



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

Psalm 40:1–3; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4

What does it mean to experience depression? Statistics show that 16.2 million Americans experience at least one major depressive episode in a given year. Depression can be described as lack of interest, as feelings of hopelessness, isolation, loneliness, or mental fatigue, and in extreme cases depression can lead to thoughts of suicide. Perhaps this describes someone you know, or perhaps these feelings are all too real for yourself.

This week we're going to learn how, as Christians, we ought to respond in times of depression in our own lives or the lives of people we know. In times of depression, people often believe the lie that they are completely alone and isolated in their pain. In the Bible, however, a number of people came face to face with the realities of depression. They know how it feels to be depressed. Even Jesus knows how we feel! Remember that you are not alone, and that God is always there to comfort you. Trust in God, and you will begin to see your anxieties weaken their hold on you.

Have you ever experienced depression in your life? Have you talked to anyone about it?



Day 2

Psalm 13

King David is one of the most recognizable figures in the Bible. He battled Goliath, led God's chosen people as their king, wrote 73 of the Psalms, and was known as "a man after God's own heart." But did you know that he also battled depression? After being forced to hide from King Saul, after carrying the shame of adultery, and after experiencing the death of two sons, David had moments where he felt like there would be no end to his suffering.

We see in his writings such as Psalm 13 that he did not hold back his feelings when he talked to God. Many of us struggle with asking for help either out of pride or embarrassment, but not David. David knew that we have the freedom to be honest with God as He will always hear us and comfort us. There is freedom in asking God for help.

What do you need to ask God for help with today?



Day 3

John 11:1–36; Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:5–16

A trick that magicians have used to dazzle audiences for centuries uses a bed of nails. In this illusion, the magician shows the audience a board with scores of nails sticking up on one side, yet the magician would experience no pain when he walked or laid down on it. This trick works because the more nails that are sticking out of the board, the less pain the performer feels since his weight is equally distributed. The same is true with the pain of depression – the more you share your pain or struggle with those in your community, the less you feel the weight of that burden.

Scripture calls us to carry each other's burdens. Jesus modeled this for us when He was grieving with the family of Lazarus in John 11. It is easy to withdraw from others while we are in seasons of depression, but during those seasons, we need community the most. Embrace the community God has placed around you.

List the names of those who are in your God-given community.



Day 4

Philippians 4:4–9; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Isaiah 26:3

If you have ever witnessed a row of dominoes falling, it is clear that the action of the previous domino affects the state of the next. Depression often feels like a continuous downward spiral between our feelings, our actions and our thoughts. Just as one domino's falling affects the next, feelings of loneliness lead to isolation, which then leads to continuous doubts of self-worth.

Scripture teaches us that thoughts have a powerful effect on our lives. That is why Scripture tells us to take our thoughts “captive” to God. When we pray, we should be honest with God about what we're thinking and ask Him to help us correct our thoughts that are false and wrong. Then those bad thoughts won't be able to take control of our feelings and our actions. God created us to have minds and emotions, but we need our minds and emotions to be guided by the truth of God's Word rather than lies from the Enemy or lies from the world around us. We want our minds and emotions to be aligned with God's truth. We ought to keep our minds focused on Him, the One who provides us with perfect peace.

What lies do you believe that you can now give to God so He can change your thoughts and emotions?



Day 5

Isaiah 43:1–4

In the midst of depression, the question we always want answered is “When will this end?” Whether it feels as if you have a chaotic storm hanging above you or raging fires surrounding you, you want answers in order to escape the dark days you are in. We often think that if we had more control over how we feel or understanding as to why we are feeling it, then we will find peace. However, the answer is not more knowledge of the future, but more trust in the Father.

You are not “crazy” or a “bad Christian” because you are experiencing pain. God promises to walk with you through the pain, the hard times, and the dark days. God says you don’t have to fear because He is your all-powerful God. He knows your name, and He has saved you from our sin! You are not alone. God will always carry you through this.

How can you trust God today?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 41 | OCTOBER 10-11



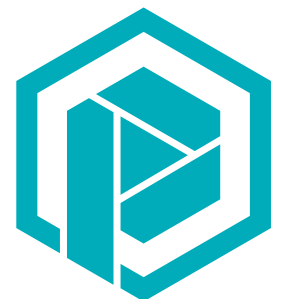
P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

Genesis 1:26–27; Psalm 139:13–18

This week we will cover the difficult topic of suicide, the act of taking one's own life. Whether you have struggled with suicidal thoughts or not, at some point in your life you have measured your worth based on what has been said about you instead of finding your identity in God. Maybe you have been called an athlete, a model, a scholar or an artist. None of these earthly titles are bad, but if you base your worth on how others perceive you, you are destined for emptiness. Your worth and identity can only be secure in Jesus Christ.

The decision to end one's own life can be caused by a variety of circumstances, but ultimately the cause comes down to believing lies and thinking that one is unworthy of love. While the opinion of others can temporarily inflate or deflate your self-esteem, their opinion does NOT determine your value. God created you in His image, meaning that you are eternally important and your life has purpose. God made you unique; no one can replace you. Every second of your life has meaning because of what has been said about you by your Creator!

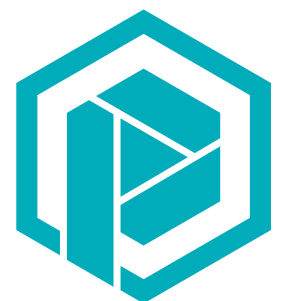


Day 2

Romans 1:20; Psalm 8:1–8; Hebrews 2:6–7

Have you ever stood in awe of God's creation? We are too easily fascinated with human inventions, and we realize this when we stop to contemplate the complexities of God's creativity. The sun helps to sustain life on the earth as it rotates on its axis. The moon, which reflects light, creates the tides with its gravitational force. And the hummingbird, whose wings can flap up to 200 times a second, defies man's logic with its speed. But above all, God bestows the most favor on humans as His supreme creation.

God's Word says that He has crowned humanity with glory and honor and has given us rulership over the works of His hands. This is great news for us as it gives us a purpose! When we do not see who we are in the eyes of the One who created the heavens and the earth, we are capable of resorting to deadly decisions in our ignorance.



Day 3

John 10:10; 8 Peter 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:2

We all have memories from our past that can bring us torment in the present. This might look like an unmet expectation or major disappointment, a broken relationship, the loss of a loved one, or hurtful words being spoken about us. Sometimes we may think that no one – including God – could ever love us because of what we've done wrong. Sometimes we may think that no one understands how we feel; no one understands our pain. All of these things can serve as weapons by the Enemy to attack us with lies regarding our self-worth. God's Word warns us of an Enemy who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. Satan is on a mission to convince God's image-bearers that hope is out of reach.

But God has different plans for our lives if we choose to place our hope in Him. Because He sent His Son to earth to heal our brokenness, we can now experience a hope that Satan cannot overcome. Only when we grow in our understanding of our salvation do we see that suicide goes against everything that the Cross sought to accomplish.

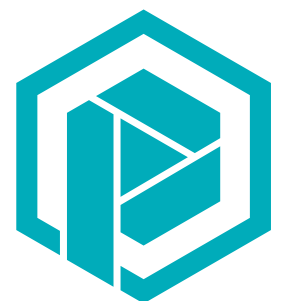


Day 4

Ecclesiastes 4:2–3; 12:13–14

Solomon journals about every human emotion in the book of Ecclesiastes. Throughout his testimony, he tries to find fulfillment in all the tempting pleasures of life. Even after experiencing the fruit of his hard work, abundant possessions, multiple sexual relationships, wealth and power, he never finds what he is looking for. This leads him to confusion, despair and eventually a desire for death. At the end of the book, Solomon only finds meaning in God.

Solomon's struggle is recorded in Scripture for our benefit. Just like him, we are enticed daily to pursue worldly pleasures to give our lives meaning. When we attain these things, we feel confident in the moment, but that confidence always slips through our fingers as time goes on. If we try to live for anything else other than God—things like accomplishments, fame, lust, pleasing other people, etc. – we will not find the meaning and purpose we are seeking. At the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon encourages us that our only purpose in living is to glorify God through our obedience.

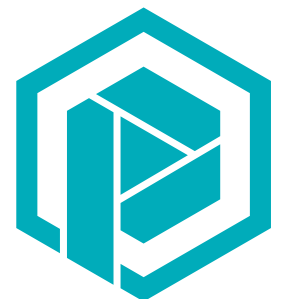


Day 5

1 Corinthians 6:19–20; John 10:10; Romans 6:13

Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. That means God the Holy Spirit lives within us once we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. If He lives within us, then our physical bodies have a powerful purpose. We are not our own because we were bought with a price. Jesus paid the debt we could not pay when He died on the Cross, and therefore we belong to Him. We are not in charge of our own bodies, despite what the world tells us. Suicide is wrong because it is rebellion against God's ownership of us. You are not your own because you belong to God, and you are here on earth for the purpose of glorifying God, not yourself. That is why you need to surrender your will to God's will so that you can be a part of His purpose and mission and thereby fulfill the calling He put on your life.

When we lose sight of who we were created to be and God's love for us, we are vulnerable to the lies of an Enemy who seeks to convince us that our bodies and our souls have no significant value. Satan seeks to convince us that we can numb our pain by means of self-harm or escape by taking our own lives. But God promises to walk with us through the pain. God understands how we feel, and He tells us we are not alone! God promises to give us abundant life, healing, comfort and strength. At the same time, He also gives us a role in displaying His righteousness to a lost and dying world. What could be more exciting than that!



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 42 | OCTOBER 17-18



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

1 Kings 2:1–12

The first part of David's dying words to Solomon was God-honoring and hopeful: Be strong and courageous (v. 2)—honor your obligations to the Lord and walk in His ways (v. 3)—walk faithfully before God, and there will always be one of your descendants on the throne of Israel (v. 4). But after that, things took a dark turn. Twice, David told Solomon to seek vengeance on David's enemies.

The two halves of David's speech to Solomon reflect the two halves of David's life: zealous and courageous in the first half (remember David and Goliath?); fallen and embittered in the second half (remember David and Bathsheba?). Sadly, this was a pattern Solomon would repeat in his own life as well.

It has often been said that what matters is not how well you start, but how well you finish. We see the truth of this in David and Solomon's lives. Wherever you are in your walk with God, you cannot go back and start over. The way you started and how you have lived until today are over. But what you can still control is how well you will end.

**Has your heart for God diminished the longer you have walked with Him?
If so, what needs to happen to restore your earlier zeal?**



Day 2

1 Kings 2:13–25

In this section, we continue to see the theme of contrasting Solomon's request to God with the requests of others. Here, Adonijah made a selfish and transparent bid for power by asking for one of David's wives to be given to him as a wife. In the ancient world, a new king's power was validated when he took the wives of the former king. Adonijah's request is not one merely to obtain a spouse—it was a brazen attempt to grasp the throne.

We might miss this nuance, but Solomon didn't. He saw through the power play, and Adonijah paid for it with his life. Again, note that Solomon did not ask God for anything self-serving when God invited him to ask for anything he desired (3:18). Solomon would have more than enough opportunities to be led astray by his wives later on in his reign (see 1 Kings 11:1), but here, at the outset, he was more interested in displaying God's justice to the people than he was in displaying his own power to them.

What does the world see when they look at your life? Do you display your own ambitions, or do you display God's character?



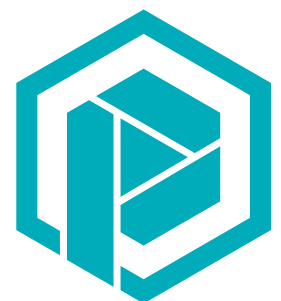
Day 3

1 Kings 3:1–9

Although the main point of this passage is Solomon's request for wisdom, we also can see some early warning signs of the trouble to come. Verse 1 notes that Solomon made an alliance with Egypt. Egypt! The site of 400 years of bondage for God's people. God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, described Egypt as "that splintered reed of a staff that will pierce the hand of anyone who grabs it and leans on it" (Isaiah 36:6).

Verse 1 goes on to say that Solomon sealed the alliance by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. While forming alliances through marriage has long been a common practice among world powers, God explicitly forbade His people from marrying foreigners because of the danger of apostasy (Deuteronomy 7:3–4). It wasn't about mixing races but mixing faiths. This was the first of many foreign wives that would ultimately lead Solomon into idolatry (1 Kings 11:1–2). How sad that Solomon didn't ask for wisdom before he made these two mistakes, although as we will see, even God's gift of wisdom was not enough to overcome Solomon's sin.

When do you typically seek God's wisdom—before or after you've already made up your mind? Why?



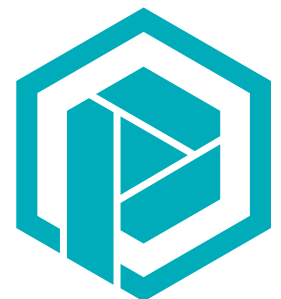
Day 4

1 Kings 3:10–15

Solomon did two things in verse 15 that are important for all of us to remember. First, he acknowledged the One in authority above him by leaving Gibeon and offering sacrifices to the Lord in Jerusalem. Then, he honored those he was in authority over by holding a feast for his servants. Every leader has 360 degrees of accountability. Even the mightiest earthly ruler must acknowledge that his or her authority is given by God (Romans 13:1) and that Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority. In Him, all things hold together (Colossians 1:17).

But godly leaders must also remember that the same Jesus who has had everything placed under His feet (Ephesians 1:22) was the One who washed the feet of His disciples (John 13). The same Jesus who said, “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). This is the model of leadership we are to follow. We are to be servant leaders who follow Christ Jesus in total dependency while simultaneously leading others in total humility.

How do you treat the authorities above you? What about those you are in authority over?



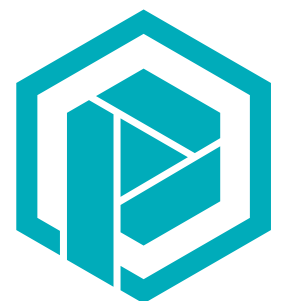
Day 5

1 Kings 3:16–28

Solomon’s credibility as a ruler was established when he gave a wise ruling in the case of the two prostitutes. Let’s not overlook the fact that this was a difficult case! There were no witnesses. It was virtually impossible for anyone to know all the facts. And there was the added pressure of dismissing the needs of these two prostitutes because, after all, it’s not like they were important members of the community, right?

Don’t forget that all these issues Solomon faced when trying to judge between the two women are issues that modern-day judges, police officers, and politicians have to make every single day. They are called upon to exercise wisdom and judgment often in the absence of facts and for the benefit of the poor and defenseless. This is just one of many reasons we are commanded in the New Testament to pray for “kings and all those who are in authority” (1 Timothy 2:2). Leading with wisdom is hard! And without our prayer support, it may be impossible.

How can you pray for your local and national leaders today?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 43 | OCTOBER 24-25



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

Ecclesiastes 1:1–11

Reading Ecclesiastes, the overall feeling is disillusionment and despair. It's the kind of book that, if you didn't know better, might surprise you was even in the Bible. But God's Word is absolutely true—not just in what it says about God, but in what it says about us as well.

As Solomon himself said, “There is nothing new under the sun (v. 9). How do you resolve this crisis? We know the answer that Solomon yearned for: Christ Jesus. Because of Christ, we need not despair. Life is not devoid of purpose. In Christ, we have been given treasure upon treasure, one of which is understanding that we live not for today, or for tomorrow, but for eternity.

What could you change today to keep you from feeling like Solomon at the end of your life?



Day 2

Ecclesiastes 1:12–18

In verses 16–18, Solomon seems to make the same mistake many of us make: treating wisdom and knowledge as synonyms. But in the Hebrew, they are two distinct concepts. Knowledge is the apprehension of fact while wisdom is a moral, rather than an intellectual, quality.

As someone said, knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit and not a vegetable. Wisdom is knowing not to put one in a fruit salad.

But we can go a step further. Wisdom is not just a moral quality. Solomon himself personified divine wisdom in Proverbs 8:12. Paul called Christ God's power and His wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:24). So wisdom is not an intellectual fact or simply a moral quality. Wisdom is a Person Who can dwell with you. The key to resolving the crisis of old age Solomon discovered in the preceding verses is to continually abide with Jesus (Colossians 1:27).

How has abiding in Christ kept you from despair?



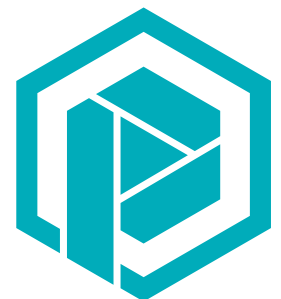
Day 3

Ecclesiastes 2:1–3

“I said to myself.” Numerous stories that begin this way end the same way as well: badly. Often, what we tell ourselves is terrible. We give ourselves horrible advice. We lie to ourselves. We flatter ourselves.

There are six times in Scripture (all in Ecclesiastes) where the phrase “I said to myself” is used. And in all six, the Hebrew literally reads, “My heart said....” In our world, following one’s heart is a romantic notion. It’s what dreamers, poets, and adventurers do. The only problem is that, according to Jeremiah 17:9, the heart is more deceitful than anything else. The sinful, unregenerate heart will get us in trouble—every single time. Which is why we can’t follow our heart. It’s the worst possible option. The path to fulfillment is not to follow our heart but to ask God for a new one. It is to have God rip the old, sin-ravaged, deceptive, heart of stone out of your chest and replace it with a new, grace-saturated, redeemed heart of flesh (Ezra 36:26). Only a new heart, given to us by God, inclined toward God, and controlled by God, is worth trusting.

The last time you followed your heart, was it your old heart of stone or your new heart of flesh? What was the result?



Day 4

Ecclesiastes 2:4–17

Look at Solomon’s description of his life in verses 4–17. He had the best of everything, but when he considered all he had accomplished and worked for, he found everything to be futile.

When you come to the end of your life, will your first-class flight have delivered you to your desired destination? This is a question with eternal implications as well as earthly ones. From an earthly perspective, you may find yourself like Solomon, feeling as if you have wasted your life trying to please yourself instead of investing your life on behalf of others. But Solomon knew that God has set eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We are all headed to one of two eternal destinations. It’s important to know that. But it is also important to consider what we are doing as we travel along the way.

How are you investing into eternity today? In what other ways can you begin to live more for eternity than today?



Day 5

Ecclesiastes 12:12–14

How does Solomon conclude his letter? He summarizes the letter and summons us to action by reminding us of two things. First, we must fear God. Many times throughout this book, the word *vanity* is used. The basic definition of *vanity* is “emptiness.” Solomon’s book clearly shows us that things of this world only bring us emptiness – if we try to find our purpose and satisfaction in them. Since that is the case, we, as humans, should be driven to take refuge in God and God alone. Why? Because what we encounter in the spiritual world or the heavenly realm is the opposite of the emptiness of this world – it has substance, eternity and meaning, and it gives our lives purpose. God alone can satisfy our every need. Whereas this world will constantly let us down and fail us, God, through Jesus, constantly justifies us.

Today, what in your life can be considered vanity? How can you walk away from it?

Solomon’s second summons to action is to keep God’s commandments. This is a challenge to the people of God dating all the way back to Moses. God has constantly and consistently called His people to do one simple thing – obey all that He has commanded. Why is this so hard for us? Because we get so caught up in the *here* and *now* (and the pleasure) of this world. This, however, does not negate the call to obey God with every action, thought and word. If we truly fear and love God, we will naturally obey His commands.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you keep the commandments of the Lord? How can you move that one or two places beginning today?

What does this section say about God and how God puts all things in perspective?

How might we read this section in light of Jesus?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 44 | OCT. 31 – NOV. 1



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

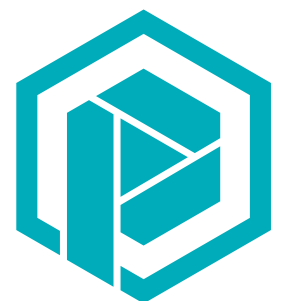
1 Kings 6:1–38

When you compare Solomon building the temple to Moses building the tabernacle, one difference stands out: Moses built the tabernacle according to very specific instructions, spelled out in minute detail in Exodus 25–31. Moses followed the directions God had given to him to the letter (Exodus 36–40). In chapters 39–40, the phrase “just as the Lord commanded Moses” is used 13 times.

But while the description of the temple building is just as detailed in 1 Kings, they describe the completed temple; you won’t find God giving the blueprints for it anywhere. In fact, the only instructions from God are found in 1 Kings 6:12.

The specific design of the temple didn’t seem to matter to God as much as the condition of Solomon’s heart. Perhaps God was looking toward the day when there would be no temple building, but that our very bodies would be temples of His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Temples that exist only because the Gospel changed a person’s heart.

When you gather with others to worship as a church, do you tend to be more concerned with the state of music, the state of the sermon, or the state of your heart? Why?



Day 2

1 Kings 7:1–51

Some might disparage Solomon because he took almost twice as long to build his own house as he did to build the temple (13 years according to 1 Kings 7:1, compared to seven years in 1 Kings 6:38). However, we have to be cautious in going further than the text itself does. First Kings doesn't give any specific evaluation of this fact one way or the other. But after the exiles returned to Jerusalem, God rebuked them for "living in your paneled houses, while this house [the temple] lies in ruins" (Haggai 1:4). David, the man after God's own heart, had also lamented that he lived in a cedar house while the ark of God sat in a tent (2 Samuel 7:2).

God does not condemn people for living in nice houses. But He always challenges us to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). The interruption of the account of the temple to describe Solomon's palace may serve to highlight Solomon's divided priorities, and if so, let it be a warning to us. Many of us enjoy prosperity beyond what most of the world can imagine. May we be a people who steward God's provisions well, always using them for His glory and to advance His kingdom, not our own.

In what ways might you need to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness rather than your own?



Day 3

1 Kings 8:1–14

Verse 9 emphatically states that nothing was in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had put in there at Horeb. While this seems to contradict Hebrews 9:4, which says the ark also contained a jar of manna and Aaron's staff, the apparent contradiction can be cleared up by pointing out that the writer of Hebrews is referring to the tabernacle, not the temple (Hebrews 9:2). Additionally, the jar of manna (Exodus 16:32–34) and Aaron's staff (Numbers 17:10–11) were to be placed before the ark, not inside it.

The fact that the only items in the ark were the stone tablets is illustrative of the preeminence of God's Word. After all, it's not called the "Ark of the Covenant and Manna and Staff." God's Word, and God's Word alone, had a place in the ark. In the same way, God's Word alone should be what we place in our hearts. It should be our sole source for understanding God's will and work in our lives.

In what ways do you hide God's Word in your heart? If you do not, how can you start?



Day 4

1 Kings 8:15–53

In Solomon's prayer of dedication, he was, in many ways, fulfilling the role of the priest, making seven petitions to God on behalf of the people, including praying for a man who sins against his neighbor, an army that is defeated, crops that fail, foreigners that call on God, and exiles that are dispersed.

It was typically forbidden for the king to step into the role of a priest. Saul lost the kingdom after committing this offense (1 Samuel 13:10–13), and Uzziah was struck with leprosy for burning incense before the Lord (2 Chronicles 26:18–19). But Solomon wasn't making sacrifices for the people; he was interceding for them. Still, this is a good reminder that on this side of the Cross, we have a better mediator than Solomon: the perfect prophet, priest, and king in Jesus. As our great High Priest, Jesus makes constant intercession for us, and we are invited to take all our petitions to Him (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).

What have you been holding back from taking to God that you can bring to Him through Christ today?



Day 5

1 Kings 8:54–66

After the temple was dedicated, the people of Israel feasted, but the celebration wasn't confined to Jerusalem; it extended to all of Solomon's empire (v. 65). The offering made during this multiple-day feast was staggering: 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were sacrificed to the Lord. No wonder, then, that when the feast was over, the people went to their homes rejoicing (v. 66). The natural response to God's extravagant blessing should be our extravagant worship, although no worship we might offer God should ever feel even satisfactory.

When was the last time you worshipped God extravagantly? Don't think of that merely as giving a large dollar amount as an offering. But when was the last time your worship went home with you? When have you experienced God's extravagant blessing—which is made most known to us in the Gospel—and were compelled to worship to such a degree that it could not be contained? May this be the regular posture of our hearts. May our worship not be contained to an hour or two as a gathered church or a single day. But may we worship in such a way that we cannot stop—that as we gather, our hearts overflow with gratitude, and as we scatter, we do so with hearts and lips overflowing with praise.

What can you do this week to extend your worship beyond your worship gathering?

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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 45 | NOVEMBER 7-8



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

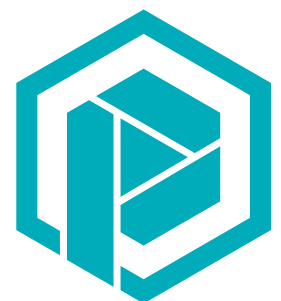
Day 1

1 Kings 11:1–8

God had prohibited the Israelites from intermarrying with the nations surrounding them (Deuteronomy 7:1–4). However, this was to preserve religious, not racial, purity as is made clear by the second half of verse 2. Solomon is an extreme example that proves the rule. With 700 wives and 300 concubines, his heart was literally turned in a thousand different directions. Notice that the heart is mentioned four times in these first four verses. The writer of 1 Kings wanted to make sure we understand that Solomon suffered from a terminal heart condition: the divided heart.

Sin doesn't happen because of something external, something happening out there. It's internal, the result of something that has already happened inside. If your heart has been divided, Scripture provides the remedy for uniting it again (Psalm 86:11). Only God can bring together a divided heart.

Have you allowed your heart to become divided over time? Ask God to bring it back together again.



Day 2

1 Kings 11:9–43

At the start of any large, organized marathon, thousands of people are lined up. There is energy, excitement, enthusiasm. There are costumes. It isn't uncommon to see people planning to run 26.2 miles dressed as Elvis.

That's the starting line. The finish line looks quite different. There are a lot fewer people. Far fewer costumes. And while some finish well, many more barely finish, stumbling, walking, or even crawling across that line on the pavement. But whether they sprint or crawl across and no matter what the time reads, everyone who crosses the finish line has one thing in common: they all finished. Many who start never do. The point isn't how you start; it's how you finish.

The first 11 chapters of 1 Kings detail Solomon's life and accomplishments. No king in Israel's history built more, taught more, spent more, wrote more, or married more. But for all that, his death is summed up with his burial with his fathers in the city of David. He started well—with the best of them—but he didn't finish well. May we be a people who finish strong.

What adjustments do you need to make in your race to finish well?



Day 3

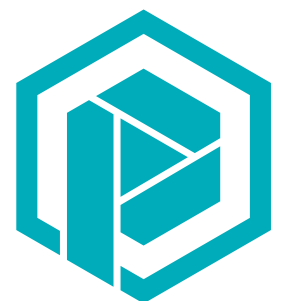
1 Kings 12:1–11

Rehoboam had two choices: listen to the old men who had counseled his father or listen to the young men he had grown up with. You know the rest of the story, and you know it didn't turn out well. It can be tempting to discount the previous generation and assume their ideas and perspectives are outdated. But consider these truths from God's Word:

- One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts (Psalm 145:4).
- Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days (Job 12:12).
- Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old (Proverbs 23:22).

Not only does it benefit us to seek wisdom from the previous generation; we ignore it at our own peril. If only he had listened! What will it take for us to listen?

From whom do you seek advice and counsel? Who do you need to seek out for advice in the future?

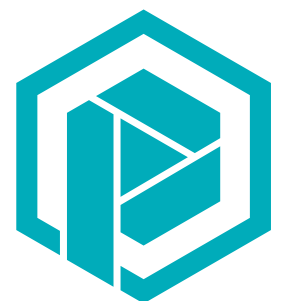


Day 4

1 Kings 12:12–19

Verse 18 has a double meaning. On one level, “to this day” refers to the writing of 1 Kings itself, which could have been any time prior to the destruction of the temple (based on 1 Kings 8:8—that the poles to carry the ark could still be seen “to this day”). But the statement can be seen as a commentary on the future state of Israel. It was Israel who rejected Jesus (Acts 4:11). Paul would write in Romans 9:31–32 that Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness through works and not by faith. Any time we seek to be justified apart from grace, we are in rebellion against Jesus, the house of David. It continues to happen, to this day.

How are you seeking to be justified? Spiritually speaking, are you in rebellion against the house of David?



Day 5

1 Kings 12:20–33

Two factors contributed to Israel's apostasy. First, Jeroboam attempted to use religion in the service of politics. He reasoned that if people were required to return to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, they wouldn't identify with Shechem as their new capital. Jeroboam missed the point of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It wasn't to align the people with an earthly kingdom but with a heavenly one.

Second, Jeroboam appealed to his people's desire for comfort and convenience. Instead of requiring them to visit only one place to offer sacrifices, he established two shrines—one at Dan, on the northern border of Israel, and the second at Bethel, on the southern border. He placed a golden calf in each one, repeating the same words Aaron used when he made the first golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exodus 32:4).

The problem with Jeroboam was that he saw the worship of God as a means to some other end. To him, worship of God was a means by which he could realize the end of a united people under his rule. Put simply, he made worship—and the God of that worship—a tool to bring about his purposes. Worship is never a means to an end. Worship is the end. May we remember that.

What do you need to do this week to make sure you are worshiping God with a pure heart?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 46 | NOVEMBER 14-15



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

1 Kings 15:1–32

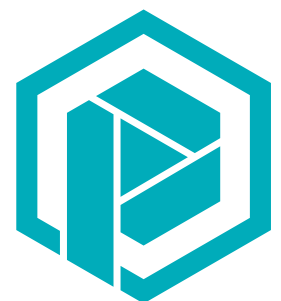
Some of the kings in 1–2 Kings had commendable traits, though none were flawless; and many were a total mess. What keeps certain portions of 1–2 Kings from being depressing is this: God was preserving a remnant so that the ultimate Son of David would come and reign forever. God was preserving “a lamp in Jerusalem” (1 Kings 11:36; 15:4).

We meet Judah’s king, Abijam, in 15:1–8. He apparently married within the faith but was not completely devoted to the Lord as David had been. Next, we read of Asa, Judah’s king who sought the Lord for the majority of his life (vv. 9–24). Only Hezekiah and Josiah received higher praise than Asa. Sadly, Asa fell later in life due to unbelief. Then we read of Israel’s king, Nadab (vv. 25–27), who did evil in the sight of the Lord. He continued in the sins of his father before being killed and replaced by another bad king, Baasha (vv. 28–30).

We need a better king, and praise God we have one, the Lord Jesus!

What are some lessons to glean from the lives of the kings in

1 Kings 15:1–30?



Day 2

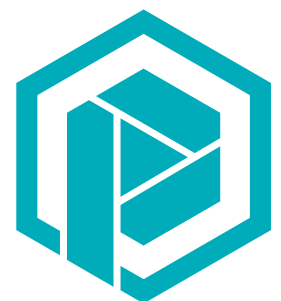
1 Kings 16:1–34

This chapter highlights the sinfulness of sin. It also shows us our need for, and the trustworthiness of, God's Word.

We meet the prophet Jehu, who brought a word against Baasha. The Lord gave Baasha an opportunity to change things, but he acted like Jeroboam and consequently shared Jeroboam's fate (16:2–4). Then we meet Elah (vv. 8–10), who got drunk and was assassinated by Zimri. Zimri went on to kill Baasha's house (vv. 11–14), which fulfilled prophecy (v. 12). Zimri only reigned for seven days (v. 15).

Omri would then reign for 12 years (v. 23). He established Samaria as the new capital city of the Northern Kingdom. It remained Israel's capital until Assyria plundered it in 722 BC. Finally, we meet the evil king Ahab. He reigned for 22 years (v. 29). He married Jezebel of Tyre. She was a Baal worshipper, who had hundreds of prophets for Baal. She also killed God's prophets (1 Kings 18:4, 13). Ahab also served Baal, the first Israelite king to do so. In this context, God sent his prophet Elijah to proclaim the Word.

How do we see God's faithfulness and the need for God's Word in this chapter?



Day 3

1 Kings 17:1–7

We read of all these kings, and then we meet Elijah the prophet. The writer says he was the “Tishbite from the Gilead settlers” (17:1a). He was a settler in the wild, forested area east of the Jordan in Gilead.

God chose this man from nowhere. Unlike the kings, we don’t know who his family was, and we don’t know anything about his childhood. God chose him out of obscurity in order to confront apostasy.

Your family background doesn’t determine your usefulness to God. God loves to use “nobodies” from “nowhere” places.

The chapter begins with Elijah proclaiming a message to King Ahab (17:1). Can you picture this? Don’t think of a pastor with a suit on. More like a man from the wild, entering the presence of the king.

Because Elijah knew the living God, he was able to stand fearlessly before Ahab. Because he knew the living God, he could also trust God for his daily provisions (17:2–7). Elijah had great faith because he had a great God.

How might we elevate our concept of God? What steps can you take this week?



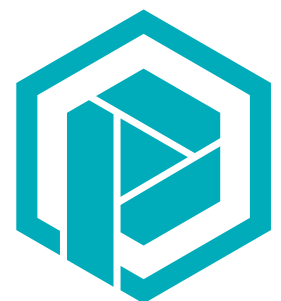
Day 4

1 Kings 17:8–16

In this passage, God provided for his prophet through a widow at Zarephath (17:8–9). She had nothing but a handful of flour and a bit of oil, but God multiplied these meager supplies. Elijah promised the widow that if she would bake him a cake before feeding herself and her son that the flour jar would not be empty and the oil would not run out. She submitted to Elijah’s word, and her household ate for days. This all took place according to the word of God (17:8, 14, 15–16).

Observe God’s sovereignty and grace. God chose this widow to provide for Elijah. God told Elijah, “I have commanded a woman who is a widow to provide for you there” (17:9). But we don’t read that God ever spoke directly to the widow. Even though she had no prophet to tell her this news, God proclaimed it to be so because He is the only sovereign. He works in the hearts of the mighty and in the hearts of the lowly to accomplish His purposes.

What impact might this passage have on a person who is anxious, afraid, or overwhelmed about the cares of this life?



Day 5

1 Kings 12:20–33

A third miracle—and a more dramatic one—took place next in 1 Kings 17. The widow's son became ill and died (v. 17), but God raised him from the dead through the ministry of Elijah. We're reminded of the reality and pain of death in this story. Stories of death are all around us. At any moment, a loved one could take his or her last breath. As in this story, just when things seem to be working out wonderfully, death can take someone. In this case, it's a precious child.

But there is hope beyond the grave for every grieving believer: God raises the dead. God gives us a little sign of His resurrection power in this Old Testament story.

We should ask God to do what only He can do, that being most importantly raising spiritually dead people to life (Ephesians 2:4–5). This young boy eventually died again. What everyone needs is to be raised up forever by the resurrection power of God.

How does this story inspire you to pray more fervently?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 47 | NOVEMBER 21-22



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

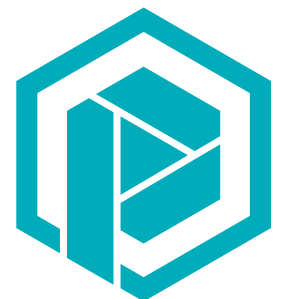
1 Kings 18:1–19

Not everyone will be called to formal ministry like Elijah, but many will be called to serve like Obadiah. Elijah's ministry was more public and confrontational; Obadiah worked quietly in behind-the-scenes fashion and yet was faithful in the sphere where God placed him.

Obadiah illustrates how Christians should use their influence and resources. Obadiah had access to provisions and made them available to these persecuted prophets. Those who work in professions that allow them to receive good salaries and benefits should consider how to use such blessings to advance the kingdom. One might object claiming that Obadiah was being deceitful, but nothing in the text says that he lied or did anything unethical. He knew about the suffering believers, and he used what he had to provide for them.

Second, Obadiah teaches us to be courageous. He ultimately followed Elijah's instructions at great risk to his own life. The lesson here is that if you are ever in a position where it's either obedience to God or obedience to man, choose God--even if it might cost you your job or your life (Acts 5:29).

How does Obadiah's life set an example for those who want to be faithful in their everyday work?



Day 2

1 Kings 18:20–29

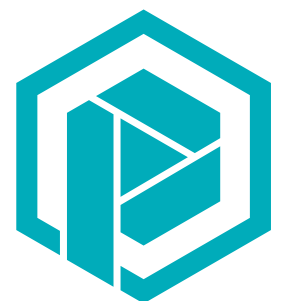
The battle at Mount Carmel was really about whether Baal or Yahweh answered prayer. The false prophets called upon Baal from “morning until noon” (v. 26), but there was no answer. Elijah’s prayer was short, and God responded!

A long prayer doesn’t mean a better prayer, especially if you are praying to the wrong god. You can pray five times a day facing any direction you want while dressing with religious garb and burning incense, candles, and more, but if you aren’t praying to the God of Elijah, you are engaging in spiritual futility.

Next, the false prophets danced around the altar, but it, too, accomplished nothing spiritually. Elijah responded to their lengthy prayers and ritual dances with some holy sarcasm (v. 27). The false prophets then cut themselves and raved, but their frenzy produced no fire either.

Though the story is spectacular and miraculous, the application is simple. The God of the Bible hears and answers prayer. And because of our relationship with Him by grace through faith in Christ, He invites us to call upon Him and promises to hear us.

Spend some time in prayer today praising God for who He is.



Day 3

1 Kings 18:30–46

We learn three important lessons on prayer from Elijah’s petition at Mount Carmel. First, have a relationship with the living God. Elijah prays to the God of the covenant, the God of Abraham. We can call upon God, and even call him “Father” if we know him by grace through faith in Christ (Mark 14:36).

Secondly, seek the glory of God. Elijah’s prayer is God-centered. He wants people to recognize the glory of God. Jesus taught us to long for God’s name to be glorified and God’s kingdom to cover the earth.

Third, pray for idolaters to turn to the living God. Elijah prayed that God would turn the people’s hearts back to the living God. He prayed that they would know and respond to the truth (v. 36). Let us pray for God to turn idol worshippers into Christ worshippers (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10).

Elijah’s brief, God-centered prayer stands in great contrast to the empty prayers of “Baal’s boys.” Let us follow Elijah’s example.

How are you praying for God’s glory to be made known in your home, your church, your city, and around the world?



Day 4

1 Kings 19:1–8

Have you ever said, “I’ve had enough, Lord”? If so, then you can identify with Elijah. If you haven’t, more than likely you will have times in your life where you are drained physically and emotionally. You may have times when you are also exhausted spiritually as you keep giving. You may also lose sight of the glory of God’s greatness as your circumstances overwhelm you. The good news in this story is that God is gracious to His weary saints. He gave Elijah food and rest; He spoke to Elijah from the mountain; and He gave Elijah a new vision for the future.

Make sure you take care of yourself physically. Make sure you are hearing and studying God’s Word. And ask God to give you a compelling vision for how you should fulfill the Great Commission. Don’t throw in the towel, but instead strive to receive God’s renewing grace and press on.

Have you ever heard a sermon on “sleep”? Why is it important for Christians to maintain good eating habits, along with healthy rest, work, and recreation rhythms?



Day 5

1 Kings 19:9–18

As Elijah stood before the Lord, the Lord “passed by,” and a great wind tore through the mountains (1 Kings 19:11). Then there was an earthquake, then a fire. But the Lord was not in these powerful displays. Instead, after a fire, Elijah heard a “soft whisper” (v. 12).

Previously, God showed up with fire, consuming the drenched altar. People marveled. But here, the emphasis is on God’s quiet ways. God often appears not in the spectacular but in the gentle whisper.

This phrase, “a soft whisper” (v. 12), only appears two others times. It appears in Job 4:16 and Psalm 107:29, as an almost silent sound. It’s used in both passages in the context of rest and refreshment in the midst of pain, distress, and fear.

Let’s remember that God often works in quiet ways. Sometimes the fire seems to fall in corporate gatherings, but God is working quietly through His written Word and by His Spirit in the hearts of His people. Seek the God of grace in the quiet place. Get alone with Him and listen to His Word.

What is your plan for pursuing quiet communion with God on a daily basis?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 48 | NOVEMBER 28-29



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

1 Kings 19:19–22

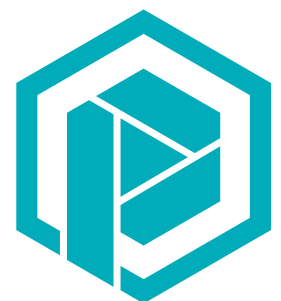
Never forget the cost of discipleship and the importance of having godly relationships in your life. Both of these essentials are expressed in this passage.

We see Elisha's total abandonment of all things to follow this prophetic calling. The call to follow Jesus will also involve sacrificing certain things. It's a privilege to follow Jesus, but it's also costly. But every true saint that has followed Jesus for years can testify that the reward makes the sacrifice look like a small thing, because Jesus is better than everything.

Then we also read in verse 21 how Elisha arose, followed Elijah, and assisted him (v. 21b) – a picture of intimacy and companionship. In 2 Kings 2:12, Elisha called Elijah “father,” indicating the intimacy the two shared. Elisha was like an intern, who apparently did some menial tasks, such as washing the hands of Elijah (2 Kings 3:11). But this relationship had mutual benefits. Remember, Elijah had previously been isolated and discouraged. But now he received the blessing of being with Elisha and preparing him for the work ahead.

Who are the people in your life that bring you spiritual refreshment?

Pause to thank God for them.



Day 2

1 Kings 22:51–53

Ahaziah continued in the evil ways of his wicked father, Ahab. He had seen the gracious and harsh acts of God toward Ahab, and yet he followed in the evil path of his father anyway. The apple hadn't fallen far from the tree, as this passage highlights.

When parents detest God or minimize Him, they shouldn't be surprised when their children do the same. When we passively and implicitly teach our children that God isn't important, our children will live it out. Parents who inadvertently teach their children that the world revolves around them by regularly skipping corporate worship for other things shouldn't be surprised when later in life they don't see the local church as a big deal. Children will be influenced by what they have been taught, whether it was explicit or implicit.

What are some simple but important ways you can seek discipleship from the authority figures in your life?



Day 3

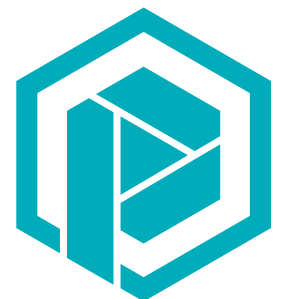
2 Kings 1:1–2a

In an act that is representative of his kingdom, King Ahaziah essentially fell over a banister and was seriously injured to the point that he didn't know whether he would live or die (v. 2a).

Ahaziah was living out what was said of him in 1 Kings as he walked in the ways of his father, serving Baal. The king, like his kingdom, was hurting. Ahaziah decided to look outside of Israel for an answer. Mount Carmel hadn't convinced him that Yahweh was strong and Baal was impotent and sleeping, and so he searched for another god.

We can all be tempted to look elsewhere. It could be overt like horoscopes and palm readers. Or it can be less clear like trusting Freud for counseling, prosperity teachers for theology, or alcohol, drugs, or food as a coping mechanism. It could be turning to work for satisfaction and meaning, or to weightlifting because we are obsessed with our looks. It could be turning to immoral sex for fulfillment. We live in a world that will turn almost anywhere for relief but doesn't want to turn to a God that demands our all.

In a time of crisis, what substitute gods are you tempted to look to?



Day 4

2 Kings 1:2b--2:12

God takes violation of the First Commandment very seriously. Ahaziah had belittled Yahweh, essentially suggesting that there is no God in Israel or that He is impotent and less powerful than Baal-zebul. Amazingly, God sent Elijah to deliver a message. God wasn't done pursuing Israel or her wayward kings, and this was an act of mercy, like a doctor telling someone they are sick. The death notice was issued as the messenger returned to the sick king.

Tragically, Ahaziah's responded by sending his army to detain the prophet, and in so doing, like his father, he sought to control the word of the prophet (v. 9). The intended goal was foolish, as they tried to bring the word of God under human control. Yahweh would again send fire to validate His prophet and judge the idolaters when these armies came to liquidate Elijah.

We see here the folly of failing to seek the Lord and to listen to His Word.

How do you see the severity and the kindness of God in this passage?



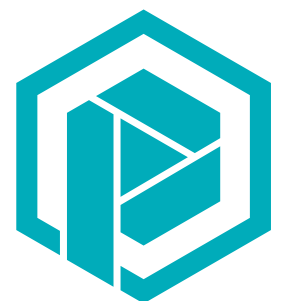
Day 5

2 Kings 2:13--6:7

Here we find one of the most fascinating and exciting portions of 2 Kings. We finished the story of Elijah in 2 Kings 2. Elijah was gone, but his ministry wasn't. It continued, particularly through the life of his successor, Elisha.

But Elisha not only reminds us of his mentor. As the privileged readers of the Old and New Testaments, we also see that Elisha foreshadowed the ministry of Jesus. Elisha's ministry was a Messiah-like ministry. In fact, Elisha's ministry is closer to the ministry of Jesus than Elijah in some ways, especially in the degree of compassion that he demonstrated. Like Jesus, Elisha had compassion on those in need: a widow, a barren woman, a dead son, a hungry multitude, a leper, and those in difficulty (4:1-6:7).

How do you see both the tender pastoral side of Elisha along with his strong prophetic traits in 2 Kings 4?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 49 | DECEMBER 5-6



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

2 Kings 6:1–16

At first glance, this opening story in chapter 6 seems unnecessary. Who cares about a floating ax head? Well, someone cared about it! We aren't given his name, but one particular prophet would never forget this story about God's miraculous provision.

God cares about world events, and He cares about giving us daily bread—or even an apparently lost ax head. Be encouraged by this fact. This was a simple need, but it was a real need. Indeed, this is the type of care and provision Jesus ascribed to God in the Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 6:31–34).

We can take every care to God as we seek to fulfill His will for our lives. He is a God you can call out to in your emergencies, and trust that He provides for His children. He may provide in “mundane” ways or “miraculous” ways, but either way, it comes from our good and gracious Father (James 1:17). Trust Him. Seek Him. Believe He responds to our cries. God's servants can rely on God to supply their needs.

What needs do you have today? Bring your petition to the Father.



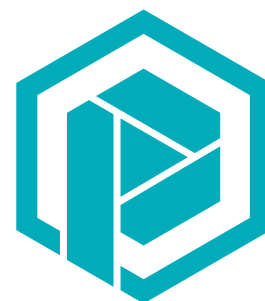
Day 2

2 Kings 6:17–20

One of the most basic prayers we can pray is that God would open up the eyes of people to see the truth of the gospel. Elisha prays first for his servant to see. And God answered this prayer, enabling the servant to see horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (v. 17). Then, once in Samaria, Elisha prayed for the Lord to open up the eyes of the Syrians. And God answered this prayer, enabling them to see that they were in the middle of Samaria.

When Jesus was on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, we read that Jesus gave a Bible study about the Old Testament, explaining how all of Scripture points to Him. Luke adds that in this process, Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (v. 45). We, too, need to carefully study Scripture, and we, too, need the Lord to open our eyes that we may behold wonderful things from His Word (Psalm 119:18).

Will you take a moment to pray that the members of your family and your church may have eyes to see the beauty of the gospel?



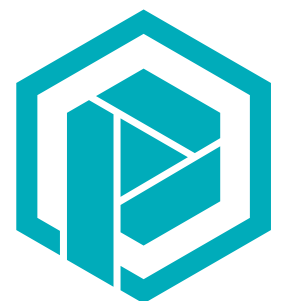
Day 3

2 Kings 6:21–23

This remarkable story highlights the kindness of the prophet, who reflected the kindness of our God. Instead of having the king of Israel kill the raiders of Syria, the prophet told the king to feed them. A feast was prepared for the raiders before they were sent home. Following this dramatic turn of events, you would have expected to see the heart of the king of Syria melt before the God of grace. But that didn't happen (v. 24). He hardened his heart against God.

Sadly, many, despite being blessed by Yahweh, refuse to acknowledge Him as Lord and God. Every gift and success that a person has comes from the hand of God, maker of heaven and earth. In response to God's revealing grace, Paul says that people sinfully exchange the glory of the Creator for the created things. Because they suppress the truth revealed to them, they're without excuse and therefore condemned (Romans 1:18–25). When it comes to proclaiming the Gospel, since we're dealing with hardened human hearts, we must pray for God to open eyes and transform hearts if anyone is to repent and believe and thus go from being condemned to being spared by divine grace.

How does God display His kindness and grace to the unbelieving world today?



Day 4

2 Kings 6:24–32

The context of the story involves war and famine, which probably was the result of Israel's unfaithfulness. Syria executed a full invasion on Israel. Because their siege on Israel lasted for an extended period of time, the conditions were terrible in Israel.

In response, the king was distressed. In anguish, he tore his clothes, a symbol of repentance (v. 30). Because this is a story of divine judgment, it was right for the king to be repenting. However, Joram (or Jehoram) didn't have a real heart for repentance. As we read next, he didn't patiently trust in and wait on God for deliverance. He acted like his mother, Jezebel, seeking to kill the prophet. He may have sackcloth on the outside, but that didn't make up for his unrepentant heart.

Have you ever practiced false repentance? What's the difference in true repentance and false repentance?



Day 5

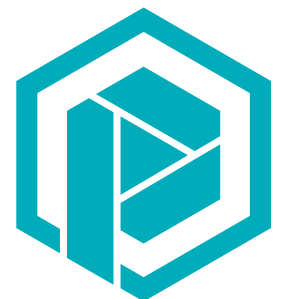
2 Kings 6:33–7:20

Elisha proclaimed deliverance, but the captain responded with a cynical, unbelieving heart. Elisha told the captain that he would see God's provision and the people will eat, but he would not eat any of it, for he would die.

Enter the four unnamed lepers. They made the bold decision to go to the Syrians' camp. Shockingly, when they got there, they found no Syrians. The Lord made the Syrians hear the sound of a great army, so they fled. As a result, the lepers found a treasure trove full of food, gold, and clothing. The lepers eventually went and told the king's household the news. But the king didn't believe. Then one of the king's servants proposed a reasonable solution. Take five men to check it out. The king sent them off. And these men found the lepers story to be true. The people heard the news and headed off and plundered the camp of the Syrians.

Elisha's word then came to pass regarding the flour and barley. What about his word concerning the skeptical captain? It came true as well. The rushing mob "trampled him in the gate" and he died (vv. 17, 20). God takes unbelief seriously and puts it to shame as He brings to pass His plans and purposes in the world.

Are you hesitant to believe the promises of God? Why or why not? Why is unbelief toward God and His Word such a serious matter?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 50 | DECEMBER 12-13



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

Luke 1:5–17

Fulfillment of the ancient prophecies of a coming Messiah began to unfold with several events before Jesus was even born. Zachariah and Elizabeth had no children and were both quite old. The Bible says that because God was pleased with the way Zachariah and Elizabeth lived, He chose to do a miracle in their lives and gave them a son who would later be known as John the Baptist.

In verse 13, what does the angel Gabriel tell Zachariah about his prayer?

God is pleased when we live lives that are righteous, upright and blameless. But the only way we can do that is through having a relationship with Jesus Christ. God always chooses to do great things with people who love Him and are faithful to Him.

Zachariah and Elizabeth were rewarded for their faith in God to do the impossible. Do you really believe that God can do anything? Name one area in your life in which you want God to act in a mighty way.



Day 2

Luke 1:26–45; Isaiah 7:14

Mary just received word from the angel that she would give birth to God's son. Can you imagine all the thoughts that must have been running through her mind, especially since she was still a virgin? However, Gabriel told her that she was the perfect candidate because she had found favor with God.

In verse 38, how does Mary respond to this startling news?

When God tells us something He has chosen for us to do, we should respond with the same attitude that Mary had. She did not question Gabriel or say no to him, she simply said that she was willing to serve the Lord.

How willing is your heart to serve the Lord?



Day 3

Micah 5:2; Luke 2:1–7, 16

In Luke 2, we see how the prophecy of the Messiah has been fulfilled. This prophecy would not have happened had it not been for Joseph's obedience to God. In Micah, we see the prophecy that Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of Jesus. Joseph was obedient to the decree of Caesar so that Jesus could be born in Bethlehem. Even in verse 16, we see that Joseph stayed by Mary's side as a sign of obedience to God. Joseph's obedience was a vital part of fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus.

It is amazing to see how one person could have changed the course of history just by the decisions he made. Joseph became obedient to lead his family even when he could have received ridicule for his wife's being pregnant before marriage.

Have you ever made fun of a person for the godly stand he has made?



Day 4

Mark 1:1–8; Isaiah 40:3–5

Verses 2 and 3 were written in the book of Isaiah hundreds of years before. Although the Jewish people knew of the prophecies foretelling the coming of the Messiah, John was the verbal messenger who told the people of Jerusalem that the Messiah was almost there.

What was John's purpose?

John was given a huge task, one of great importance, but he understood that the One coming after him, Jesus, was much more important. John's message was not always popular. Although many people thought he was crazy, he continued his mission. Many times, God uses us for a purpose that isn't popular with everyone but has great significance to God.

Jesus Himself testified that he was a “burning and a shining light.” How would Jesus describe your life today?



Day 5

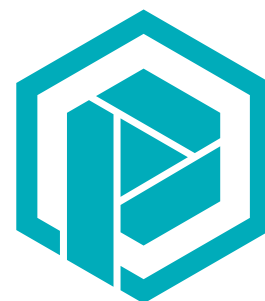
Matthew 2:1–11; Numbers 24:17; Micah 5:2

News of the newborn King had spread across the land. The Magi were not Jewish. They were considered priests in Persia but had seen the star in the East and heard about the birth of the Son of God. So they traveled many miles to see Jesus.

What did the Magi do when they saw Jesus?

The Magi must have known this baby boy was special because they traveled hundreds of miles to worship Him and bring Him gifts. Even though He was a baby, the Magi recognized the majesty of Jesus and gave Him the honor and praise He was due. The treasures they brought were gifts that were reserved for kings: gold, incense and myrrh. As Christians, we are to make Jesus the King of our hearts and lives.

Is Jesus the King of your heart? What do you need to change in your life to make Him King?



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FALL 2020

DEVO

WEEK 51 | DECEMBER 19-20



P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

Day 1

Genesis 3:15

The Bible begins with a God who reigns supreme before and over all creation. He made human beings in His image as the pinnacle of His creation (Genesis 1:26–31). God wanted to partner with humans to fill the earth with His glory. But since humankind fell into sin (Genesis 3), we no longer properly represent and display the character and mission of God.

Just after Adam and Eve sinned, God made a promise: a seed (a child) who would descend from Eve and defeat the serpent (Satan). In cursing the serpent, God was offering an incredible hope to rebellious humanity. This promised seed would suffer because of the serpent (“you will strike his heel”), but He would not be utterly defeated. Instead, He would deal a deathblow to the serpent (“He will strike your head”). This seed would redeem and restore humanity.

Many years later, a woman named Mary, a descendant of Eve, would carry that promised seed. The seed would be the perfect, sinless “image of the invisible God”—Jesus the Christ (Colossians 1:15).

How does the defeat of Satan encourage you to keep trusting God when life feels chaotic and defeating?



Day 2

Matthew 1:1–17

Matthew wrote his account of Jesus to awaken the faith of the Jews and to strengthen the faith of Jewish and Gentile Christians in the first Christian communities. He boldly began his account by claiming Jesus is the Christ (Matthew 1:1). Matthew began proving his claim by tracing Jesus' lineage back to Father Abraham and King David, through whom the promised Christ would come (Genesis 12:3; 2 Samuel 7:11–16).

Matthew 1:16 dramatically hints at the unique, divine origin and identity of Jesus. Joseph did not “father” Jesus as all the others in the genealogy “fathered” their sons (Matthew 1:2–15). Instead, Joseph is listed as “the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus” (1:16). Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus but the legal, adoptive father of Jesus by whom Jesus had legal right to the throne of David. Thus, God kept His promises to Israel through the sending of Christ.

What promises of God do you need to cling to this season?



Day 3

Matthew 1:18–21

The climax of history had come. The promised Christ had arrived. And how did God bring about this most blessed of occasions? Seemingly through a scandal, through a woman engaged yet found to be pregnant.

Thankfully, an angel of the Lord interrupted Joseph's thought process with some very special revelation: Mary's child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, so Joseph was to marry Mary and to assume legal fatherhood of the child, who would "save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

This was not the kind of salvation that many Israelites expected from the Christ. But God knows that our greatest problem is our sin, and nothing can solve that problem except God Himself. Jesus saves us from the penalty, the power, and (one day) the presence of our sin.

How do you need to respond today to the promised Savior who has come to save you from your sin?



Day 4

Matthew 1:22–23

Seven hundred years prior to Jesus' coming, God promised King Ahaz, an unfaithful king of Judah (2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28), that He would protect him from the military invasion of Aram and Israel (Isaiah 7:1–9). Despite Ahaz's persistent lack of faith, God promised him and the rest of Judah a sign that this destruction wouldn't happen (Isaiah 7:10–16). However, God would then allow Judah to face great suffering at the hands of Assyria because Judah had put their faith in Assyria's military power rather than in God (Isaiah 7:17–8:10).

The sign was a boy named Immanuel—"God with us"—whose name would serve as a reminder to them that God was with them in both judgment for the faithless and His grace for the faithful (Isaiah 7–12). Jesus was born to be the complete fulfillment of that prophecy. As Immanuel, "God with us," the Christ's coming would mean salvation for those who believe and judgment for those who will not (Luke 2:34).

How does Jesus' being "God with us" comfort you as you put your trust in Him?



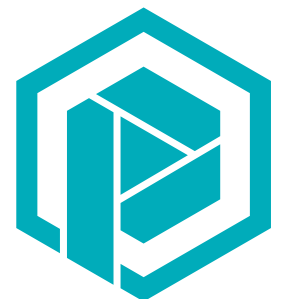
Day 5

Matthew 1:24–25

God used Joseph's obedience in bringing about the coming of the Savior of the world. There's no way Joseph could have fully grasped the historical, theological, and eternal implications of his obedience to the angel's command to marry Mary and assume legal fatherhood of Jesus. Likewise, there's simply no way for us to fully grasp the historical, theological, and eternal implications of our day-by-day obedience to God's Word.

Just because he obeyed God's command, Joseph wasn't guaranteed a pain-free, easy life. Quite the opposite. But by obeying God's call, Joseph took his place in God's great story of His glory as a partner with God and not a foe (like Herod, Caiaphas, and many others). Our limitations are no limitation for the God who works mightily in the margins of society to display His power and grace.

What limitations and weaknesses do you think keep you from being used by God? How does Joseph's story inspire you to trust God with the results of your day-to-day obedience?



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FALL 2020

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P R E S T O N W O O D S T U D E N T S

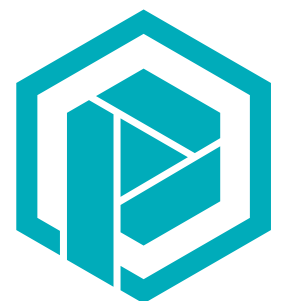
Day 1

Acts 17:1–4

Often when we face difficult questions or concepts within our faith, we can find ourselves wanting to quickly skip to the next page, or we can be tripped up in uncertainty. The academic word for learning to support what we believe with facts (or evidence) is *apologetics*. This isn't just a textbook analysis, however – instead, it is an aim to connect us with the truth of the Gospel. The study of apologetics enables us to make defense of what we believe. This does not mean we just want to be the smartest person in the room and win an argument for argument's sake. Instead, the aim of apologetics is to help lead people to Jesus and to strengthen believers' faith.

Why do you think it is so important to have confidence in what you believe?

List some verses that give you confidence in the truth of the Gospel. If you don't know any – text a staff member or LifeGroup Leader and spend some time looking those up now.



Day 2

Acts 2:36–41

When we share Jesus with others – no matter what questions they may ask – we can confidently address them knowing that Christianity is true. It is truly rational to believe. Faith and science *both* point to the validity of our faith. As we study more, we are able to see proof of our faith – this does not mean you have to have all the answers to all the questions you may be asked, but you can help those with questions find them. Apologetics that looks at who God is, what Jesus has done, the reliability of the Bible, etc., enables us to confidently lead people to a saving faith in Jesus. As we understand what we believe, we are able, like Peter, to articulate truth to those around us and point them straight to Jesus.

What stands out in how Peter shares the Gospel?

Spend time asking the Lord to give you confidence as you share your faith – knowing that it is true.



Day 3

Acts 17:16–34

While the study of apologetics illuminates the truth of Christianity, it also exposes the false doctrine of other religions. Just as the apostle Paul did in the book of Acts, we can look at what other religions teach, uncover the fiction, and help others see the saving light of salvation. Paul addresses what the men of Athens believed, first showing an understanding of what they believed, and then pointing them to the truth of Christianity. Just as a lawyer lays out the facts to bring to about a life-changing verdict, we, as believers, can bring someone to a lifesaving relationship with Jesus as we defend and share our faith.

As Paul pointed out what the men in Athens didn't believe, what were they missing about the truth of Christianity?

How can you learn from Paul in how you choose to share Jesus with those who believe a false religion?



Day 4

1 Timothy 6:3–5; Romans 16:17

Another facet of apologetics is defending and explaining why we believe what we believe. Over the last couple of days, we have seen there are moments when we need to point out to someone the truth found within Christianity, and then there are times when we are able to defend our faith based on the fallacy of other religions. There are also moments when we need to help someone understand what is true within what we believe. We can know that our God is the one true God. We can rest securely that in fact, Jesus did rise from the dead. Even if it seems overwhelming, the study of apologetics helps us defend what we believe. Our faith teaches us the Bible is true. Apologetics gives us proof – facts – to back up and strengthen our faith.

How do you see Paul defending his faith in these verses?

What have been some hard questions other believers have asked you about what you believe? How did you answer them?



Day 5

2 Timothy 4:1–2

Quarterbacks don't take the field without knowing the plays. The band doesn't march without knowing the sheet music. No gymnast competes with an unrehearsed routine. So why would we, as Christians, want to limp through our faith without confidence in what we believe? When we are able to defend our faith – not to win an argument but to win others to Christ – we are able to stand firmly in what we know is true. This is why it is important for us to know what we believe. This is why Paul tells Timothy to be ready – if you are living a life of holiness, people will notice and ask you about it. Then you will be equipped to give an answer in season and out of season. When we study apologetics, when we know what we believe, we can make an impact in the eternity of those around us.

What does it mean to be ready in season and out of season?

Can you think of a time when someone has asked you to defend your faith? What did you do?

