



**ADULT LESSON GUIDE  
LARGE PRINT  
WINTER 2023-24**

**GOD'S HOLINESS . . .  
AND OURS**

Beautiful Passages on the  
Beauty of Holiness

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**GOD IS FAITHFUL**

Old Testament Portraits of  
God's Unfailing Faithfulness

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**THE BREAD OF LIFE**

Jesus' Words and  
Wonders in John 5-6



**GOD'S  
WORD**  
FOR LIFE

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DECEMBER 3, 2023

1.1

**FOCUS VERSE**

**Isaiah 6:5**

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

**LESSON TEXT**

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

**TRUTH ABOUT GOD**

God is holy.

**TRUTH FOR MY LIFE**

I will humble myself in worship before a holy God.

SERIES 1: GOD'S HOLINESS . . . AND OURS

# OUR HOLY GOD



## BIBLE LESSON

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### I. THE LORD REVEALED HIMSELF TO ISAIAH

The mention of King Uzziah in Isaiah 6:1 provides an important backdrop for the narrative of this chapter. The downfall of King Uzziah is a classic Old Testament illustration of the corruption of power. At fifty-two years, Uzziah's is the second-longest recorded royal reign in all of Scripture. Such longevity is testimony to an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity, marked by remarkable victories over historic enemies like the Philistines and the Ammonites. (See II Chronicles 26:6-8.)

However, the glory of Uzziah's reign came to a humiliating end in banishment as a leper. (It seems likely his son Jotham ruled as co-regent until Uzziah's death.) The writer of Chronicles gives us the reason in his introduction to the tragic story: "But when he [Uzziah] was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (II Chronicles 26:16). Uzziah's destructive pride, then, was the perfect foil for Isaiah's response here, showing us the interrelationship of humility and holiness.

#### A. Isaiah Saw the Lord

Two assumptions shape our understanding of Isaiah's vision. The first is that this account is a report of Isaiah's initial calling as a prophet, based on his confession of sin (Isaiah 6:5). The second is that this vision took place within the precincts of Solomon's Temple, since the seraphim took a coal from the altar to cleanse Isaiah (Isaiah 6:6). However, it is important to bear in mind that neither of these points is explicit in the text.

Though Isaiah's location is a bit ambiguous, what he saw was clearly the heavenly throne room, where God sat in royal council. Two important clues are given. First, Isaiah saw the Lord "high and lifted up" (this could refer to the Lord, to the throne on which He sat, or perhaps to both), which gives us a sense of dramatic height. Added to this description is the comment that the "train" of His robe filled the entire Temple (Isaiah 6:1).

The "train" has been the object of many speculative investigations built on the assumption that it was a separate garment somehow attached to the robe. However, there is no real support for this thought in the Hebrew. The word in Isaiah 6 that translates into "train" usually refers to the seam or edge (i.e., the hem) of a garment rather than to a separate attachment.

Thus, the first awe-inspiring element in Isaiah's vision is quite simply the size. Standing in the Temple, Isaiah looked up and saw the exalted Lord seated on a high throne in His heavenly realm; His figure was so large that just the hem of His garment

was as tall as the Temple itself. What Isaiah saw, then, was the Lord seated on His heavenly throne with His feet resting in the Temple. Perhaps it was this vision that inspired the prophet to later write of God's sovereign majesty in these terms: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool" (Isaiah 66:1).

### B. The Angels Declared His Holiness

Other elements of the vision add to its overwhelming sense of God's holy glory. First, Isaiah witnessed the presence of six-winged seraphim (we are not told how many), who apparently served as throne guardians or throne bearers. The word *seraphim* derives from the Hebrew *saraph*, which means to "burn." The best translation, then, would be "burning or fiery ones," indicating the blinding brightness of their appearance. These seraphim continuously cried (probably a good part of the reason for the shaking Isaiah described), saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3). This tripled use of the adjective "holy" indicates the Lord's holiness is superlative and unsurpassable; that is, He is the holiest Being, perfect and pure.

Three further observations reinforce this point. Isaiah noted that these seraphim—who are themselves bright, fiery beings—used their wings to cover their faces, shielding their eyes from the even greater splendor of the divine glory (Isaiah 6:2). Also, their cry explicitly connected the divine "holiness" as the source of the divine "glory." Finally, Christopher Wright has proposed that the final line of the angelic cry could be better translated: "The fullness of the earth is [God's] glory" (*The Mission of God*). In other words, the earth's very biodiversity and beauty express God's profound glory. If that is so, then the "ongoingness" of the created order (e.g., the beauty of each new sunrise and sunset, as unique as a human fingerprint), actually *increases* the total "amount" of God's glory. The claim of the angel's cry, then, is not just that God's holiness and glory are greater than that of any other being, but also that those attributes are exponentially increasing as time rolls on toward eternity.

*Have you (or anyone close to you) ever experienced an angelic visitation? How did you know it was an angel? Do you recall the emotions you felt?*

### C. I Will Seek to See the Lord for Who He Is

What should probably surprise us here is the economy of Isaiah's description of this peek into the heavenly realm. The apostle Paul later described "a man in Christ" (a coy self-reference) taken up to the "third heaven" (that is, the abode of God) who heard "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (II Corinthians 12:2-4). Apostle John's vision of the resurrected Christ on Patmos quite literally stunned him: "I fell at his feet as dead" (Revelation 1:17). Something about divine self-revelation throughout Scripture leaves humanity dumbstruck with awe and fear.

It is not at all clear that any of these figures would describe their encounter with God's holy glory as "exciting" or even "pleasant." The seraphim surrounding the heavenly throne were at best

bizarre and at worst frightful in appearance. While seeking to see the Lord for who He really is sounds like an obviously noble goal, it has never been an encounter that was sought lightly. In fact, in most of the biblical accounts, it was an encounter that was never sought at all. To commit to seeing God truly is a commitment to total transformation. It is impossible to see God and remain as you were.

## II. RESPONDING TO GOD'S HOLINESS

### A. The Temple Was Shaken

Finally, Isaiah described for us the effects of this vision. The seraphic cries were so continuous and so loud that the heavenly Temple was being shaken. This description clearly recalls the Sinai theophany, which was marked by the “voice of the trumpet exceeding loud,” and the mountain that “quaked greatly” (Exodus 19:16, 18). Bryan Beyer (*Encountering the Book of Isaiah*) notes that the smoke recalls the incense that filled Solomon’s Temple (Exodus 30:34–38) and the cloud of the Presence that descended on the Tabernacle and led Israel through the wilderness (Exodus 40:36–38).

### B. Isaiah’s Response

Isaiah’s response to this awesome sight was not “wow” but “woe.” Isaiah pronounced himself “undone.” It is clear he saw himself as doomed to die. Again, the most immediate context for Isaiah’s dread was the tragic story of Uzziah (II Chronicles 26:16–21), and Uzziah had only trespassed the *physical* Temple. What worse fate would await Isaiah, who had trespassed the heavenly throne room itself?

God had clearly told Moses, when he requested a vision of God’s glory, “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20). From that point, the holy glory of the Lord was seen as so overwhelming in its power and purity that mere humans could not physically survive it. Moses’ encounter with the “back parts” (i.e., a small portion) of the divine glory was powerful enough to leave his face physically glowing (Exodus 34:35).

Isaiah’s sense of doom stemmed from a renewed sense of his own sinfulness. He was a man of “unclean lips.” We are given no real clue as to the exact nature of this transgressive speech. However, Beyer helpfully notes that, biblically speaking, “speech reveals what lies in one’s heart” (*Encountering the Book of Isaiah*). Isaiah’s words should probably be seen as a confession of a generally sinful disposition rather than a specific transgression. This thought is strengthened by his further acknowledgment that the entire nation suffered the same spiritual malady. Before the majesty of divine holiness, all Isaiah could see was his own corruption, magnified in the light of God’s moral perfection and absolute beauty.

*In a world so focused on the importance of positive self-esteem and self-image, how do we understand the importance of acknowledging sin (rather than excusing it or shifting blame)?*

### C. Isaiah Was Cleansed

As Isaiah stood, awaiting the final blow, one of the seraphim “broke rank” (obviously at the Lord’s command), took up a burning coal from the altar, and proceeded toward Isaiah. Alec Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*) points out that in the Old Testament, fire is seen primarily not as a “cleansing agent” but as a symbol of divine wrath (Genesis 3:24; Numbers 11:1-3). Isaiah likely assumed the seraphim had been dispatched to finish him off.

Then something unexpected and amazing happened. Instead of incinerating Isaiah where he stood, the angel gently touched his mouth (it is unclear whether it was with his hand or with the tongs) and pronounced him forgiven and purified. Fire meant for judgment had become fire for purification.

*Recall the first time you truly repented and felt God’s forgiveness. What thoughts were going through your mind? How did you feel? What did you do?*

This moment was triggered by Isaiah’s forthright confession. We can only imagine what might have happened if Isaiah had attempted to escape the divine Presence. However, a key aspect of God’s moral perfection is that He is perfectly loving and perfectly merciful. Forgiveness, then, should be understood as an outflow of divine holiness. The apostle John later summarized this principle: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

### D. The Lord Called Isaiah

What had transpired was a shift in Isaiah’s fundamental relationship to God, from sinful “outsider” to holy “insider.” Isaiah was now positioned to hear the deliberations of Jehovah’s council. We often wrongly assume that the Lord’s question was addressed to Isaiah when, instead, it was addressed to the council.

Christopher Seitz points out the overlooked parallels between the council scene depicted here and the one described by the prophet Micaiah in 1 Kings 22:19-22, where God deliberated the best way to accomplish the downfall of the evil King Ahab (*Isaiah 1-39: Interpretation*). Given his now-sanctified status, Isaiah was “allowed in” to the divine discussion in much the same way that God included Abraham in His deliberations regarding Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:16-33). Without even knowing what the task was, Isaiah volunteered for divine service.

### E. I Will Humble Myself before the Lord and Seek to Be Cleansed for His Purpose

Sometimes we seek to be called before we have been cleansed, and we seek to be cleansed without making full confession. Truth be told, we would much rather skip the whole “confession-forgiveness” component of worship and go straight from praise to commissioning. However, if we allow ourselves to stand in the searing light of God’s holiness, instead of condemnation, we will find forgiveness and new purpose.

*How do you keep personal pride in check? More important, how do you grow in humility?*

DECEMBER 10, 2023

# 1.2

SERIES 1: GOD'S HOLINESS . . . AND OURS

## CALLED TO BE HOLY

### FOCUS VERSE

I Peter 1:15

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.

### LESSON TEXT

I Peter 1:13-23

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God calls us to reflect His holiness and His work of transformation in our lives.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will respond to God's transformative work in my life and reflect His holiness.





## BIBLE LESSON

### I. BE YE HOLY

#### A. Girding Our Minds

The epistles of Peter have suffered unfortunate neglect in recent study. Their brevity, especially when compared to the writings of Paul, leads to the mistaken assumption that they are less valuable. Further, the precise historical circumstances of this correspondence have been a matter of continued debate; though the letters consistently use “persecution” rhetoric, it is difficult to link the letters’ contents to a known period of systemic persecution.

However, these brief letters are of immense value. Peter played a crucial role within the Twelve and the early church, making him an important voice in the Jesus movement’s formative years (Matthew 16:16-18; Acts 2; 10). According to the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, these Roman Christians existed as cultural “outsiders,” possibly facing social persecution such as slander and ridicule. (See I Peter 2:12; 3:13-17; 4:14-16.) In more severe cases, they faced governmental opposition such as imprisonment and banishment. Peter’s message is remarkably relevant to us who must learn to navigate being “in” but not “of” the world.

For Peter, salvation was not only a past experience but also a future hope. It was an “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Peter 1:4-5). In light of this glorious reality, Peter’s first exhortation was that we “gird up” our minds.

The imagery here is important. The common garment was a long (ankle-length), sleeveless tunic, which hampered fast movements and strenuous work. In circumstances requiring it, the tunic would be gathered up and tucked into a belt worn at the waist (Peter Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*). If this were automatic for us, Peter might not have had to remind us to “gird up” our minds. However, we often set our gaze on what we see rather than what we cannot see. We must live and look with anticipation toward the coming of the Lord! This will help us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12).

*Why does true holiness begin with a changed mindset rather than with modified behavior? What are the dangers of changing what we do without changing what we think?*

#### B. Rejecting Former Things

Adopting this mindset means simultaneously rejecting another, what Peter called our “former lusts.” Such captivity to unbridled desire was the essence of the pagan lifestyle from which these believers had been delivered. Paul provided a lengthy, condemning description of this lifestyle in his letter to the Romans (Romans 1:24-32), later pleading with his readers: “Be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2). Peter and Paul both

understood we tend toward conformity to a particular *pattern* of actions—actions controlled not by fixing our eyes on our eternal future but on our immediate “desire.”

*When you were saved, was it a struggle for you to put off your old life? Why or why not? What are some common reasons why people may struggle?*

This path that leads to our coming salvation is first introduced, then, as a path of non-conformity, marked by its opposition to worldly values and ways of understanding. Peter expected his hearers to make a “full break” with their former identities. In fact, in I Peter 1:3, Peter used “rebirth” language to describe the completeness of our salvific transformation: we have been “begotten . . . again unto a lively hope.” This new “identity” is not a product of our own imagination but a direct divine action.

### C. I Will Pursue My New Life in Christ

What was this new identity that had been given by God? Instead of pagans controlled by raging lust, Peter’s hearers were now “children of obedience.” Throughout Scripture, obedience to divine commands is the essence of humanity’s proper relationship to God. It is an expression of both loyalty and faith; it is an obligation owed to God as our Creator and Lord; it is the only way for humans to access divine blessing and protection.

However, obedience alone does not offer us the entire picture of what it means to be in relationship with God because we are first of all “*children* of obedience.” Obedience is not simply a matter of obligation or an optimal way to guarantee success in our endeavors; before all of that, obedience is the loving response of grateful children to a loving Father. David celebrated precisely this in Psalm 103: “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him” (Psalm 103:13).

The family imagery that serves as the basis of this call to obedience softens the break we must make with our former life. God does not call us to leave our old ways without simultaneously opening the door to welcome us into the warmth and safety of His family. Demands for obedience are more than matched by offers of care and protection.

These promises of loving care, freedom from past shame and guilt, and a sense of belonging and renewed purpose all work to motivate our pursuit of the new life offered to us in Christ, undergirded by the glorious hope of heavenly reward. The path has been marked out; provision has been made; promises have been given. All that is left is for those who believe to join the pursuit.

## II. AS HE IS HOLY

### A. Reflecting God’s Holiness

“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (I Peter 1:15-16). At first glance, God’s call to us to be holy begins with what we ought *not* to do. But holiness is more about what we *ought* to do. Instead of conforming to the “former

lusts,” we are called to be “holy in all manner of conversation”—every aspect of life. Peter pointed out that this commandment is rooted in the Old Testament, echoing and then directly citing Leviticus 19:2. The Book of Leviticus features chapters 17–26, which have been dubbed the “Holiness Code.” This group of chapters form the middle Book of the Pentateuch, suggesting that its teachings are the central “heart” of the Mosaic law. As we know, Jesus understood His teaching not as the overturning of the Law but as its truest fulfillment (Matthew 5:17). The connection Peter drew here reaffirms the church’s continuity with God’s intended purposes for Old Testament Israel.

Second, the verse Peter cited stands at the head of a chapter most notable for its variety of commandments. It appears almost haphazard. Throughout the chapter, separate “arenas” of life—right worship, good neighborly relations, care for the needy, prompt payment of wages—are presented as all interconnected matters, held together under the umbrella of the call to holiness. All of life—not just our worship—is meant to be governed by God’s directives.

Finally, we must remember that in the Old Testament, the holiness of God is what distinguishes Him from humanity. He alone is morally and spiritually perfect; we are imperfect and sinful. Yet God offers to freely share with us the very thing that sets Him apart from us. Leviticus 19 makes clear that human holiness is a product of divine holiness, a gift that is shared more than a status that is achieved.

In his book, McKnight is surely right that when Peter called his hearers to imitate God’s holiness in their own personal lives, he had in mind “the similarity children are to have to their parents” (1 Peter). Holiness, then, is the “family resemblance” we are to share with our Savior. Like Adam and Eve, we are called to bear the divine image (Genesis 1:26–28).

## B. Responding to God’s Redemption

Peter returned to exploring the glorious nature of salvation, echoing and carrying forward his earlier discussion in verses 3–9. There, the focus was on salvation’s future aspect; here, the focus shifts to its past aspect, that is, salvation as an already-completed work. Note the past tense: “Forasmuch as ye *were* not *redeemed* with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19, italics added).

The life of holiness is an organic response—akin to a spiritual reflex—to the fearsome wonder of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ. The “fatherhood” of God, used above to comfort and encourage, here becomes an exhortation and a warning. The privileges of being God’s beloved child entail the awesome responsibility of bearing His likeness in a God-honoring lifestyle. “Fear” in this context is not “fright”; it is instead “the constant

*What are some areas of life that we don’t commonly address in our discussions of holiness? Why do you think these areas are overlooked? Can you think of specific scriptural principles that apply to those areas?*

knowledge the child of God has that whatever he or she is about to think or do is subject to the scrutiny of God's penetrating love and holiness" (McKnight). It is a sensibility that is borne out of our faith and (here again the future aspect appears) hope gifted to us by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

### C. Loving God and Others

What does such conformity to the holy character of God look like? Is there any objective, visible measure? Yes. It is our "unfeigned love of the brethren." That we are all children of God implies not only a unique relationship with our heavenly Father but also a unique relationship with one another. We are more than just friends or companions, colleagues or co-workers—we are brothers and sisters. This unique type of love is given its own special term in the New Testament, *philadelphia* (see Romans 12:10; I Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1; II Peter 1:7). It goes far beyond expected social norms of concern.

And we are called to express this love from a "pure heart fervently." A term often associated with prayer (Luke 22:44; Acts 12:5), fervency in this context is indicative of the effort that is required for this type of love—it is "hard work." Here, Peter linked back to his opening exhortation that his hearers must "gird up" their minds; this is the "work" for which they were to prepare themselves.

*Why is love the ultimate expression of holiness? What happens to holiness when it is disconnected from love?*

### D. I Will Respond to God's Transformative Work in My Life and Reflect His Holiness

The paralleled logic of Peter's teaching in I Peter 1 is convincing and compelling. God, who has "abundant mercy" (I Peter 1:3), has expressed His character in the glorious work of our redemption "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:19), whereby we are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God" (I Peter 1:23). The same "living" (e.g., "life-giving") Word that generated life in Genesis 1 now spiritually regenerates fallen humanity. By it, we are delivered from the corrupted and corruptible system of this world into the glorious reality of eternal, incorruptible hope.

Furthermore (and more important) the very character of this holy, gracious God has been imparted to us in that wondrous redemption. Just as God expressed His character in the concrete action of the Cross, we must express the reality of that inner character in concrete actions of fervent loving care for our brothers and sisters. Near the end of his epistle, Peter reiterated this theme: "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. . . . As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (I Peter 4:8, 10). We are to love as we have been loved, not from our own resources but from God's magnificent supply in Christ Jesus.

DECEMBER 17, 2023

SERIES 1: GOD'S HOLINESS . . . AND OURS

# 1.3

## EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT TO BE HOLY

### FOCUS VERSES

**I Thessalonians  
5:23-24**

<sup>23</sup> And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>24</sup> Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

### LESSON TEXT

**Acts 15:7-11; Romans  
6:4; I Thessalonians  
5:23-24**

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The Spirit empowers us to live transformed lives.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will be filled with the Spirit and walk in newness of life.



## BIBLE LESSON

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### I. SANCTIFIED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

#### A. Debate over Including the Gentiles

In Acts 15, we arrive at what appears to be a “watershed moment” for the early Apostolic church. The Gentiles were granted full inclusion as equal members alongside Jewish believers. In some ways, however, that point of view is overly simplistic.

First, it is easy to forget that, probably close to a decade earlier, the Jerusalem church had already considered the matter of Gentile inclusion in the church after the miraculous conversion of Cornelius’s household by the apostle Peter (Acts 10). Peter was brought before the church to give an explanation and defense of his actions, which appeared to be a clear violation of the Mosaic law. However, after he gave a full account, those gathered “held their peace” (i.e., they ceased debating) and, what’s more, “glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). For all intents and purposes, the matter appeared settled, without any reference to required Torah observance.

That fact makes the actions of these visitors to Antioch so problematic because it appears there had been a reversal on a matter already decided. In advocating the requirement of circumcision for all Gentile converts, they were really arguing for a reinstatement of the entire Mosaic law (Acts 15:5). The second and much larger problem was that this approach to Gentile conversion really positioned Christianity as simply another “sect” of Judaism, like the Sadducees or the Pharisees. (In many ways, it positioned Christianity as a sect of *Pharisaic* Judaism.) However, as Paul (himself a former Pharisee) argued, the coming of Christ marked the end (i.e., completion) of the Law (Romans 10:4); salvation could no longer be found through Law observance but only through faith in Jesus Christ. What was at stake here was the very nature of salvation. No wonder this was “no small dissension and disputation” (Acts 15:2).

#### B. Peter’s Declaration

As the account makes clear, although the Judean ambassadors to Antioch were “acting ‘without portfolio’” from the Jerusalem church (Anthony Robinson and Robert Wall, *Called to Be Church*), they did represent a vocal faction there, led by converted Pharisees (Acts 15:5). The dissension was so sharp that the leadership (here identified as “apostles and elders,” Acts 15:6) went into a “closed session” where Peter rose to speak for the last time in Acts.

First, it was God—not Peter—who initiated the mission to Cornelius’s household (Acts 10:11-16) to proclaim the gospel “by my mouth” (Acts 15:7). In his commentary, *Acts*, David Williams

points out that this phrase was something of a signature Petrine phrase in Acts. (See Acts 1:16; 3:18, 21; 4:25.) In those other contexts, it was used to introduce quotations or allusions to the canonical writings of David (i.e., Psalms) and the prophets; notably, it referred here to Peter's own words, clearly equating the authority of the gospel he proclaimed to Cornelius with the authority of the Old Testament.

Peter's second point was that the outpouring of the Spirit was the positive evidence of the Gentiles' saving belief; this same evidence convinced the original council (Acts 11:15-18). The Spirit's outpouring meant God had purified [i.e., sanctified] their hearts by faith (Acts 15:9) and that "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:11). Note the clever twist: Peter had faith that his present Jewish audience could be saved just like the Gentiles.

*If you are a convert to Pentecost, recall your own journey into holiness. Was the path easy or difficult? In what ways did the Spirit work on you to make you receptive and obedient to biblical teachings about holiness?*

Most pertinent to the present issue was to allay the unspoken concern about uncircumcised and non-observant Gentiles introducing unholy impurities into the community of believers. Peter emphasized that this concern was a non-issue since these believers had received the Spirit, which is the source and guarantee of their sanctification.

### C. The Council's Decision

Although Peter's testimony was critical, James held a position of crucial authority within the council, likely as the current pastor of the church in Jerusalem or perhaps due to his "reputed attachment to the Jewish law [e.g., James 2:8]" (Williams). In a move that perhaps shocked the Pharisee contingent, James wholeheartedly endorsed Peter's perspective on Gentile salvation and even found authoritative support in the Old Testament prophecy of Amos (Amos 9:11-12).

That prophecy envisioned a restored Israel that included non-Israelites as part of the coming Kingdom, but with no mention of circumcision or Torah-observance as a requirement for entrance. To add the "yoke" (Peter's term) of Torah to these believers would have been to unnecessarily "trouble" them, James argued, since the Spirit was already active in their lives, achieving the same ends toward which Torah observance was ideally aimed.

One final point is important: the guidelines James suggested for Gentile converts should not be seen as "backtracking" on the claim that they were sanctified by the work of the Spirit. The guidelines given were aimed at maintaining fellowship in the church, not at maintaining the Gentiles' "saved" status; they are drawn from Leviticus 17-18, laws that applied not only to Israelites but to non-Israelite "sojourners" and were, in a sense, simply matters of cultural sensitivity. Their presence was an important reminder that the church "is a society whose structure remains profoundly sensitive to the selfless awareness of the needs of others" (Robinson and Wall).

#### D. I Will Acknowledge That the Lord Sanctifies Me

The Pharisee faction in the Jerusalem church wrongly understood the means of the believer's sanctification; they still operated within an old, Law-based paradigm. Ultimately, it led to a works-based view of salvation that asserted, "I am saved because I have made myself holy" rather than acknowledging, "I have been made holy because I have been saved." (Paul likely reacted with such vehemence to this teaching because he himself had been a Pharisee who probably believed much the same thing at an early point.)

It is easy for us to unconsciously adopt a similar view today: we may see our holiness as the basis of our salvation rather than recognizing our salvation as the basis of our holiness. More bluntly, we erroneously might see salvation as the "work" God does for us and holiness as the "work" we do for Him. To be honest, nothing could be more spiritually deadly. Our pursuit of holiness must begin with the recognition that it is God's work in our lives.

### II. WALKING IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

#### A. Empowered to Live a Transformed Life

In his writings, Paul carefully paralleled the believer's experience of salvation with the saving work of Christ as encapsulated in the gospel message of His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The outpouring of the Spirit that Jesus described to Nicodemus as a spiritual "rebirth" (John 3:5), Paul equated with a "resurrection."

For the metaphor to work, it is important to note that "resurrection" is not the same as "revivification." To be "revived" is to be brought *back* to life, to have our death "reversed," if you will; however, to be "resurrected" is to be given *new* life on the other side of death. One who is merely "revived" faces the dark prospect of experiencing death a second time; one who has experienced "resurrection" never has to face death again.

This "resurrection" life is gifted to all believers in Jesus who have received the gift of His Spirit. Importantly, this life bears no connection to the previous life; it is an entirely new kind of life, life of an entirely different order. Paul said in Romans 6:6-7 that the "body of sin" has been "destroyed" in our baptism, "that henceforth we should not serve sin" because we have been "freed" from its power. Yes, Christians may still sin, but we no longer live under sin's dominion (Romans 6:14); we have power through the sanctifying Spirit to resist and defeat sinful strongholds in our lives.

Paul finally challenged his Roman hearers: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:13). Sanctification is not our achievement for God; it is God's achievement in us. Our "work" in sanctification is simply yielding to the Spirit's work.

*How have you experienced the Holy Spirit helping you to live a transformed life in this present world?*



## B. Sanctified Completely by the Spirit

The power of the Spirit is why the apostle Paul could make what seems to be an almost outrageous claim to the Thessalonians that God would sanctify them “wholly,” preserving them “blameless” until the day of the Lord’s return (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Such language sounds impossible and even downright arrogant to our contemporary ears.

Most often, we deflect this text’s astounding claim into a debate about whether Paul was meaning that humans are comprised of three separable elements: a body, a soul, and a spirit. Other New Testament passages seem to assert only two separable elements: soul and body (Matthew 10:28). As fascinating and beneficial as those discussions are, they may be “adventures in missing the point,” as the saying goes. More likely, this was a rhetorical flourish, echoing Jesus’ own invocation of the *Shema* (Mark 12:30) as a command to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength (John Stott, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*).

Rather, Paul emphasized that the call to sanctification impacts every domain of human life. As the list of commandments leading up to this final exhortation indicated (1 Thessalonians 5:12-22), holiness encompassed inward attitudes and outward actions (1 Thessalonians 5:16, 22) as well as behavior toward fellow believers and non-believers (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 15).

Furthermore, the prescribed level of conduct was humanly impossible: “Be patient toward all men” (1 Thessalonians 5:14), “ever follow that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:15), “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Paul’s ultimate point was that the Spirit is “the source of . . . power that alone would enable them to live in this way” (Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*). The God who called us to holiness is faithful and will accomplish for and in us the transformative work of sanctification.

*If it is not possible for a Christian to live a sinless life, how should we interpret passages like 1 Thessalonians 5:22?*

## C. I Will Be Filled with the Spirit and Walk in Newness of Life

Before believers can ever commit to “walking in holiness” as Scripture defines it, they must first commit to “walking in the Spirit.” A lifestyle of holiness divorced from the inner working of the Spirit is nothing more than the pursuit of self-righteousness, which leads only to arrogance or despair.

Worse, we end up in the quagmire of Acts 15, where we fail to recognize the work of the Spirit in our own brothers and sisters because they do not follow “our rules.” We attempt to impose uniformity rather than live in a unity birthed in love and mutual care. Not only is our own walk with the Lord imperiled by our pride, but the health of the church is damaged by factionalism, and, ultimately, her witness to the transforming power of the gospel is negated before a watching world.

DECEMBER 24, 2023

WINTER CHRISTMAS SUNDAY

CS

## THE GIFT OF WORSHIP

### FOCUS VERSE

Matthew 2:11

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

### LESSON TEXT

Matthew 2:2, 11; 7:11;  
Luke 1:26-38, 41-43;  
2:20; Romans 5:12-19

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God desires our worship.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will worship God with my entire life as the natural response to my faith.



## BIBLE LESSON

### I. WORSHIP IS THE NATURAL RESPONSE TO OUR FAITH

Christmas—in some areas it is a winter wonderland; in others maybe it is a desert, complete with palm trees and waves gently washing against the shoreline. No matter the landscape surrounding us, Christmas is known as the most wonderful time of the year. It is a time to spend with family and friends, a time to relive old traditions and create new ones. At Christmas we remember the years gone by and anticipate the ones to come. We give in love and receive in gratitude.

Christmas is a time of splendor, of wonder, when we remember and celebrate the birth of our Savior. From the time of our childhood, we are told to remember the reason for the season. During this season the wonder around us inspires us to believe in something greater than ourselves, to believe in the miraculous.

And so it was during the very first Christmas, when our Savior was born. Although we realize that December 25th is not the actual date of Jesus' birth, during this time we focus our attention on the birth narrative of Jesus and are moved not only to remember, but to respond. The characters in the Christmas story not only believed in the Messiah, but they acted out in worship, and we are called to respond in a similar way today.

#### A. We Are Called to Believe

The Christmas story is a call to faith, as it was for the characters in the story long ago. In the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced that two miracle babies would soon be born. Gabriel told Mary that she was “highly favoured,” and even though she was a virgin, she would give birth to a son through the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:28, 35). The angel also told her that her cousin Elizabeth, who had been barren and was now well in age, was already six months pregnant. Even though these two announcements seemed illogical and impossible to Mary, the angel proclaimed that “with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37). By faith Mary accepted this proclamation of the coming Messiah, as did Joseph, Elizabeth, the shepherds, the wise men, and others.

Although we have not encountered angels nor seen the baby Jesus lying in the manger, we read the story in faith, believing that this newborn was the long-awaited Savior. And we have an advantage over these characters because we have read the rest of the story. When reading the Christmas narrative, we believe that not only did God come down to Earth to be born as a baby, but also that He grew to become a man, took on the sins of the world, gave His life on the cross, rose again as the victor over sin and death, and now calls us to be in relationship with Him.

*Has there been a time when you had faith for something that seemed impossible?*

## B. We Experience Wonder in God's Presence

Soon after the angel's announcement, Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, her unborn child leapt with joy within her, and Elizabeth was "filled with the Holy Ghost" (Luke 1:41). After this experience Elizabeth believed, calling Mary "blessed" and the "mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43). The Bible isn't clear whether Mary told Elizabeth about the angel's message, but as soon as Elizabeth encountered the presence of the Messiah through Mary, she was changed.

After Jesus was born, a heavenly host appeared to a group of shepherds, proclaiming the birth of the Christ and telling them where they could find the baby. The shepherds went to see for themselves what the angels had proclaimed. After they saw Jesus, they believed and responded by "glorifying and praising God" (Luke 2:20).

Like Elizabeth and the shepherds, we experience wonder when we encounter God's presence. We approach God and Scripture through faith, but when we enter the presence of God, we experience Him, changing us and confirming our belief. When we encounter God, we are engulfed by His Spirit. We are in awe of God. In awe of His greatness and His love, we are moved to action, moved to worship Him.

*Was there a time when you felt overwhelmed with emotion in God's presence?*

## C. Worship Is the Outward Expression of Our Faith

In James 2:20 we read that "faith without works is dead." So, what is our response when we believe and when we experience God's Spirit? In Matthew's account of the Christmas story, he wrote about a group of wise men who traveled from the East to find Jesus. They had seen His star and by faith began to follow it, searching for the "King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2). They continued to follow the star until they came to where Jesus was. The Bible says when they saw the young Jesus, they "fell down, and worshipped him" (Matthew 2:11). The wise men believed that the star would lead them to whom they sought, and when they came into the presence of the Messiah, they were compelled to worship Him.

As is displayed in this story, worship is the natural outward expression of our faith. When we experience the wonder of God, our eyes are opened to His majesty and splendor. Then we worship Him.

*How would you define worship?*

## II. WE WORSHIP GOD WHEN WE HUMBLE OURSELVES BEFORE HIM

Christmas is a time when we give gifts to the people close to us. Gift giving is recognized as a love language. When we receive gifts, we feel loved by the giver. We give gifts to others to show our appreciation for them—to show we care enough about them to sacrifice our resources for them and because we know that receiving gifts produces happiness in the recipient. Christmas is

a time when we are thankful for the ones we love, and as a result, we act by giving gifts.

But during the holidays, do we stop long enough to think about what we can give to God? Matthew 7:11 talks about a man giving good gifts to his children, but it goes on to say, “How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” God is our creator, our redeemer, our deliverer, and our provider. God gives good gifts, but He desires for us to reciprocate His love by giving back to Him. When we worship, we give back to God, acknowledging His goodness and honoring Him for who He is. God is holy and deserves the worship of those who have believed on Him and experienced His holiness. When we give back to God through worship, we humble ourselves in reverence before Him.

#### A. Bowing Down in the Presence of God

Many times we refer to our church song set as a worship service. Maybe we think of worship as lifting our hands, or clapping our hands, or singing, or some other outward expression during a service. But what are we really doing when we worship? Let’s clearly define the term “worship.” The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines *worship* as “reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power” or “an act of expressing such reverence.” So in simple terms, worship is an outward expression of our respect and devotion to God. But what does worship really look like?

Let’s go back to the story of the wise men. The Bible says when they worshiped, they bowed down before Jesus. Though the act of bowing down is just a simple physical motion, it represents something much deeper. To bow down is to humble yourself before the thing you bow to. When we worship, we lay down our pride, our selfishness, our honor, our reputation, and our status. We lay them down because we recognize their insignificance in the presence of the King of kings.

Throughout the Christmas story, we see people who humbled themselves so the will of God could be accomplished. The most prominent character who displayed humility was Jesus Himself. When we claim to be a Christian, we are identifying ourselves with Christ, striving to be like Him. As God incarnate, Jesus represented a second Adam, so to speak (Romans 5:12-19). Jesus displayed what humankind should be. He initiated the kingdom of God on Earth, and He is the example we are to model our lives after.

In the Old Testament, God dwelt among His people. In the New Testament, God physically came down to Earth to restore His relationship with humanity. From His humble beginning of being born in a stable as a helpless child, to submitting Himself to His parents’ authority, to being ridiculed, to washing His disciples’ feet, to being hung on a shameful cross, Jesus displayed humility throughout His life on Earth, and as His followers, we are called to do the same.

*What are some ways we can display humility?*

## B. Offering as an Act of Worship

One way we worship God in humility is by giving. Not only did the wise men bow down in reverence to Jesus, but they brought Him gifts. Matthew 2:11 says, “When they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” Worship for God comes from our hearts, but our actions show the manifestation of that worship. The wise men gave of their riches, and the shepherds left their flocks to glorify God.

When we are submitted to God, we are willing to give up the things we believe are important to honor God. Many of us have heard that “God loveth a cheerful giver” (II Corinthians 9:7). God wants us to give to Him, not out of duty alone, but out of love. When we humble ourselves to God by willingly giving of our time to work for His kingdom, giving our resources to fund the furtherance of His kingdom, and blessing others with the blessings we have received, these are all forms of worship for our King.

## C. Called to Give Our Lives

In the Christmas story, we see a beautiful picture of the characters laying down themselves at the feet of the Messiah. The shepherds left their sheep to praise God, the wise men laid down possessions in worship, but others in this story laid aside much more. As a young, unmarried girl, Mary had everything to lose at Gabriel’s announcement. Her reputation, her marriage, her prospects—her whole future was on the line. She could have been shamed by her society, by her family, and by her betrothed. But despite all these factors, Mary, in an act of humility and great faith, responded, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38).

Joseph also had a lot at stake by obeying God and taking Mary as his wife. What would society say if they found out Mary was pregnant? What would they say if Joseph married her anyway? Joseph and Mary weren’t asked to give up possessions, but they were asked to give their very selves. Mary laid down her reputation and Joseph his pride. They were willing to give up their desires and plans so God’s plan could be fulfilled.

We like to give to those we love, and for some so much so that we would be willing to give all. A husband would offer up his life to save his wife. A mother would give her life if it meant her children could live. Soldiers would sacrifice themselves for their country. We are willing to lay down our lives for those we love most, but what are we willing to give for our Savior? Jesus gave up His life to die on the cross. As His followers, we are called to give up our lives as well, not in death, but in life. When we humble ourselves, by surrendering everything, we act on our faith and on our experience to truly worship our God.

*Has there been a time when you have surrendered a desire or plan to God?*

DECEMBER 31, 2023

# 1.4

## FOCUS VERSES

Daniel 3:17-18

<sup>17</sup> If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

<sup>18</sup> But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden Image which thou hast set up.

## LESSON TEXT

Daniel 3:1-30

## TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God empowers us to live a holy life for a purpose.

## TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will pursue God's holiness to fulfill God's purpose.

SERIES 1: GOD'S HOLINESS . . . AND OURS

## HOLY FOR A PURPOSE



## BIBLE LESSON

### I. BABYLON DEMANDED WORSHIP

#### A. King Nebuchadnezzar Demanded Worship

It is almost impossible for us to imagine the trauma Daniel and his three friends must have experienced. They were taken as young children from their homes, transplanted into a foreign culture, cut off from all contact with their families, and then forcibly indoctrinated into the Babylonian way of life (even to the point of losing their given names). In addition, they were forced to watch (even cheer) as Nebuchadnezzar came parading home, bearing the treasures of Solomon's Temple, bragging about how he had destroyed the city of Jerusalem, never to rise again. To top it all, underlying the glitz and glamor of life in the palace was the constant reminder of the wealth, power, and superiority of all things Babylonian.

Somehow, these four young men found ways to resist the allure of all this power and privilege and to retain their distinctive Jewish identity. Sure, their actions seemed to be feeble gestures (i.e., refusing to eat the king's meat, Daniel 1:12-16), but they portrayed hearts steadfastly committed to living a holy, separated life.

Over time, the pressure to conform increased, the expectations became more challenging to navigate, and the threats for failing to comply became more drastic. Nebuchadnezzar's golden image represented a new level of Babylonian demand. It is unclear what the image represented, though it is possible it was a replicant of the image from his dream (Daniel 2:31-33) or perhaps an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself (Paul Lederach, *Daniel*). Whatever it depicted, it was Nebuchadnezzar's image, a monument to his growing pride.

To bow down to the image, then, was tantamount to worshiping Nebuchadnezzar as a god, making his demand a clear violation of the first two of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-4). However, not to bow risked certain death by burning in Nebuchadnezzar's specially designed fiery furnace.

#### B. The Three Hebrews Did Not Bow

Two important things are easy to overlook in this story. The first is: It is quite possible (perhaps even likely) that the Hebrews' decision not to bow would have escaped the king's notice if not for the Chaldean "tattletales." Clearly, the heart of their animosity was jealousy mixed with more than a good bit of old-fashioned racism: "There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon" (Daniel 3:12).

More important for us, though, is the fact that the Hebrews were likely aware of the animosity, yet they still elected to take a public stand. They had, in fact, been preparing for this

*Share a time when you felt pressured (at work, at school, and so on) to compromise your faith? How did you respond, and how did it turn out?*



moment ever since they arrived in Babylon. In some ways their earlier refusal to eat the king's meat is confusing; we are given no explicit reason, and there is nothing in Jewish dietary law that forbids the consumption of meat and wine or demands a strict vegetable diet. Perhaps such an action portrayed a level of friendly alliance with the king that they found unacceptable. It may have been that the Babylonians had made a meat offering to their gods and poured out a drink offering known as a libation to these false deities. The association with idols tainted the meat and the wine. However, their earlier dedication in this "minor" matter of personal conviction prepared them for this "major" confrontation with a transgressive demand.

We must give Nebuchadnezzar his due. Though angered, he acted justly in allowing the three Hebrews to speak for themselves, giving them a second chance to obey his command. However, the die was cast when the king added this scoffing question to his demand: "And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" (Daniel 3:15). Like long-ago Pharaoh, deluded Nebuchadnezzar imagined himself an all-powerful god who must be deposed by the one, true, living God of the Hebrews.

### C. I Will Worship God Alone

One easily overlooked subtheme in the stories of Daniel and his friends is the subtle critique of the insanity of godless human power. Over the stories related in Daniel 2-4, we see Nebuchadnezzar slowly coming "unhinged," eventually falling into complete madness. In chapter 3, the story almost takes on a comic edge. Within one chapter, Nebuchadnezzar styled himself a sculptor, orchestral arranger, and pyrotechnic engineer. It is difficult to imagine any image that was ten times as tall as it was wide looking like anything other than a terrible caricature of its subject. Nor is it possible to read the repeated references to "all kinds of musick" (Daniel 3:7, 15) without hearing the strained melodies of some off-key junior-high band. And anyone knows a fire that is "seven times" hotter does not burn "seven times" faster.

The writer of Daniel did not want his audience just to refuse to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image; he wanted the audience to *laugh* at it. The "glory" of Babylon was reduced to farce and sideshow. If Nebuchadnezzar did try to recreate the "image" from his dream in the previous chapter, the likeness was a dismal failure of artistic skill and symbolic power. (It was more "pole" than "person.")

Why should we, like the Hebrews, worship God alone? Simple. Because He is the only one truly worthy of worship. Who else measures up to the faithful righteousness and awesome power of our God? Senators? Celebrities? Professors? Presidents? None of them.

Like the Hebrews, we are bombarded daily with messages about the might and glory of our nation, our political party,

our economy. They demand from us loyalty and self-sacrifice, complete trust in the righteousness of their cause, total faith in their ability to deliver on all they promise, but these promises are all lies. As the product of human ingenuity and ability, these all are frail and failing realities, unable to save us in the end.

## II. GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO SEPARATION FOR A PURPOSE

### A. The Three Hebrews Took a Stand

Most important, they did not need to deliberate before they responded. In fact, it came without any titles of formal address (contra the conniving Chaldeans' flattering approach), perhaps a bit discourteous but a stinging reminder to the arrogant king that he, too, was merely human. However, there is an ambiguity in the Hebrews' reply, which is the second easily overlooked point. The King James Version, followed by many other translations, offers the following: "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us" (Daniel 3:17). No one had ever faced this circumstance before, and these young men fully recognized that God may choose *not* to deliver them (Daniel 3:18). Either way—whether God can or He can't, whether He does or He doesn't—their decision had been made: they would not bow.

The Hebrews' determination to live for God was never predicated on a guarantee of an easy or favorable outcome. Their dedication was not: "We will serve the Lord as long as it is convenient or popular or safe." No; the dedication they manifested was: "We will serve the Lord no matter what comes." The same kind of determination must drive our own commitment to holiness. If our convictions are only a matter of convenience, then they are not really convictions.

### B. Thrown into the Furnace

Again, the story takes on a somewhat humorous or, better, ironic edge. Nebuchadnezzar, who had successfully controlled his earlier anger, totally lost control to the point that his "visage [i.e., image] was changed" (Daniel 3:19). With his reddened face, bulging eyes, and foam gathering in the corners of his lips, the king looked nothing like the "image" he had erected.

He then ordered the Hebrews thrown—clothes and all (usually, they would have been stripped)—into the blazing furnace. The fire was so hot that it immediately killed the soldiers assigned to throw them in. Ironically, these men were the only ones who died in the story.

Bloodthirsty Nebuchadnezzar gazed into the furnace to see the flames consume these rebels, but he leapt up in astonishment when he saw a fourth figure in the fire, who looked like the "Son of God" (Daniel 3:25). Nebuchadnezzar, who had constructed an image of a "god" at the beginning of the chapter then saw one who looked like a god (i.e., an "image") in the fire. From

*What "furnaces" might we face as we live for God?*

Nebuchadnezzar's perspective, his tottering "god" stood there inert, unseeing, uncaring, while this other "god" in the fire was actively protecting the Hebrews.

### C. Bearing Witness to the Living God

When Nebuchadnezzar called the Hebrews forth from the furnace, not even the smell of smoke lingered on them (Daniel 3:27). The only thing missing were the ropes with which they had been bound. When Nebuchadnezzar had witnessed this miracle, he proclaimed: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him" (Daniel 3:28). Here is the greatest irony of all: earlier, King Nebuchadnezzar had scoffed: "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" (Daniel 3:15). Afterward, he answered his own question: it is the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

*What are some areas of our witness we easily ignore or overlook? How can we address these areas in helping make disciples?*

Nebuchadnezzar went even further—he reversed his decree. Instead of commanding all the people to bow and worship his "image," he commanded all the people not to say anything against the God of the Hebrews under penalty of an ignominious and torturous death because "there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (Daniel 3:29).

### D. I Will Pursue Holiness to Fulfill God's Purpose

We should not deceive ourselves: Daniel 3 is not the story of Nebuchadnezzar's conversion to the worship of Jehovah. As the later story of Daniel and the lion's den bears out (Daniel 6), the concluding truce achieved here was not long-lasting. Darker clouds soon gathered on the horizon; bigger threats to Israelite survival appeared (e.g., Haman). We might ask honestly, "Then what's the point?"

The Hebrews' admission that their God might not choose to deliver them was an ever-so-slight nod to the many thousands of Israelites (perhaps including their own parents) who lost their lives in the Babylonian conquest. There were other "fiery furnace" experiences in the Exile, many without the miraculous ending we see here.

We forget that, biblically speaking, witnessing can have two outcomes: conversion (the one we all hope for and the only one we celebrate) or condemnation. (See Matthew 12:41-42.) In a courtroom setting, the task of the witness is not to convict or exonerate or even to sway the jury; the witness's task is simply to witness, to faithfully represent what he or she knows to be true. The response is entirely out of the witness's hands. So it is with a life of holiness; along with our verbal testimony, holiness is a key part of our witness to the world.

JANUARY 7, 2024

# 2.1

SERIES 2: GOD IS FAITHFUL

## RUTH AND THE REDEEMER

### FOCUS VERSE

Ruth 3:11

And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirdest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.

### LESSON TEXT

Ruth 2:11-13; 3:8-14; 4:9-12

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God cares about every need in our lives.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will share God's love with those in need.



## BIBLE LESSON

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### I. RUTH AND NAOMI RETURN

The Book of Ruth begins with famine, death, and failure before taking a radical turn and ending in fullness, life, and blessing. The narrative reveals that even when we face our most difficult circumstances, God demonstrates care for all the needs in our lives. No matter what happens or what decisions we make, God can still intervene. The power of God's love can profoundly change our situation.

The story starts in the days of the judges with a man named Elimelech and his family dealing with famine in Bethlehem, a city whose name means "house of bread" in Hebrew. Elimelech chose to journey to Moab because he heard there was food in the country. While some have criticized Elimelech for leaving the house of bread, we cannot ignore the fact that other men in the Old Testament left the Promised Land during times of famine. Dearth in the days of Abraham and Sarah sent them to Egypt and Gerar. Isaac and Rebekah stayed in Gerar during a famine. The entire family of Israel moved to Egypt because the Lord sent Joseph ahead of them to save the world from famine.

Elimelech had good reason and precedence for his choice. Plus, his name may also prove telling. Elimelech means "my God is King." In the days of the judges, when there was no king and everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25), Elimelech recognized the sovereignty of God. Since the Israelites behaved terribly in the days of the judges, perhaps Elimelech thought Moab would be a better place for his family. Despite seemingly being a good man, Elimelech's decision proved fatal. He would leave his wife Naomi with a heavily burdened heart.

#### A. Naomi's Destitution

Although life seemed good in Moab when her two sons found wives, Naomi soon faced the devastation of seeing her husband and her boys die. She decided to leave Moab, traveling down heartbreak road in the hope of finding some solace back in her homeland. However, she had few prospects for the future. As a widow so long gone from home, she could expect some help from her relatives. But the goodness of life had faded and passed away, buried in the tombs of her husband and her sons.

Naomi expressed her despair and destitution to her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. Naomi informed them that she had no more children in her womb nor the ability to bear them. Sounding as though she spoke out of her mind in a crazed way, she further informed them that even if she could have sons, the two women would not wait for them until they grew up.

Orpah understood the message and left. Orpah had likely only followed her mother-in-law out of a sense of duty. With each step, she looked for a way out of her situation. Perhaps she wanted to find the right time to speak up and say goodbye to Naomi so she could return home. Finally, Naomi broke the silence and gave her a reprieve. Orpah saw her cue and headed for the exit.

### B. Ruth's Amazing Commitment

Ruth, however, missed Naomi's very human cue. But in doing so, she was in perfect sync with the divine cue. She did not return with Orpah even though convention and common sense dictated she go back to Moab. Journeying with Naomi would make her more of a burden than an asset. A widow like Naomi could find kinfolk to assist her. If Ruth accompanied her, the relatives would assume Ruth would provide for her mother-in-law. At the time, Ruth's decision seemed unwise on multiple levels.

Nevertheless, Ruth remained steadfast, refusing to leave Naomi. She made many promises in her famous words in Ruth 1:16-17. Most tellingly, she vowed that Naomi's God would be her God.

*How can we look past the words of others, see their hurt, and help them?*

### C. I Will Care for the Hurting

We must all take advantage of opportunities to care for the hurting. On many occasions they may lash out at us and tell us they do not need our help, our prayers, or our God. They may be so upset that they talk out of their minds, just like Naomi. Despite their attempts to send us away, we must not miss our cue to help them. We must look beyond their words and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. God may have a greater plan, one not dictated by their words of despondency.

## II. RUTH'S ENCOUNTERS WITH BOAZ

Because Ruth was on cue in her decision to accompany Naomi to Bethlehem, the Lord put her on a divine trajectory to give Naomi what she needed. Although Naomi did not have a son to give Ruth, Ruth could give Naomi another son. When someone died in Israel, a family member could raise up a child that counted as their own child. God had orchestrated an ingenious plan that turned Naomi's words of nonsense about bearing sons into a new plan. Because of Ruth, Naomi would soon hold a child that counted as her own. God showed care for every need in Naomi's life. While she might have thought she just needed sustenance, the Lord knew she needed much more and gave her the desires of heart.

### A. In the Field

Ruth started down the path by going to glean in a field, seeking food for her mother-in-law and herself. We see the beauty of God's plan in the narrator's note about Ruth, stating "her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech" (Ruth 2:3). As we read this line, we can almost see the narrator winking knowingly to the reader.

Far from being something that “just so happened,” the Lord had intentionally and strategically placed Ruth in Boaz’s view under his protection.

Boaz ensured Ruth had plenty of food and water as she gleaned. In fact, he went beyond the requirement of the Torah that allowed the poor to glean the corners of a field (Leviticus 23:22). He commanded his workers to allow handfuls of purpose to fall to her. Boaz also defended Ruth. Some hirelings working for Boaz might have thought they could take advantage of a foreign woman, but Boaz ensured her safety.

Boaz acted the way he did because he was a man of standing or a man of substance. The description spoke of his wealth. Boaz, however, proved that the statement also revealed his character.

### B. At the Threshing Floor

God had beautifully orchestrated the meeting between the man of substance and the Moabitess Ruth. Nevertheless, Naomi seemed to feel that Boaz had missed his cues. After all, a young woman had gleaned in his fields, drank from his well, and eaten at his table. Perhaps Boaz needed a bit more motivation to see the wonderful opportunity right in front of him.

Naomi told Ruth to wash, anoint herself, get dressed, and head down to the threshing floor to meet Boaz. Ruth followed Naomi’s instructions precisely. When she arrived, she found Boaz sleeping at the end of a heap of corn after his night of eating and drinking. Ruth lay at his feet.

When Boaz discovered Ruth around midnight, he sought her identity. When she revealed who she was, she asked him to spread his skirt over her because he was a near kinsmen. Many scholars suggest that by this request, she essentially proposed. Boaz thanked Ruth for her kindness and vowed to attend to the matter.

Boaz continued to take care of Ruth and go beyond mere requirements. Before she left the threshing floor, Boaz asked for her veil. He measured out barley for her and put it in her veil to prevent her from going empty-handed to her mother-in-law.

### C. I Will Put My Faith into Action

When we have followed all the cues of the Lord, we must put our faith into action. As we watch the Lord place us in favorable situations, we must not simply rely on the Almighty to do all the work. We must engage our faith by taking action. We must apply for the promotion. We must seek ministry opportunities. We must talk to those who can help us fulfill our dreams.

Faith is not a passive concept. Faith must be put into action.

*Have you ever had a situation that first appeared to be coincidence, but later you saw the hand of God in your life? Share this testimony.*

*How do you need to put your faith into action?*

### ''' BOAZ THE REDEEMER

Boaz proved as good as his word. Although Boaz may not have fully recognized his previous cues, he now understood the significance of the moment before him and desired to seize the day. Although we know little of his backstory, we can see that God wanted to bless a man of character and substance by redeeming Ruth and Naomi.

#### A. Boaz Was Aware of Ruth's Sacrificial Action

Boaz acted because he saw something of himself in Ruth. The Bible describes Boaz as a man of substance, and the text utilizes similar wording to describe Ruth as a woman of substance. Although some might focus on Boaz's wealth, God clearly wanted to show that substance, standing, and character do not arise only from riches. The widow Ruth had no wealth or social position, especially as a member of an ethnic minority. Yet God recognized her worth. Her sacrificial action to assist Naomi would not go unrewarded.

*How can we allow God to work through us even though we feel powerless?*

#### B. Boaz Honored Ruth's Bold Request

Boaz also recognized the extreme value of someone like Ruth. He knew of everything she had done for her mother-in-law. While some might have initially said negative things behind Ruth's back due to their potential distaste for Moabites, their tune soon changed when they observed the faithfulness of Ruth as she helped Naomi.

In fact, when Boaz proposed his plan to marry Ruth, he told Ruth that other people saw her as a woman of standing. In the threshing floor, Boaz informed Ruth that everyone in Bethlehem recognized her as a woman of substance (Ruth 3:11). The same Hebrew phrase is used to describe a virtuous woman (i.e., the ideal wife) in Proverbs 12:4; 31:10.

When the Bethlehemites heard that Boaz would marry Ruth, they publicly proclaimed her value and her potential for more greatness (Ruth 4:11). They prayed that Ruth would be like Rachel and Leah, who built the house of Israel. Ruth would add to this house by being in the lineage of David and Jesus. She would be famous because she stepped out boldly.

#### C. I Will Share God's Love with Those in Need

Like Boaz, we must step out and seek to redeem others. Sometimes we may think it is someone else's responsibility. There may be those who appear to be more gifted than we are. Yet the Lord has called all of us to minister to those in need. We must not put all the burden on pastors, ministerial leadership, or other members of the church. We must do our part for those in need by sharing God's love.

*Who is someone you know who needs redemption? How can you help this person?*



JANUARY 14, 2024

SERIES 2: GOD IS FAITHFUL

# 2.2

## THREE DAYS IN THE DEEP

**FOCUS VERSE**

**Jonah 4:4**  
Then said the LORD,  
Dost thou well to  
be angry?

**LESSON TEXT**

**Jonah 4:1-11**

**TRUTH ABOUT GOD**

God's grace and  
mercy extend to  
everyone.

**TRUTH FOR MY LIFE**

I will rejoice in  
God's mercy to my  
enemies.



## BIBLE LESSON

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### I. NINEVEH, THE GREAT CITY

Nineveh was a huge city in the ancient world. Numerous people traveled to this metropolis due to the many opportunities its bustling economic center provided for trade. Now present-day Mosul in Iraq, the city of Nineveh took its name from its patron goddess Ishtar. The name likely meant “House of the goddess.”

The leaders of the Assyrian empire who controlled Nineveh featured a who’s who of ancient history. The great lawgiver Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC) known for his famous code conquered the region. Shalmaneser (1274-1245 BC) built walls, a palace, and a temple in the city. Tiglath-Pileser I (1115-1076 BC) helped to strengthen Assyrian power. Later the city and Assyrian dominance became greater with the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, beginning in 911 BC.

Nineveh featured palaces, temples, paintings, and gardens that added to its splendor. In fact, the city included the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Gardens like that one and others could flourish since citizens had easy access to water due to the aqueduct system.

Despite Nineveh’s wonders, the prophet Jonah hated the city and its Assyrians inhabitants. We can date Jonah to around the eighth century BC. Events in his time and beyond fueled the flames of animosity against the Assyrians.

#### A. Assyria, Israel’s Most Fearsome Enemy

The Assyrian Empire greatly affected the politics in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The Syrians and the Northern Kingdom of Israel formed an alliance to defeat the Assyrians. Seeking troops from Judah, they attempted to depose King Ahaz and set up a puppet king during the Syro-Ephraimite War (736-732 BC). Despite Isaiah’s warnings, King Ahaz sought help from the Assyrians and ended up paying them a great deal of tribute.

The Assyrians eventually defeated the coalition of Syrian and Israelite troops. In 722 BC, the Assyrians destroyed Samaria and deported the Israelites. Some of these northerners may have seen the coming destruction of their kingdom and traveled to Judah, preserving historical texts. The Southern Kingdom, however, also faced the threat of the Assyrians. In the days of Hezekiah, the king rebelled against the Assyrians and nearly faced the demise of his kingdom. Miraculously, the Lord saved Jerusalem.

The city and the king escaped a horrible fate. The pages of history feature the cries of Assyrian victims and run red with their blood. The Assyrians enacted some of the worst forms of torture and punishment on their victims. Assyrian cruelty knew no bounds.

*What does “roots of hatred” mean, and how do we avoid it?*

Jonah was not the only person who hated the Assyrians. Near the end of the Assyrian Empire, numerous subjects revolted. Their rebellions went beyond achieving victory or freedom. They wanted to punish the Assyrians for their brutality.

### **B. God’s Plan to Redeem the Nations**

History makes the Assyrians seem completely irredeemable due to their ruthlessness. Since God often punished the wicked for going too far, Jonah likely had every reason to believe that God would give the Assyrians a more-than-justified, well-deserved punishment. God, however, felt something besides anger when He looked at the Assyrians. He recognized the desperate need of humanity and felt mercy.

While we often think of God reaching out for just one person, God wants to redeem and bring salvation not only to individuals, but also to towns, cities, countries, and regions of the world. God has a redemptive plan that can challenge our human ideas about justice. We may see the punishment of the Lord as a righteous act. If a city behaves wickedly, then we may feel that justice is justified. However, many innocents get caught up in any calamity. Wars, natural disasters, and other problems come at a heavy price.

### **C. I Will Remember There Are No Limits to God’s Love**

Nevertheless, we may wonder why God would go to such lengths to save a wicked city like Nineveh in an evil empire. Perhaps the Lord chose to show such mercy to teach us a lesson. We all make mistakes. Sadly, sometimes our sins seem so great that we think we have gone far beyond even the reach of God’s love.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Our own disappointment in ourselves and the voices of judgmental people as well as the enemy of our soul may make us feel as though we can never find our way back to God. We may believe we are too far gone. But if the Lord can love a terrible city like Nineveh and show grace, compassion, and mercy to all the people there, despite their sins, then we know God’s love truly has no limits.

*What are some ways the Lord has shown limitless love to you?*

## **II. JONAH’S REBELLION**

Jonah knew about the love and mercy of God. Unfortunately, he saw the Lord’s compassion as detrimental to his own desires. Ironically, Jonah rebelled against the Lord for this very odd reason. In explaining his disobedience to the Lord, the errant prophet said, “I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil” (Jonah 4:2). Despite knowing *about* God, Jonah did not truly know God.

Because of his skewed vision of the Almighty, Jonah held out the horrible hope that the Lord would pour out judgment on the Assyrians. At the same time, the prophet knew another

side of God. He knew the Lord could be forgiving. Rather than embracing the mercy of God, Jonah feared what it might mean for him and his reputation as a prophet.

### A. Jonah Fled to Tarshish

Even though the Lord had told Jonah to share a message of repentance with Nineveh, Jonah had no desire to participate in their salvation. Imagine being given the opportunity to preach one of the world's greatest revivals with the assurance of widespread repentance, only to run away instead of embracing the call. Jonah did just that. He fled to Tarshish.

The opening chapter of Jonah gives the prophet's downward journey. He went down to Joppa. He went down to the ship and then down into the lower part of the ship. Eventually, he found himself going down into the sea, being swallowed by a great fish, and heading even deeper into the depths of the sea. Jonah's life was a real downer.

### B. Jonah's Prayer

In the midst of his terrible ordeal, Jonah knew the Lord was with him in this watery version of Hell. Jonah had gone down about as far as humanly possible. The height of his rebellion had taken him down to the bottoms of the mountains.

Jonah's plight brings to mind the words of the psalmist: "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (Psalm 139:8). Thankfully, the fleeing Jonah realized he could not escape the Lord.

In his odd predicament, Jonah remembered the Lord. He remembered the God of mercy and cried out. In his prayer, the prophet promised to sacrifice unto the Lord with the voice of thanksgiving because Jonah recognized that salvation comes from the Lord.

### C. I Will Repent of My Rebellion

We too must repent of our rebellion. Perhaps we never intended to stray away from the Lord. Perhaps we started out with lofty goals. We wanted the Lord to use us. We might have hoped the Lord would reveal a prophetic word to us.

We might have found ourselves fervently praying in a service for God to take us to higher heights and deeper depths. But then rebellion crept in, and we found ourselves descending to the wrong kind of depths. We headed in the opposite direction of God's plan.

During these troubling times of our own making, we must seek the face of the Lord. We must repent of our rebellion. We must recognize that salvation only comes from the Lord.

*Why do you think God sometimes has to take extreme measures to encourage us to repent?*

### III. JONAH'S REJECTION

Because of Jonah's repentance, God gave Jonah a second chance, causing the great fish to spit out Jonah on dry land. The mission, however, remained the same. The prophet still needed to journey to Nineveh and preach a message of repentance, but Jonah still hated the Ninevites and wished for their destruction.

#### A. Nineveh's Repentance and Jonah's Anger

Nevertheless, Jonah preached a message of repentance, warning of the overthrow of the city in forty days if things did not change. The ultimatum worked. The people proclaimed a fast, and all participated from the greatest to the least. Even the king put on sackcloth and ashes. The people trusted in the possibility that the Lord would turn and repent of His fierce anger, and they would be saved.

#### B. God's Questions

Jonah, however, still wished to see the destruction of the city. The perplexed prophet prepared a booth on the east side of Nineveh and waited for the fireworks to start. The Lord prepared a gourd to provide shade over Jonah. Jonah rejoiced in the respite from the sun that the plant offered him.

The next day Jonah felt as though tragedy had struck him. A worm ate the gourd. The gourd withered, removing the blessed shade that covered Jonah. The Lord sent a strong east wind to trouble Jonah as the sun beat down upon him. Jonah wished to die. The Lord questioned whether Jonah should feel angry due to the loss of the gourd. Like a petulant child, Jonah claimed he had the right to be angry, even unto death. Then the Lord showed Jonah the lesson He had wanted to teach the erring prophet by providing the gourd.

Jonah had pity on the gourd even though he did not work for it or make it grow. The gourd sprung up in a night and perished in a night. If Jonah cared so much for the gourd, then the Lord asked the prophet why the Almighty should not spare the great city of Nineveh with all its people. The Book of Jonah gives God the last word about the power of mercy.

*Why do we sometimes feel we have a right to be angry? How can we overcome feelings of anger?*

#### C. I Will Rejoice in God's Mercy on My Enemies

We all should be careful about judging Jonah too harshly. We too may have had the same feelings about those who have wronged us. The Lord, however, calls us to go against our human nature and rejoice in God's mercy for our enemies. Even if we feel like they deserve punishment, we cannot know all the struggles they face. Additional struggles or troubles will not actually help them to be better people, but mercy might. Therefore, I will rejoice when God shows mercy to my enemies even if others do not think it makes any sense.

*Who in your life may need mercy rather than judgment?*

JANUARY 21, 2024

# 2.3

SERIES 2: GOD IS FAITHFUL

## STANDING TALL ON HIS KNEES

### FOCUS VERSE

Daniel 6:10

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

### LESSON TEXT

Daniel 6:10-13, 16-28

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God's favor in my life is not dependent on ideal circumstances.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will trust God to deliver me from my trials.



## BIBLE LESSON

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### I. DANIEL'S SUCCESS

Daniel could have taken the easy path to success in the Babylonian Empire. As one of the first deportees during multiple exiles of Jews to Babylon, the young man faced the very difficult decision of whether he would remain true to godly values or obey all of the new influences around him. Daniel chose wisely to be faithful to God.

An opportunity to demonstrate his faithfulness presented itself when Daniel and his friends refused to drink the king's wine or eat of the king's meat. Perhaps enjoying the king's fare portrayed a level of friendly alliance with the king that they found unacceptable, or the Babylonians had made a meat offering to their gods and poured out a drink offering to their false deities. Either way, Daniel and his friends asked to eat vegetables and water. The person in charge of the Hebrew boys feared they would not fare as well as the others under his charge. God blessed Daniel's commitment to righteousness, and at the end of a ten-day test, Daniel and his friends looked better than the others.

Later, in Daniel chapter 2, they faced the difficult task of being asked to interpret a dream even though King Nebuchadnezzar could not remember the dream. Confronting his own death, the demise of his friends, and the slaughter of the wise men of Babylon, Daniel asked for time to pray. Daniel prayed to the God of wisdom. God answered Daniel.

Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation of his dream. As a result, the monarch advanced Daniel and his three friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—in the kingdom. Daniel knew the secret to his success was prayer, but that ace might just turn into a wild card if some of his comrades had their way.

#### A. Daniel's Excellent Spirit

Daniel's life was built upon the success of his prayers. Due to his consistent prayer life, Daniel developed an excellent spirit. The Lord deemed the words of his mouth and the meditations of his heart acceptable. As a result, the Lord gave Daniel a wonderful attitude.

An old saying tells us that our attitude determines our altitude. We can always fly higher when we act appropriately. Nothing could be truer in a king's court. One wrong word could mean demotion or even death. In fact, the Book of Proverbs provides a great deal of advice to young people on how to properly conduct themselves in the palace. Daniel and his three friends needed even more knowledge of decorum and protocol given their status as outsiders.

*How can you demonstrate an excellent spirit in your daily life?*

Daniel's attitude had determined his altitude as he rose to one of the most prominent positions in the kingdom. Yet he had achieved such a high altitude by humbly bowing down in prayer. Despite his prestige in the kingdom, Daniel knew his success came from the Lord. The excellent spirit that raised him in the ranks was the direct result of a posture of prayer.

### **B. God's Favor**

God poured out his favor on Daniel. Most remarkably, God continued to support Daniel throughout changing circumstances. Daniel 5 tells the story of Daniel prophesying that the Babylonian Empire would give way to the Persian Empire. The very night that Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall saw the prophecy fulfilled. Many historians believe that the Persians diverted a river, giving them easy access to defeat the Babylonians.

Daniel not only survived in this situation, but he also thrived. Just as he had risen in power in the Babylonian Empire, even so God raised him above other leaders in the Persian Empire. Although the laws, customs, and rulers were different, Daniel relied on the steadfastness of his relationship with God. Everything else could change, but as long as Daniel's connection to the Lord remained strong, the favor of God continued to lift up Daniel.

### **C. Faithful Obedience Brings God's Blessings**

Daniel stands as a strong example of faithful obedience. We too must remain faithful in the midst of changing and sometimes difficult situations. Like Daniel, we might face a corporate takeover at work that brings in new people, policies, and leaders. We might fear losing our job or wonder if we can manage the challenges ahead. Daniel's life gives us strength to face these situations. Although we cannot see everything in front of us, we have a God who has gone before us.

Let's remember all the great things the Almighty has already done for us. Instead of casting our cares on tomorrow, let us cast our cares on the Lord.

God has proven faithful to us. During difficult times, Daniel remembered all the ways the Lord had walked with him from Judah to Babylon. Perhaps when he prayed, Daniel testified of the goodness of God and thanked the Almighty for salvation and deliverance.

## **II. DANIEL'S PERSECUTION**

Even in the midst of faithful obedience, we may face persecution. Our human response may be to declare the complete unfairness of our situation. We have no idea why on earth we should be punished, especially when we feel as though we have done everything in our power to do what is good, acceptable, right, and pleasing in the sight of God.



When we consider these issues, an uncomfortable, but important, truth comes to light. Sometimes we face persecution because of our faithfulness. Our trials are not the result of sin; rather, our troubles are the result of righteous living. Like Daniel and Job, we must recognize the source of our trials. We must refuse to give up, despite our difficulties.

*How could faithfulness lead to persecution or other problems?*

#### A. Darius's Decree

Sometimes, however, our trials make it seem as though the whole world is against us. In Daniel's case, it certainly felt like that. Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes in the realm. As a result, they desired to take him down. Because they could find no fault in Daniel, they even went so far as to have the king make a decree they knew Daniel could not obey.

Darius decreed that for the next thirty days, no one could ask a petition of any god or human except the king. Anyone who violated the law would be cast into a den of lions. Daniel would have to contend with a pride of lions due to the pride of the king. While Daniel had remained ethical, his co-workers had played dirty. Since nothing else worked to defeat Daniel, they resorted to a trick play. But would Daniel bite?

#### B. Daniel's Response

Daniel could have chosen not to pray for thirty days. If he could have outlasted the evil scheme of the presidents and princes for a month, then all would have been well once again. Daniel, however, saw the big picture. He knew that faithfulness mattered. He also knew the presidents and princes would not stop until they had won. No matter what they did, Daniel would not stop praying.

#### C. Faithful Obedience Brings Worldly Resistance

While we may want the Lord to reward us for our faithful obedience, we must be aware of the worldly resistance that may arise from doing the right thing. When we pray, the Lord blesses us with an excellent spirit and the opportunity for advancement. Others may despise our blessings and seek to harm us or destroy us. Like Daniel we must continue praying. Our spirituality is not conditional on our emotions. Our faithfulness is not conditional. Instead, it should be consistent, just like Daniel's.

*How could you become more consistent in your personal spiritual habits?*

### III. DANIEL'S DELIVERANCE

Doing the right thing led Daniel into one of the most difficult trials of his life. Even King Darius felt sorry for Daniel. Realizing he had been bamboozled, the king hoped Daniel's God would deliver Daniel. The king could do nothing to help his friend because he had made such a foolish decree.

Daniel's deliverance depended on God and God alone. For some unknown reason, Daniel's three friends do not appear in this

story. They could not help him. The king could not help him. Many of Daniel's colleagues would not even want to help him.

God intervened. The Almighty sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. What should have been a terrible ordeal that ended in horrific death proved to be yet another miracle for Daniel. He had walked through the valley of the shadow of death. He had feared no evil, for God was with him.

#### A. Darius's Love for Daniel

Even though the king could not be on Daniel's side because of his foolish decree, he still loved Daniel. King Darius's love for Daniel reveals the divine favor of God. Daniel's excellent spirit cultivated by prayer had caused the king to love him.

*What are some ways God has given you favor with others?*

In fact, the king had spent the night fasting for Daniel. King Darius had hoped the lions would follow his example. Miraculously, the "kings of beasts" followed the example of the king.

#### B. God's Miraculous Intervention and the Aftermath

The lions chose not to partake of the prophet due to the Lord sending an angel to shut their mouths. Daniel's innocence saved him. Although the court of public opinion and even a foolish law decreed death, the Lord overturned the death sentence because the Almighty rules over birds and beasts—including the mighty lions.

The tables were reversed for those who wished ill will toward Daniel and even courted his destruction. Darius commanded his soldiers to round up the presidents and princes and throw them into the lions' den. Famished from their night of fasting, the lions enjoyed their main courses.

#### C. I Will Trust God to Deliver Me from My Trials

Like Daniel, we must trust God to deliver us from our trials. Sometimes we can create bad situations for ourselves, but that is not always the case. Trials may also arise because we are doing what is right.

We live in a world where politicians, bosses, and other leaders can make strange decrees for bad reasons. These situations have the potential to harm us. Yet we can rise above them.

The story of Daniel brings to mind another narrative from the Persian period. Esther and Mordecai also faced a foolish decree made by a king. They trusted in God to deliver them from their trials.

*What is something you need to trust the Lord for right now?*

The Bible provides numerous examples of the delivering power of God. Whenever we find ourselves in a difficult situation, we should remember their testimonies and trust God to deliver us. Someday people may read about our testimonies just like they read about the testimonies of Daniel, Esther, and Mordecai.

JANUARY 28, 2024

SERIES 2: GOD IS FAITHFUL

# 2.4

## GOD SAVED THE QUEEN

**FOCUS VERSE**

Esther 4:14

And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

**LESSON TEXT**

Esther 4:4-16

**TRUTH ABOUT GOD**

God often works out His will through adverse circumstances.

**TRUTH FOR MY LIFE**

I will face my circumstances with courageous faith.



## BIBLE LESSON

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### I. ESTHER BECAME QUEEN

The story of Esther took place in the Persian Empire. Although the Jews faced genocide in the Book of Esther, the Persians generally treated the Jews favorably. After defeating the Babylonians and becoming the superpower of the day, the Persians allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. The decree of Cyrus the Great reversed the Exile and the seventy years in captivity. The Persians also allowed the Jews to rebuild their Temple. Nevertheless, many of these Diaspora Jews remained in their countries.

#### A. Vashti's Rejection

The positive treatment the Jews received under the Persian Empire makes the narrative in Esther seem quite surprising. At the same time, the text reveals the fickleness of kings. Ahasuerus also known as Xerxes I ruled over the Persian Empire. The Book of Esther portrays the king as capricious, buffoonish, and even despicable.

No one knew the depths of his disappointing nature like Queen Vashti. During a showcase of his kingdom featuring multiple parties of feasting and drinking, the king demanded that Vashti appear before him and the men attending his party. Vashti refused the king's request.

The story of Esther provides us with key insights into the character of Ahasuerus. When Vashti refused to appear before him, the king's advisors convinced him that the actions of one woman would affect all the women in the kingdom. If the queen did not obey her king, then widespread rebellion of women against their husbands would break out in the empire. The exaggeration of these advisors and the king's banishment of Vashti reveals the poor judgment of Ahasuerus. The king acted despicably, and Vashti paid the price.

#### B. Esther's Selection

After the king's wrath waned, the servants sought virgins to possibly serve as the new queen. Esther found herself chosen. Her relative Mordecai forbade her to reveal her Jewish heritage. Therefore, Esther entered the chamber of the women on a secret mission from God that she herself did not even realize.

Esther knew the difficulty of her situation because she had likely heard stories about Jews being persecuted in foreign lands. Obeying Mordecai and keeping her identity hidden seemed like the best course of action. Still, Esther wondered how everything would turn out.

Following Mordecai's advice had proven exceedingly beneficial. As a result, Esther trusted in the guidance of Hegai, the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women. While many other women demanded lots of items before going into the king's chambers,

Esther simply took what Hegai had appointed. Esther's kindness and her good demeanor caused her to gain favor with everyone who saw her. The king saw her worth and made her his queen.

### C. God Is Still at Work in Difficult Situations

Esther faced the tough reality of being taken from her home, being forced to keep her identity a secret, and being placed in a competition for the queenship among young women from all over the empire. Despite the difficulties before Esther, God still worked in her situation. Although Ahasuerus proved to be an extremely capricious king, the Almighty proved faithful to Esther. In the same way, we must recognize God's ability to work in situations, no matter how strange or onerous they are.

*Why do you think God moves in mysterious ways?*

## II. HAMAN'S GENOCIDAL PLOT

The wicked Haman exacerbated the difficulties for Esther and Mordecai. Ahasuerus had proven extremely pliable in the situation with Vashti, and the evil Haman saw an opportunity to capitalize on his good relationship with the king and take down an enemy. Haman did not just want to punish Mordecai; he wanted to exterminate all the Jews.

Thankfully, Esther had hidden her pedigree as a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. Readers of the text often notice Haman's background. The Bible describes him as an Agagite. First Samuel 15 tells the story of Saul the Benjamite king being told to destroy all the Amalekites, including King Agag. Saul did not follow through on the command. His poor decision led to the current problem for the Jews. A woman from the tribe of Benjamin would need to step in and complete a divine command where a king had failed.

### A. Enmity between Mordecai and Haman

The problem between the Jews and Haman arose over Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman. As a result, Haman blamed all the Jews for the behavior of one Jew. Racial hatred and ethnic strife often arise due to terrible stereotypes that lead to broad, erroneous categorizations. Haman's hatred of Mordecai and all Jews represents one of the earliest examples of Anti-Semitism in history.

Haman's utter disdain for Mordecai led him to formulate a plan to destroy all the Jews. Obtaining the permission of the fickle king proved easy for Haman. In his discussion with Ahasuerus, Haman used the language that racists often use by talking about a "certain people" who did terrible things in the empire. Haman lacked any real proof of wrongdoing. Fortunately for him, the king lacked wisdom and failed to care for all his subjects. Unfortunately for the Jews and Mordecai, Ahasuerus allowed a death decree to be pronounced upon them. Haman cast Pur, that is the lot, to determine the date of disaster for the Jews. Providentially, the timing presented a window to change the difficult situation for the better.

*How can we best use our time to allow the Lord to make a bad situation better?*

## B. Esther's Resolve

Esther soon discovered the problem she and her fellow Jews faced. Esther heard about everything her relative Mordecai had done in response to the king's decree. Although Esther wore royal robes, Mordecai had rent his clothes. Although Esther had servants to ensure her garments were impeccably cleaned, Mordecai dressed in sackcloth and ashes. Esther remained safe in the palace, while Mordecai sat at the king's gate and cried out bitterly.

Esther attempted to intervene for Mordecai by sending garments to clothe him. Mordecai refused. Esther would need to do much more to save her people.

Due to her position of power and relationship with the king, Esther might have thought she could escape the decree of the king. Mordecai worked to convince Esther that she might have her position for another reason—not to save herself, but to save her people. Mordecai asked her, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). Esther vowed to go in unto the king even though the king had not called her, risking the same fate as Vashti. Esther resolutely stated, "If I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). Esther listened to Mordecai and determined to save her people even though it could cost her everything.

## C. Doing God's Will Requires Great Courage

Sometimes we can find ourselves in a safe place of blessing thanks to God's plan. Yet the Lord calls on us to demonstrate great courage and step out by faith to reverse something terrible. The challenge may prove even more intense because we might have to stand up for someone else, and doing so would create risk for us. Nevertheless, we must move outside of our comfort zone and fully embrace the will of God.

*How can we overcome our hesitancy to act and demonstrate great courage?*

## III. ESTHER SAVED HER PEOPLE

Esther and her maids, along with the Jews in Shushan including Mordecai, fasted to help Esther prepare to save the people. Doing so allowed her to formulate a clever plan to counteract the evil scheme of Haman. The situation that gave Esther her position had arisen because the king spent so much time partying. The festive mood had caused Ahasuerus to take the crown away from Vashti. Esther also hoped she could ply the king with feasting and drinking in order to help him hear her petition.

### A. Esther's Wisdom and Haman's Folly

Esther demonstrated tremendous wisdom in preparing a couple of feasts for both her husband and Haman. Esther understood how the king worked. Haman, however, proved himself more foolish than wise as he failed to read the king quite so well.

The beginning of Haman's downfall occurred when the king could not sleep. To alleviate his insomnia, the king asked for the royal records to be read before him. The archives contained the story of Mordecai preventing an assassination attempt on Ahasuerus. When the king discovered that Mordecai had received no reward for his lifesaving deed, he summoned Haman.

Ahasuerus asked what should be done to the man whom the king delighted to honor. The presumptuous Haman assumed the king desired to honor him. Haman proposed the honoree be clothed in the king's royal robes and paraded through the city on the king's horse as someone proclaimed, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour" (Esther 6:9).

In one of the best scenes of poetic justice ever, the king commanded Haman to give this honor to Mordecai. A scowling and embarrassed Haman reluctantly led Mordecai through the city. Mordecai had gone from wearing sackcloth to donning the king's robes.

*How have you seen God radically change a bad situation?*

### **B. Esther's Success and Haman's Destruction**

Esther would also succeed in her mission, but not before Haman tightened the proverbial noose more tightly around his own neck. He had gallows built so he could execute Mordecai. Although some translations use the word *gallows*, the text most likely refers to a pole where Haman could impale his enemy.

Esther would put the final nail in Haman's coffin at the second banquet. Esther told the king of the pending destruction of her people. When the king discovered that Haman was the culprit, he decreed that Haman be impaled on the pole he had prepared for Mordecai.

The king, however, could not reverse the decree against the Jews. To counteract the previous plan, the king allowed the Jews to defend themselves on the day decided by Pur, the lot. The Jews defeated their enemies and celebrated with a new Jewish holiday known as Purim that is celebrated unto this day.

### **C. I Will Face My Circumstances with Courageous Faith**

Hopefully, we will not face such terrible circumstances as Esther and Mordecai. Even if we do, we can increase our faith by thinking about the situation in the Book of Esther. The Jews went from potential genocide to great victory. They even threw a party and created a new holiday to celebrate.

*How can you celebrate God's delivering power in your life?*

We should face every circumstance with courageous faith. Although we may lack personal courage, perhaps the Lord has placed us in certain situations for a very specific purpose. We must have faith in God and the courage to step out by faith.

FEBRUARY 4, 2024

# 3.1

**FOCUS VERSE**

**John 5:36**

But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.

**LESSON TEXT**

**John 5:1-47**

**TRUTH ABOUT GOD**

Jesus Is God In flesh.

**TRUTH FOR MY LIFE**

I will be a witness and testify that Jesus is who He said He is.

SERIES 3: THE BREAD OF LIFE

## THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS





## BIBLE LESSON

### I. JESUS HEALED THE MAN WHO WAS DISABLED

#### A. Jesus' Question and the Man's Response

Jesus was not a household name, but after He turned water into wine at a wedding, people were asking questions about Him. Who is He? How does He do that? What else can He do? Within days Jerusalem was bustling with travelers and tourists coming to the feast. When Jesus arrived, He led His followers past the merchants peddling their overpriced wares and into one of the saddest sights in Jerusalem. Jesus clearly wasn't angling for a tour guide job because this was one area of town you didn't take tourists.

Wow them with the grandeur of the Temple or with the pomp and circumstance of the Roman soldiers at the Antonia Fortress, but don't take them to Bethesda. It was teeming with hurting humanity. The Book of John records the sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed were all eking out their living at the Pool of Bethesda. They all wanted healing, but they believed they had to wait until the waters in the pool were troubled.

As Jesus wound His way through this sea of sickness and paralysis, He met a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. Jesus knew exactly when the man was laid there and when he left there, so He cut right past chitchat and asked a seemingly obvious question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5:6).

Would you like to be well? Ask an eagle, "Would you like to soar?" Ask a cheetah, "Would you like to run?" Ask a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years, "Would you like to be well?" Of course!

But the man didn't give Jesus an answer, just an excuse. "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me" (John 5:7). I would be well already, but no one will help me. The man was about to lament his fortieth anniversary of being disabled. Thirty-eight years ago, he lost strength. A few years later, he lost hope.

#### B. Jesus Healed the Man

Jesus did not even flinch. He commanded the man, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk" (John 5:8). Immediately, a man who had not walked in forty years save two, stood, steadied himself, and walked. One simple command from Jesus Christ erased a generation-long illness and gave the man a brand-new beginning. As this man carried his bed away from the pool, we may be left with more questions than answers. Why did Jesus heal this man? Did this man even have faith? Were other sick

*Why do you think the man at the pool of Bethesda offered an excuse rather than a genuine answer?*

*How would you have responded if you were the man at the pool of Bethesda or one of his neighbors?*

people healed? Were other sick people not healed? John did not tell us why Jesus chose this man, but Jesus walked in among hurting humanity, healed this man, and the man walked.

### C. I Will Act in Faith That Jesus Cares for Me

This story scribed in Scripture gives us faith that Jesus cares. While all miracles are for the glory of God, this miracle appears to be Jesus giving strength and hope to a man who had lost both. Jesus cared for this man, and He cares for each one of us. Perhaps you have been battling an addiction that stole your past and threatens your future, but Jesus cares for you enough to set you free. Maybe a sickness has sapped your health and even your hope; Jesus cares enough for you to sit next to you as the doctor reads the diagnosis, and Jesus will heal you from your sickness or give you grace to make it through.

Jesus cares. The disciples saw firsthand the difference compassion makes for someone who desperately needs it. We have seen it too. Every time God works a miracle for us, He is showing us how much He cares for us. The God of the universe, who spun the planets and molded the mountains, cares that we cry. And He dries our tears. Don't lose hope, and don't offer excuses for why you are disqualified from a miracle. Have faith that Jesus, who cared enough to show up at Bethesda's pool, cares enough to show up wherever you are.

## II. JESUS DECLARED HIS DEITY

### A. The Jews Sought to Kill Him

The people were happy. Jesus was happy. The man who was healed was leap-over-the-moon happy. The disciples were happy, although they were still a little awestruck. But not everyone in Jerusalem was happy. The religious upper crust wanted to kill Jesus because He had worked this wonder on the Sabbath Day. Nevertheless, Jesus worked this wonder. But that did not tip the scales from "kill Him" to worship Him. They demanded to know why Jesus intentionally violated the law of the Sabbath and worked a miracle and even commanded this man to carry his bed away from the Pool of Bethesda. Didn't Jesus know that carrying a bed is considered work?

They had their handy, laminated ticket book that contained all the possible Sabbath violations in case anyone dared work on the Sabbath. Certainly healing someone and carrying nearly anything constituted a violation. Both Jesus and the man who was healed deserved to be judged according to the Jews' law. The leaders cornered the man, but he didn't have a ready answer to satisfy their vitriol.

They stated, "It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed" (John 5:10).

The man answered, “He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk” (John 5:11).

The man did not know the Law as well as the leaders did, but he knew Jesus told him to carry his bed, so he did. The leaders continued to grill him on who, why, and how dare He, but the man did not know. All he knew was he was healed. Further interrogation would do no good; he was no real help.

Later, Jesus went looking for the man and found him in the Temple. Jesus struck up another conversation—this one about the man’s soul. Jesus told him to cease sinning.

The man who formerly could not walk walked out of the Temple and gave the Jewish leaders a description and possibly a name of the one who had healed him. They fumed. This Jesus of Nazareth had caused enough trouble already. He was reported to work miracles, but this time He crossed the line by working on the Sabbath Day. For this capital crime, He would pay with His life.

### B. Jesus Made a Divine Claim

The Jewish leaders turned their sights on Jesus, wondering what He had to say for Himself. They were pleased with themselves, thinking Jesus would deny their charges and they could catch Him in a lie. Maybe Jesus would beg them for mercy, and they would show the city who was really in charge around here. But Jesus answered, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). Something in His tone of voice or body language told them who His Father was. They did not think of Joseph or another mere mortal, even for a minute. They knew Jesus was referring to Almighty God.

If Jesus was already skating on thin ice, at this point He took off the skate, sharpened the blade, and intentionally pierced the ice. How does a murderous, bloodthirsty crowd become more murderous and bloodthirsty? Well, they did. “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18). They thought Jesus was just a man trying to be God, but they had it all backward. Jesus was God incarnate, but they could not understand it. This moment was a signal moment for the Jews, but they missed it.

### C. I Will Recognize the Deity of Jesus

We cannot afford to make their same mistake. Jesus is not just a prophet or preacher or wonder worker or outstanding teacher. Jesus is Almighty God who came in flesh. He is Lord and God. He is not just the Lamb laid in the manger in Bethlehem; He is also the Lion who roared out of the grave in Jerusalem. This miracle is recorded—along with all other miracles—that we “might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

*Why is it incredulous that the leaders were more concerned about the Sabbath Day than about a man being healed?*

*What does it look like to recognize the deity of Jesus? How can we show His deity to our world?*

### III. JESUS DECLARED WITNESSES

#### A. The Father, Moses, and John the Baptist Bore Witness

Jesus was not finished. He continued to testify for twenty-nine more verses as His accusers grew angrier. Since they called this ad hoc trial to order, Jesus produced witnesses of His own who testified to His identity and authority. His first witness was John the Baptist. None of these accusers owned a John the Baptist jersey because he had called them to repent, along with all the other rank sinners. But John bore witness of Jesus, as John was the “voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” (See Isaiah 40:3; Mark 1:3.)

The accusers needed a stronger witness than John, so Jesus called His Father to testify. He could have called no higher, holier witness to the stand. God Himself had commissioned the Man Christ Jesus to the work He was doing. Jesus was doing what He was doing, when He was doing it—even on the Sabbath Day, as a testimony to His divine identity. Jesus did not come with a hand-scrawled to-do list He had thought up overnight. Jesus was doing the Father’s work. But the accusers did not recognize His work because Jesus pointed out they had never heard the Father’s voice. How convicting that the men who were supposed to speak for God had never heard from Him.

In case the Father was too lofty for them to believe, Jesus called on at least one more witness: Moses. They revered Moses. They believed they were upholding the law Moses gave them to uphold. But Jesus let them know Moses had written about Him. The Scriptures where Moses prophesied of a coming Messiah all pointed to Jesus. (See Genesis 3:15; 49:10; Exodus 12; Numbers 21:6–9; 24:17; Deuteronomy 18:15–19.) Jesus fulfilled each of those Mosaic prophecies to the letter.

*How much more evidence and testimony did the Jews need to believe Jesus? What about people in our day who want evidence of God? What evidence and testimony do we all have available to us?*

#### B. The Jews Were Unwilling to Believe

The wonders Jesus worked coupled with the testimonies of His star witnesses should have been enough for the Jews to bow down and worship Him, but they refused. They thought they loved and revered Moses, but Jesus charged that they disobeyed and ignored Moses. If they truly listened to Moses, they would truly listen to Jesus. But they did not believe Moses’ words, so how would they believe Jesus’ words?

#### C. I Will Believe the Witness of Scripture Testifies of Jesus

We shake our heads at their hardheadedness, but we are not called to right their wrongs. We are called to believe the Word of God for ourselves. Jesus commanded us the same as He commanded them: “Search the scriptures; for in them . . . are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). From the beautiful beginning in Genesis 1 all the way through the beautiful ending in Revelation 22, the Scriptures testify that Jesus was coming, Jesus has come, and Jesus is coming back.

FEBRUARY 11, 2024

SERIES 3: THE BREAD OF LIFE

# 3.2

## FEEDING A CITY WITH A SACK LUNCH

### FOCUS VERSE

John 6:14

Then those men,  
when they had seen  
the miracle that  
Jesus did, said, This  
is of a truth that  
prophet that should  
come into the world.

### LESSON TEXT

John 6:1-15

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God provides  
for us out of His  
compassion.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will worship God  
for who He is, not  
just for what He  
does.



## BIBLE LESSON

### I. JESUS FED FIVE THOUSAND

#### A. Jesus Tested the Disciples

Over five thousand men gathered on the mountainside to hear what Jesus would say and see what He would do. Women, wives, sisters, mothers, daughters, and children all came for Jesus' words and wonders, which swelled the crowd count to around fifteen thousand people. They listened as Jesus taught them. This crowd was hungry for the Word of God, and because they had been there so long, they were hungry for dinner as well. The disciples saw that as the people's problem, not Jesus' problem. If the crowd wanted to eat, they should go home and eat. But Jesus saw this opportunity as a time to test His followers' faith and raise the crowd's faith.

Jesus asked His number cruncher, Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (John 6:5). John, who recorded this miracle in his Gospel, added this footnote for those of us who were not there: "And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do" (John 6:6). Jesus held back a wry smile because He knew He was about to multiply a Lunchable to feed a city, but Philip did not. Philip just worked the math in his mind and gave Jesus a bottom-line number.

"Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little" (John 6:7). Philip was worried. In today's terms he was saying, "I'm counting thousands of people here, Jesus. Thousands. I didn't invite all these people here. Did You? How did they know we were coming? We don't have the money to feed all these people. It would take two hundred pennyworth—eight months of paychecks—just to give everyone a crust of bread. That won't fill anyone up."

While Philip worried, Jesus grinned, and Andrew answered, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes." Yet John recorded faith-filled Andrew's faithless moment, "But what are they among so many?" (John 6:9). Even Andrew couldn't make the math and recipes work in his mind. Let's take our focus off Philip and Andrew for a moment and look back at Jesus. He was not worried. Concerned? Sure. Did He care? You bet. But worried? Not even a little.

#### B. Jesus Multiplied a Meager Lunch

The disciples didn't have eight months' worth of paychecks stored up. They had been following Jesus for the last eight months. They didn't have any paychecks; they didn't even have paystubs. But they did have a little lunch of five barley loaves and two small fish. A couple of the disciples may have sighed, "Barley loaves? That's for the poorest of the poor. Don't you have any Pillsbury crescent rolls in there? No? Okay. Well, let's see

*Why do we worry so much when we know Jesus is able to meet all our needs?*

what Jesus can do with these sad ingredients. He's a dynamic teacher and wonder worker, but He's no chef. We'll see." They had a bag of bread and fish and a lot of doubt.

Jesus held the five barley loaves and two small fish in His hands, and He commanded the disciples, "Make the men sit down" (John 6:11). Everyone was seated and grouped into hundreds and fifties. As the disciples counted, they realized the number of this great multitude was greater than they originally thought. Jesus held up the barley loaves and fish, lifted His eyes to Heaven, and gave thanks—not for what He wished He had, but for what He did have.

*What would you have thought if you were in the crowd and saw Jesus give thanks for such a little lunch to feed such a massive multitude?*

Before you enjoy your next meal, remember to give God thanks. At mealtime, the head of each Jewish family looked up to Heaven, gave thanks, and distributed bread for the meal. One of the most common mealtime prayers was: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth."

Jesus was acting as the father of this whole crowd. That's a lot of kids. His next act revealed He was not just acting as their father; Jesus really was their heavenly Father, who brings forth bread. Jesus broke the bread and kept creating more and more to meet their needs. Then He gave the lunch to His disciples and told them to feed the crowd. Jesus broke the bread while the disciples served it.

We can hear the disciples' thoughts between the black and white print on the page: *This isn't gonna last*. The first disciple may have served his first lunch with a side of advice: "You guys, share this food and chew slowly." Out of the corner of his eye, he may have seen other disciples serving other groups and wondered, *Where did they get more bread?*

When the disciple returned to Jesus, Jesus handed him more bread and fish. Then the disciple served another family with a side of different advice: "Go ahead and take some bigger bites. We must have found more food." The other disciples were taking bread and fish to their groups and returning to Jesus for more. Each time, Jesus gave them more to give the hungry families. The crowd could hear Jesus' followers laugh and say, "Eat up, guys; we've got plenty."

After a long time of going from group to group, the disciples circled around to the groups they had already served. Everyone was full. People shook their heads and held their stomachs when the bread and fish baskets came by. No one wanted any more. Jesus had fed thousands of people (including teenagers) with a poor boy's bread and two small fish. And the disciples carried out twelve take-home baskets.

*What great miracle have you seen God do when He had so little to start with?*

### C. I Will Be Available for Jesus to Use Me

This miracle started when Andrew looked around to see what he could offer Jesus. But it would not have happened the way Scripture records if the lad had not been willing to give his lunch to Jesus to be multiplied. And the multitude may not have enjoyed Jesus' wonder bread if the disciples had not been willing to serve the multitude. God could have opened the heavens and poured down manna for this multitude like He did for the multitude in the wilderness, but He chose to involve people in the process. Thankfully people chose to be available to God.

God can heal everyone of every sickness with just His word, but we should be thankful He chooses to use our prayers to make a difference. Let us be available to God to use our prayers, our faith, our fervor, and our compassion to minister to people's needs. Maybe God gave you a raise or bonus, not just so you could buy bigger, nicer, newer things, but so you could also help support a missionary who feels called of God to share the gospel with people who have not yet heard the gospel. God could rain down money, but He uses His people's offerings and generosity to meet the needs of His people. Just as God used Andrew, the lad, and the disciples, He uses us.

## II. THE MULTITUDE'S RESPONSE

### A. The Multitude Wanted to Crown Jesus as King

The rumors were true. Jesus really did work miracles. Everyone in that mountainside multitude who witnessed what happened realized Jesus was not just a man; He was a miracle worker. He was a prophet. He might even be the Messiah. They got more animated and excited as the minutes ticked away. Jesus knew human nature. He even knew what the people were thinking. They were about to crown Him as their king. They had been waiting and praying for a Messiah to come, and it appeared He had come.

Some of the men cried out, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (John 6:14). He is the Prophet the prophets prophesied was coming. The crowd's response made sense. Who would not want to crown Jesus king after what they had just witnessed? If Jesus could multiply bread and fish to feed a city, what else could He do? Could He wage war with the formidable Roman army and win? They were willing to risk their lives and His to find out. Crowning Him king was signaling revolt against Rome, but they were sure revolt was worth the risk.

### B. Jesus' True Purpose

They may have even thought back to the scroll of Deuteronomy. The Lord had prophesied to Moses, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that



I shall command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18). They were right about Jesus’ identity, but they were wrong about His mission. Jesus wasn’t flattered. He did not come from Heaven to Earth just to set up a kingdom to lead a revolt against Rome. Luke succinctly recorded Jesus’ mission statement: “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus’ true purpose was to save our souls.

His purpose has not changed from their day to ours. He is still seeking and saving the lost. He can empty every hospital and fill every bank account, but He does not just want to give us a more comfortable life; He wants to bring us eternal life. One day every crooked limb will be straight, and every cancer will be healed. Even death will bow its grisly knee to the lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ, but what will really matter on that day is that our souls are right with God. Every one of the men, women, and children in that multitude eventually died. They were still under Roman rule, but even the Roman rulers who governed them died as well. Yet their battle is still our battle. We don’t fight with Rome, but we do fight with sin; therefore, we must realize Jesus’ true mission is to seek and save that which was lost.

*How would you live differently if you were constantly thinking of eternity?*

### C. I Will Worship Jesus for Who He Is, Not Just for What He Does

One day we will have the holy honor of crowning Jesus as king, but not just of a nation or people. We will crown Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. (See Revelation 4:10-11.) We worship Jesus for who He is, not just for what He does. If our devotion hinges on Jesus working miracles for us every time we make our request, He is not really Lord, and we will be disappointed and even disillusioned with God because He did not do everything we wanted when we wanted. But if He is Lord, He can say yes, no, or not yet, and we will still worship Him because of who He is, not just for what He does. Jesus is Lord, not us.

When Jesus realized the people were going to try to take Him by force and make Him king, He left the crowd as He instructed His disciples to board a boat. He would meet up with them after He climbed another mountain to pray. Perhaps, as Jesus walked up that mountain, His mind looked ahead three years to another mountain He would climb. That future mountain He knew He would climb since the day He called out into the darkness, “Let there be light,” and there was light—the mountain where He would call out into even deeper darkness, “It is finished,” and it would be.

*Do you worship Jesus because of who He is or because of what He does for you? Will you still worship Him if He never works another miracle for you?*

FEBRUARY 18, 2024

# 3.3

SERIES 3: THE BREAD OF LIFE

## WALKING ON WATER

**FOCUS VERSE**

John 6:19

So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.

**LESSON TEXT**

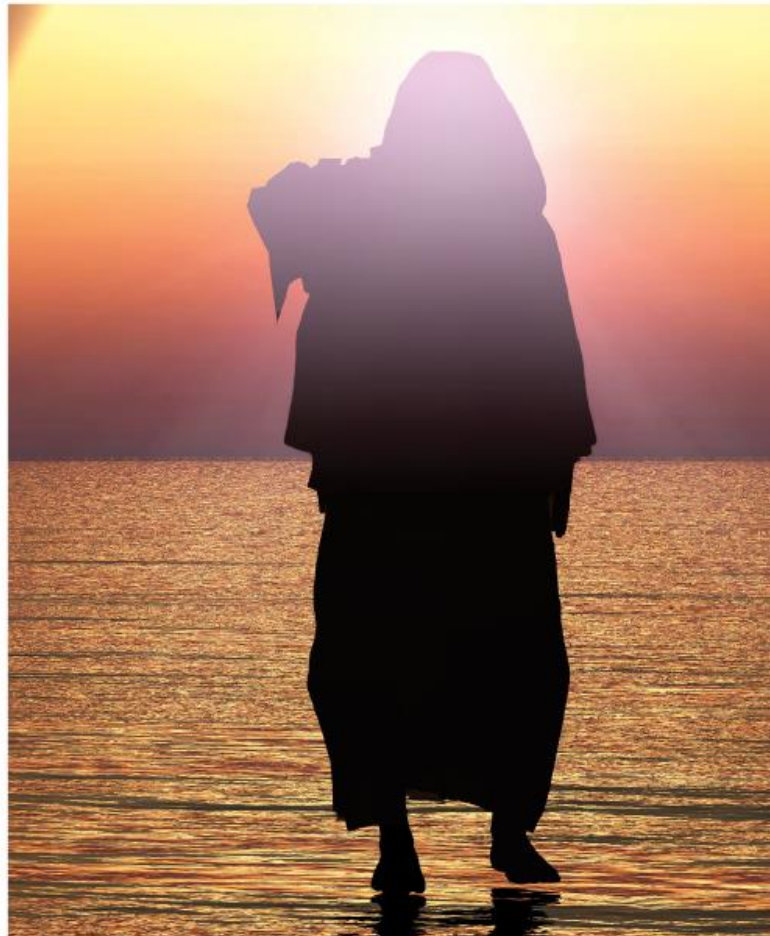
John 6:16-21

**TRUTH ABOUT GOD**

God is greater than the storms in life.

**TRUTH FOR MY LIFE**

I will seek God to be with me at all times.



## BIBLE LESSON

### I. JESUS WALKED ON WATER

#### A. The Disciples Were in a Storm

The disciples had just come to the end of another wonderful, wonder-filled day. Jesus had fed a city with a Lurchable. After He fed their stomachs, He fed their souls. He preached to them. The crowd was restless, ready for a Messiah, and they just knew this Jesus was the king they were waiting for. But Jesus slipped out of the crowd and to the mountain before they could crown Him King. He sent His disciples into a boat to sail to the other side of the sea. He would meet up with them later.

As they sailed, He prayed. The sun was setting; the moon was beaming. The night was perfect for another calm cruise across the sea. Some of the disciples knew about cruises. A handful were fishermen. They were rowing along with no concerns or cares. They were already in the middle of the water, halfway there. Maybe they would roast a few s'mores before lanterns out.

Then, without warning, they found themselves in the middle of a fishing boat in the middle of the sea in the middle of a hurricane. In a matter of seconds, they went from a calm, moonlit cruise to rowing for their lives. But this was not their first time in danger on the water. As the wind pushed and the sea churned, they thought back to the last time that looked like this time. *What did we do? What did we do?* Then they remembered. Let's wake Jesus up. He'll stand up, speak up, and the storm will calm down. He did it before; He'll do it again.

But this time was not like last time. This time Jesus was not asleep on the boat with them. He wasn't even on the boat with them. Jesus was on the shore. As we live for God, we will discover God is not formulaic. He does not do everything the same way every time. That is okay. That just tells us He is God, we are not, and He knows what He's doing even when we don't.

*Have you ever been discouraged if God didn't answer your prayer exactly as you prayed it? How do you deal with that discouragement?*

#### B. The Disciples Were Afraid

God doesn't answer our prayers the same way every time. Sometimes we pray for healing for ourselves or someone else, and God miraculously heals. At other times we pray for healing, and we watch God miraculously give grace to live through the sickness. When God answers a prayer for someone down the row from us but He doesn't answer our prayer like we hoped, God is still God, and God is still good. He doesn't love us less and love the other person more.

This time on the Sea of Galilee would have been a great time for an encore of the miracle in Mark 4, but Jesus was a few furlongs away from them on the mountain. As the disciples worked their rescue mission, they were getting nowhere. The fishermen were

nervous. The tax collector and physician were really nervous. It seemed like for every bucket of water they bailed out of the boat, the sky opened up, the waves crashed down, and two more buckets poured into the boat. Try as they might, they just couldn't get ahead.

They were in the unforgiving hands of a hurricane, rowing their little fishing boat for all they were worth. Although Jesus was not with them, He was watching them. Mark's Gospel records one of the most reassuring passages in all the Word of God. It's a passage we need to read and remember. Mark 6:48 reads, "He [Jesus] saw them toiling in rowing." When the disciples could not see Jesus, Jesus still saw them.

We need to hear that verse again. Let it sink in. Write it with permanent, chisel-tip Sharpie on our souls. When they could not see Him, He still saw them. He saw them when they were calmly cruising along, and He saw them when they were fighting for their lives. It would have made for a great story if Jesus had come walking on the calm waters when they were as still as glass. The disciples would have applauded and slapped each other on the back. "Wow, He really is something! He walks on water." But Jesus came walking above the water when it looked like the water was about to take the disciples under.

### C. I Will Look for Jesus in My Storm

Storms on the Sea of Galilee birth in a moment. When the cold weather from the mountains mixes with the warm weather from the water, they form squalls that have claimed the lives of even the most seasoned seafarers because many of the storms stir without warning. It would be wonderful if those storms came with a check engine light, but they don't.

It would be wonderful if all life's storms came with a check engine light. We would have fair warning before the squall hits and tosses our boat. We could even get out of the boat and get to shore, but life does not always come with a warning. Life's storms are much like Galilee's storms. They strike without warning. Car accidents claim our loved ones without warning. Divorce claims our families without warning. Job loss and layoffs claim our security without warning. Addiction claims our freedom without warning.

*Why do some people isolate from other people and even from God when they face a storm? How do we make sure we do not make this same mistake?*

But even when life surprises us and tosses us around, it does not surprise Jesus. He knows exactly what will happen and when. Just as He saw the disciples, He sees us. We should follow the disciples' lead and look for Jesus in our storm. When the winds pound and the rain stings, look to Jesus.

As the disciples wrestled to steer their boat to safety, they saw a silhouette of a man walking on the waves. That's truly something you don't see every day. People don't walk on water. *This silhouette must be a ghost*, they thought. Just when they thought the end of their life could not get any worse, here came a ghost

to haunt them. Life just got worse. They were more afraid of the water-walking silhouette than they were of the storm. They shrieked, and they were surprised when Jesus answered, “Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid” (Mark 6:50).

*If you were one of the disciples and saw Jesus walking on the water, how would you have responded?*

## II. JESUS’ RESPONSE TO THEIR CRISIS

### A. Jesus’ Reassurance

When Jesus showed up shipside, He calmed their fears that He was a ghost. Whew, that was close. But He pulled back the veil even further than He had pulled it back in previous passages, and He revealed to them He was the I AM. The KJV reads, “It is I; be not afraid.” But the true translation is abundantly more powerful than those words. Jesus was not just telling them, “Read the name tag, boys. It’s Me, Jesus.” The truest translation reads, “I AM. Be not afraid.” Jesus made the highest divine claim He could make. He did not just come from God; He was God who came in flesh.

Jesus identified Himself as the God of the Old Testament who introduced Himself to Moses as I AM. (See Exodus 3:14.) This would be similar to saying Jehovah. The Jehovah-Jireh who provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice; the Jehovah-Rapha who healed the Israelites of their deadly diseases; the Jehovah-Nissi who fought for Israel against their enemies; the Jehovah-Shalom who gave Gideon peace when he faced over 120,000 ruthless, relentless soldiers; the Jehovah-Sabaoth who stands at the helm of all of Heaven’s armies; the Jehovah-Raah who shepherds His sheep to safety—that Jehovah was standing in the wind on the waves that threatened their very lives.

This statement Jesus made in Matthew 14, Mark 6, and John 6 is one of the fullest revelations of Jesus’ identity to His disciples and to us. Jesus is I AM. The followers followed Jesus long enough to know each of the aforementioned Bible stories where God revealed Himself in a new way to His people. And they knew if He could do that for others, He could certainly calm the storm for them.

Never lose sight of who Jesus really is. He’s not just a baby in a manger or a crucified Christ on the center cross. Jesus is I AM.

*What effect does knowing Jesus as the I AM have on your faith?*

### B. Jesus Calmed the Storm

When we couple Matthew’s account of this story with John’s, we have a more complete picture of what happened on that stormy Sea of Galilee. Peter could not believe what he was seeing. Then when Peter realized Jesus was there and Jesus was I AM, he asked to walk on the water with Jesus. He threw one leg over the boat, and then he threw the other leg over the boat. It was time to hold on or let go. Do or die. The die part scared him. Peter let go of the boat and began to walk on water. He and Jesus are the only two ever to use the sea for a sidewalk, especially in a storm.

Maybe the thunder clapped or the lightning lit up the sky, but something caught Peter's attention, and he looked away from Jesus long enough to look around. Suddenly he began to fret. And sink. But Jesus reached out and saved him. Then, when they both boarded the boat, the storm calmed. Once again Jesus demonstrated by walking on the sea and calming the churning sea that He commands power over nature. Even the wind and waves obey Him.

### C. I Want Jesus with Me at All Times

Jesus walks on what worries us. The doctor's diagnosis, the bills we cannot pay, the fear of being forgotten—Jesus has power over all of those. No doubt precious people in our families and church family hear the howling wind and feel the stinging rains and crashing waves. We wonder how long we can bail water and stay afloat. John has good news for us. The I AM is here. He always has the power to calm the storm, but even if He does not calm the storm, He will be with us in the storm, and He will calm us. When we really realize whom we are serving, we will fret less and trust more. Jesus is I AM, Almighty God. And He is still with us.

*What is the greatest "storm" Jesus has calmed in your life?*

FEBRUARY 25, 2024

# 3.4

SERIES 3: THE BREAD OF LIFE

## THE BREAD OF LIFE

### FOCUS VERSES

John 6:68-69

<sup>68</sup>Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

<sup>69</sup>And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

### LESSON TEXT

John 6:25-69

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

Jesus is the true Bread of Life.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will never turn from Jesus.



## BIBLE LESSON

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### I. JESUS WAS REJECTED BY HIS OWN

#### A. The Jews' Complaint about Jesus

Jesus lifted their eyes and appetites above just thinking about dinner and reminded them life is preparation for eternity. They bantered for a while as they glowingly spoke of the days when a grocery store of free food rained from the sky every day and fed their forefathers in the wilderness. But Jesus again worked to lift their eyes above earth to Heaven and told them the bread of God is not a what: He's a who.

"For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (John 6:33). Their eyes lit up. If God has it, we want it. "Lord, evermore give us this bread" (John 6:34). And Jesus' next statement left them speechless. It rocked them on their holy heels for a moment. They knew Jesus could somehow feed thousands with scraps, but that didn't mean He was divine. Or did it?

#### B. Jesus' Claim as the Bread of Life

Jesus answered that question with His reply, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Silence. No witty retorts. No sarcastic comebacks from the crowd. Jesus had just claimed to be the Bread of Heaven from God who had come down to them to give them life. But how? Jesus was Jesus. To us, He is divine, God, Alpha and Omega. To them, He was Joseph's boy, though that was still up for debate since Mary wasn't fully married when she was with child. But He and His dad had worked the carpenter's shop together. Jesus had delivered their dining room sets. He didn't come from Heaven; He came from Nazareth.

How would you respond if the gentleman who came to fix your leaky roof winked and said, "I'm the Son of God"? He's not the Son of God. His name is Joshua, he wears overalls, and he has a Packers bumper sticker on his work van. Jesus was a carpenter from the sleepy, blue-collar town of Nazareth, yet He was so much more. He is so much more. He is the Bread of Life. He is nourishment for our hungry souls. He is water for our thirsty souls.

These Jews were not in the same place as their forefathers. They were not slaving away under Egypt's blazing sun, yet Jesus was telling them in very certain terms that He was leading a new exodus in their day. Their ancestors ate bread from Heaven and drank water from a flint rock, but this Jesus was both the Bread of Life and the Water springing up into everlasting life. (See John 6-7.)

This exodus would not free them from any national superpower but from a foe that had enslaved the whole of humanity since long before Moses. This exodus would set them free from the



*Why was it so difficult for the Jews to believe Jesus was divine? Would it be hard for us to believe if we lived in their day?*

relentless, ruthless reign of sin. Kingdoms have risen and fallen, come and gone, but sin has remained the constant depraved despot behind them all. But as Jesus spoke, hope began to swell because all that was about to change.

### C. I Will Feed My Soul

We shake our heads and wonder how the Jews in the first century could miss Jesus, but they did. But we are not responsible for their response to Jesus and His words; we are responsible for our response. Their story has been written, and sadly, they got it wrong. But our story is still being written. And Jesus is still the Bread of Life. Let's resolve today to feed our souls in our relationship with Jesus.

One wise woman shared a story with someone she was discipling. She said, "It feels like two bulldogs are in me, fighting all the time. One of them wants what I want, and the other one wants what God wants. And they constantly fight."

Her friend asked her, "Which one wins?"

The wise woman wisely replied, "The one I feed the most."

Every day we will choose to feed one or the other: either what we want (our flesh) or what God wants (our souls). I choose to feed my soul. I choose to grow in my relationship with Jesus. I choose to belly up to the buffet of the Word of God and feast on His forever-settled, never-changing Word. I choose to soak my soul in the presence of God every time I am blessed to be together with His people. I choose to feed my soul.

I choose to walk with God daily so I can hear from Him and He can lead me. Feeding our souls often means starving our fleshly (selfish human) desires. God, help us to be so full of You and Your ways that we no longer hunger for the ways of this world.

*What are ways we can feed our souls?*

## II. MANY DISCIPLES LEFT JESUS

You could hear the din of side conversations all throughout the synagogue. Some of the crowd tried to be discreet, but it was more than they could handle. Jesus claimed to be the Bread of Life, and then He claimed to be able to raise people from the dead to life. Who did He think He was? How did this man claim to be God? Earlier He was bordering on blasphemy, but now, He had crossed the border and was building His house in the seedy city of blasphemy. It was just a matter of minutes before God struck Him or they struck Him.

But Jesus was not finished. He did not backpedal or soften the blows. He kept coming, and He saved the hardest saying for last: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that

eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:53-56).

That's it. He had gone too far. Was Jesus promoting cannibalism? By this time the Jews were quarreling and quibbling with each other over Jesus' hard-to-hear words. But Warren Wiersbe suggests Jesus' words were not hard to hear if the Jews truly heard Him. In his book *Be Alive: John 1-12*, Wiersbe writes, "All Jesus said was, 'Just as you take food and drink within your body and it becomes part of you, so you must receive Me within your innermost being so I can give you life.'" Jesus was comparing natural food to spiritual food. Our bodies need to eat; so do our souls.

*How would you have responded if you were in the crowd?*

This comparison is akin to David's comparison in II Samuel 23 when three of his mightiest military men broke through the enemy's camp just to bring him back a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem. When they risked their lives and returned with the water, David poured it out on the ground as a sign of humility and gratitude. He said, "Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" (II Samuel 23:17). Certainly the water was not their blood, but the dangerous journey to bring it back to him could have cost them their very lifeblood. In a similar way, following Jesus eventually will lead every follower to the foot of the center cross on Calvary where we must allow His broken body and shed blood to atone for our sins.

*Are there other "hard sayings" of Jesus you have difficulty understanding?*

#### A. Though Some Left, the Twelve Remained

Jesus' hard sayings were too hard for some to hear. For a short while, Jesus' followers were following Him wherever He went, but this saying was too much. They shook their heads, packed up their things, and headed toward home. Family by family, follower by follower left, disappointed and disillusioned with Jesus. *He's no Messiah*, they mused. *Drink His blood? Not on your life.*

When the dust finally settled, Jesus looked at the followers He had handpicked from the beginning of His ministry. They didn't seem to understand any more than the crowd understood, but they were still standing around. They hadn't gone anywhere. By most accounts, it didn't look like they were going anywhere.

Interestingly, Jesus didn't give chase to those who walked away. They willfully walked away, and Jesus let them. He loved them enough to let them make their own choice. But they would live with the consequences of that choice. They would live their lives knowing they walked away from the one who later rose from the grave and ascended into Heaven. They could have followed, but they walked away.

*Is there anything that could drive you away from Jesus? If so, what?*

#### B. Peter's Faith-Filled Declaration

Jesus asked His twelve followers, "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:67). That's not what they teach in Church Planting 101, Jesus.

When the church splits, don't try to split it again by asking the people who stayed if they're going to leave too. This is the time for damage control. Let's stop the bleeding. But not Jesus. Jesus was more concerned with people following Him for who He is rather than for the many miracles He could work. He did not just come to heal us from sickness; He came to save us from sin. Sin is not forgiven through soft speeches and even softer music; sin is forgiven through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Peter stood up and spoke up for the group. "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68-69). Peter got it. The crowd did not, but Peter did. Jesus was never calling Peter to drink even one drop of blood, but he would have to hear and heed every word Jesus spoke. Jesus alone was the way to eternal life. Although we have not yet come to Jesus' signature statement in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Peter already made his faith-filled declaration of why Jesus came and who Jesus was because Peter already knew.

### **C. I Will Never Turn from Jesus**

May we have the same faith-filled resolve as Peter in John 6. Although the Word of God will offend our sin, we are not going anywhere. Although Jesus has called us to the same selfless life of following Him as He called His followers in John 6, we will not turn around and walk away. Nothing He will say to us or anyone else will say about us will cause us to turn and walk away from Jesus. One eternity-changing day, Jesus turned to us and called us to follow; this day and all my days, we will follow and never turn from Him.