# GAD'S

# **VOLUME 1 READINGS, DEVOTIONS, POEMS**

Fishers United Methodist Church

Introduction

This year-long study of the Old Testament is a follow-up to the previous studies on the four Gospels ("Be with Jesus") and the rest of the New Testament ("Be on Mission").

The Old Testament can be intimidating for many Christians. It is much longer (929 chapters) than the New Testament (260 chapters). Additionally, the Old Testament covers a much longer time period (2000 years plus) than the New Testament (less than 100 years). Also, it contains several kinds of literature including history, poetry and prophecy. Some of these are difficult to understand, further confounded by the fact that the prophetic books are not in the kind of sequential order that the modern reader is accustomed to.

To address these challenges, this study contains just 235 daily readings, only about onefourth of the Old Testament. We will cover the grand sweep of the entire Old Testament, but many chapters will be left to the reader for further study. Still, we will explore the history of the people of God from creation to the time period only a few hundred years before Jesus. As we do so, we will explore what the prophets had to say to challenge and encourage the people to turn their lives toward God. While the wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) are not a part of the daily readings, they will be referenced throughout the devotions to give insight to the themes covered.

Together, the Old Testament and New Testament are part of God's continuous story. That is why they are both in the Bible! Along the way, we will examine how Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and how the two testaments fit together.

### There are several components to this year-long exploration:

- 1. Daily Scripture Readings Actually, they are five days a week. Consider reading each weekday to anchor your day in Scripture.
- 2. Daily Devotions These are written by me and correlate with the daily readings to help you think more deeply about what you are reading.
- 3. Daily Poems These are written by my sister-in-law, Rev. Dr. Martha FrizLanger. They will help you imagine the Old Testament through poetry.
- 4. Weekly Studies These studies, written by my colleague Rev. Dr. Ben Greenbaum, are great tools for small groups and classes.
- 5. Weekly Sermons If you cannot attend worship with us in person, you can always watch them online, <u>visit fishersumc.org/begodslight</u> for easy access, or view them in the Fishers UMC app.
- 6. Weekly Podcasts Ben and I and some special guests will spend some time each week dialoguing about that week's readings, visit <u>fishersumc.org/begodslight</u> for easy access.

As with the previous studies, throughout my devotions for the "Be God's Light" study, I use capital letters when referring to Jesus: Son, King, Messiah, His, He, Him, etc. This sets Jesus apart from other mere humans. An exception is when talking about his relationships (e.g. "Mary's son"). I do the same for references to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The hope is that we are all drawn to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this study as One who is Holy, yet approachable through His kindness and salvation. All Scripture references are NIV unless otherwise noted.

It is my prayer that you will be motivated to explore the Old Testament like you never have before, then pursue God and minister for Him to a waiting world. It is my hope that you will "Be God's Light!"

Enjoy the journey!

Rev. Mark A. Ellcessor Senior Pastor, Fishers United Methodist Church

### **The Creation of All Things**

firipture GENESIS 1

Devotional

1/8/2024

WEEK 1 DAY 1

This year's study, "Be God's Light," begins with the first page in the Bible. God's very first words on the first day of creation in Genesis 1:3 were, "Let there be light." Notice that this command for light was prior to the creation of the sun, moon and stars. God's powerful presence alone was all that was needed for light. The entire Old and New Testaments are a continual story of God's desire for humans to walk in the light of His presence and to be His light in the world. It didn't take long for people to choose darkness.

Last year's study, "Be on Mission," ended with the last page in the Bible. There, in Revelation 22:5 there is a glorious vision of the restored Garden of Eden for His people: "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."

This theme of God as light is weaved throughout Scripture. In speaking of the arrival of Jesus, John 1:9 says, "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world." Jesus later called Himself the Light of the world, then told His followers they were the same. We are called to live in God's light and be God's light in the world!

Look again at all the days of creation in today's reading. What stands out to you about how and what and when God created?

Now look at God's creation of people in verses 26-31. What does it mean that we are created in God's image? What privileges and responsibilities were people given from the start? When God created everything else He said that it was good. When He created people He said that it was very good. How does it make you feel that God considers you a masterpiece?

Look up Psalm 139:13-18. Read this out loud. What does this say about God's creation of YOU from the moment of your conception in the womb? How does God feel about you?

Poem

And there you have it

No need for potions Or waving arms No voodoo magic Or chanted spells No 'Shazam!' Or 'Abracadabra!' No lanterns Or wispy Genies Just spoken truth Just calling out From nothingness To marvelous creation And there you have it And there it is Good God! Good, God!

### 1/9/2024 WEEK 1 DAY 2

### Adam & Eve

firipture GENESIS 2

Devotional

The first chapter of Genesis focused on the days of creation. In Genesis 2, the focus is on the relationship of creation. Man with God, man with nature, man with animals, man with woman.

### Man with God.

Here we see God interacting with man. The Lord scoops up a handful of dirt, forms a man, breathes life into his nostrils, and has conversations with him. How would you describe your relationship with God? When is a time that you absolutely knew that God was real?

### Man with Nature.

In this chapter, God waits to create shrubs and plants until man could work the ground. Then, the Lord grows trees that produce fruit that both look and taste good. Even the rivers of the land bring blessings to the man. What is one of your favorite parts about nature?

### Man with Animals.

You can't get more personal than being assigned the task of naming all the wild animals, livestock, and birds. From the pileated woodpecker to the five-lined skink to the wild water buffalo, the man named them one by one. What is your favorite animal in the zoo?

### Man with Woman.

Rogers and Hammerstein wrote a song, "There is Nothin' Like a Dame." Genesis 2:20 says it this way: "But for Adam no suitable helper was found." As amazing as all of creation was, the man desired somebody who would have the same bone and flesh. What do you see in the creation of the woman that stands out to you?

Read Psalm 8 and reflect on the goodness and grandness of creation. Then take time to praise our Creator God!

### Boy meets Girl

He's walking around Minding his own business Not really much on his mind Except, perhaps, An unknown unspoken Loneliness

"What's missing?" He asks "It seems I have Everything I want... But something I need I do not have... What possibly could It Be?"

Must rest from this pondering He takes a snooze He dreams a dream He can't imagine What he does not have The sun awakens This sleepy boy Something bright Is in his eye He shields his face From streaming rays And sees a vision Before Him

"Do I pinch myself To arouse from sleep? Do I move from the comfort Of my past? Do I dare risk the step Toward this lovely one? Or do I hide In the bushes?"

Whomever the vision Attractive and fair The approach takes courage To meet her She's strong And lovely And, O, so fine. "O Lord Above, Can she be mine?" SHE BELONGS TO NO ONE EXCEPT TO ME SHE BELONGS TO HERSELF SHE IS YOUR EQUAL SHE IS YOUR HESER SHE IS YOUR FRIEND SHE IS YOUR LOVE

Bones like mine Flesh like mine Brain like mine Courage like mine Feelings like mine Blood like mine

They meet Face to face Eye to eye Hand to hand Cheek to cheek "It was not good for me to be alone." Now, and only now, True joy Equally yoked For tending God's fields

# **The Fall of Humanity**

firipture GENESIS 3

Devotional

1/10/2024

WEEK 1 DAY 3

"You will be like God." With those enticing words, the sly serpent seduced Eve into convincing herself that a bite of the forbidden fruit was worth it. The devil still uses this same temptation on us today. Look out for number one. Be the master of your own universe. Take charge. You do you. The crux of sin is the desire to be our own god.

That's when rationalization kicks in. Eve wanted to be like God. So she tricked herself into saying the fruit tasted good, looked good, and sounded good. After she took a bite or two, her husband thought, "Everybody else is doing it." He munched away too. Oh how good we are at rationalizing our decisions to rebuff God and embrace evil.

Then came awareness ("they realized they were naked"), shame ("they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves"), deceit ("they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden"), and blame ("The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit" and "The serpent deceived me, and I ate").

This story is simply known as "The Fall." Adam and Eve fell from a perfect, intimate relationship with God, and fell into a finite life of hard labor and labor pains. This is our story as well. Romans 3:23 says "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." There's that word fall again.

Psalm 7:15 says, "Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit they have made." Our desire to be our own god always takes us farther from God. And too often, when we find ourselves in the pit of our own digging, we grab a shovel and dig some more. That's a sure sign that you haven't hit bottom.

A better answer is found in Lamentations 3:55, "I called on your name, Lord, from the depths of the pit." Whether we find ourselves in a pit due to the sin of ourselves or the sin of others, the way out is always through God.

Confess your sin to God. Cry out to Him for rescue. Admit when you have tried to be your own god. And when tempted, claim this verse from 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

Poem

But really, I want THAT

So many options on the list Of foods so good for me There's more, O more, than one could wish From spinach to chickpea

Some fresh green herbs, some lovely spice And precious olive oil Quinoa and oats, barley and rice To steam or roast or boil

Here's pineapple and juicy pear And watermelon sweet Mango, kiwi and others rare Corn, common bean and beet.

O God, you made the garden full (I hope I'm not a brat) Obedience is your cherished goal But really, I want THAT.

### 1/11/2024 WEEK 1 DAY 4

## **Cain and Abel**

firipture GENESIS 4

Devotional

In this famous first murder, there are many things going on. For some reason, Cain's fruit and vegetable offering was not received as well by God as his brother Abel's animal offering. Perhaps Cain was giving the leftovers ("some of the fruits") while his brother was giving the best ("some of the firstborn"). Maybe it had to do with attitude, one making a reluctant sacrifice while the other made a joyful one.

We can see that both the quality of the gift and the way it was given were part of the problem: "The Lord looked with favor on Abel AND his offering, but on Cain AND his offering he did not look with favor" (v. 4-5). This made the older brother jealous, angry, and sad. What do you do with negative emotions when they arise in your heart toward another person?

In verse 7, God paints a compelling picture for Cain, telling him that sin is crouching at the door of his heart in order to overwhelm him. The Lord tells him to stamp it out, to kill the sin. He kills his little brother instead.

In the New Testament, Paul writes about this battle within us: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7:15). When God confronts Cain and asks him where Abel is, he famously lies to the Lord saying, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

One of the things I have discovered in my years of ministry is that when people are caught sinning, they almost always lie to cover it up. But this is not the way to God's heart. Proverbs 28:13 says, "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Confession is good for the soul.

Buried in the genealogy near the end of the chapter, we see that one of Cain's descendants carried on the family tradition. Lamech killed a guy for hurting him. Are there any negative traits or tendencies that have been passed down to you? Cry out to God and quash the curse. Sin may be crouching at your door, but through the Lord you have the power to rule over it!

Poem

Why do you hate me?

Why do you hate me? I've done vou no wrong I'm just living my life Just going along The path God is taking This soul of mine on Why do you hate me? I've done you no wrong There's plenty of room In this big spacious world For talents and daydreams For both of us. Girl Your focus is off I'm not in your way Stop looking at me And live your today You catch me off guard With your knife killing words At time of my joy You whip out your sword I don't want to fight you I don't have a clue Why do you hate me I'm me and you're you This isn't a contest This isn't a fight I just want to express me And live my full life Let me give my offering And you give yours, too Why do vou hate me? I haven't a clue

### **The Lord was Grieved**

### 1/12/2024 WEEK 1 DAY 5

firipture GENESIS 6

Devotional

In earlier readings from this week, we have looked at the sins of Adam, Eve, and their offspring. By today's reading, we see that evil had taken up residence in human beings. Wickedness, evil thoughts, corrupt hearts and violence were an accepted way of life. John Wesley once said, "What one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace." This is as true today as ever.

Some interesting phrases are used to describe God's response to all that wickedness and sin. Verse 6 says that the Lord's heart was deeply troubled and that He regretted creating people. Other translations say that God was grieved and that His heart was filled with pain.

Does it surprise you that our sin affects God so deeply? Think about how parents feel when their kids go off the deep end. Magnify that times eight billion and that is how our Creator feels when those made in His image shatter it. He grieves. He is deeply troubled. His heart is filled with pain.

Contrasted with the prevalent evil of the day was a man named Noah, righteous and blameless by comparison. Seeing that, God commanded Noah and his family to make an ark to preserve a remnant of life while He washed the earth of evil. Imagine how unpopular Noah was to those around him. He already didn't fit in with the cultural trends of the day. Now he was building a big boat and mumbling about an impending flood.

It takes little effort to do what everybody else is doing. But it takes a strong person to swim against the tide... or build a boat for a tide that is not yet here. Psalm 1:1-2 says, "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night."

How are you being challenged by the Holy Spirit to be fully on board with the Lord regardless of what others think, say or do? What is God saying to you?

Put your name in the blank and claim the final verse of this chapter as your own: "\_\_\_\_\_\_did everything just as God commanded."

Poem

### God from heaven looked about

God from heaven looked about Searching for some goodness But the world was sadly marred Filled with every wick'ness. "I am sorry that I made This entire creation. I will blot out everything, Thus destroy corruption."

Yet, when God saw Noah there, Blameless man and righteous, God remembered days they shared Walking with him, joyous. "I will save this gentle soul, Midst the flood of trial. He will build an ark of sorts; He'll learn self-denial."

Noah heeded God's warning; Filled his days with labor People mocked and laughed at him; He ignored his neighbor In his heart he trusted God— Followed God's direction— Laboring year in and out As per God's election.

God has told us what to do, How to live together. Calling us to build anew For the future better. Will we mock or will we work? Will we join the labor? Will we trust in God's own will? Will we seek God's favor?

### 1/15/2024 WEEK 2 DAY 1

### **On Board the Ark**

firipture GENESIS 7

Devotional

I love going to the zoo. For some reason I never get tired of watching monkeys swing from branches, elephants spray themselves with water, penguins waddle across the cold rocks, and tigers pace back and forth. I love going to the zoo. But I wouldn't want to live at the zoo.

Noah not only lived at the zoo, he and his family lived with the floating zoo... for half a year. At that point I doubt the hippos, pandas, and gazelles had retained their allure. He might have even told the parakeets and cockatoos to shut up a time or two. Building the massive boat had to be physically exhausting. Putting up with laughing hyenas for months on end must have been emotionally draining.

Sometimes the call of God is glamorous. Most times it is a grind. Feed the lions. Clean the rhino stalls. Water the camels. Contain the chaos. That's the way most of life is. Jesus said, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much" (Luke 16:10). The little things in the daily grind are a necessary part of the great things God calls us to.

At times, I wonder if Noah wanted to abandon ship. But there was no place to go. Once, when a number of disciples stopped following Jesus, He asked his twelve apostles if they wanted to leave Him too. I love Peter's response. He basically told Jesus, "Where else would we go?" (see John 6:66-68).

Whether times are tough or tedious, this is a good question for us to ask. If we are in the center of God's will, where else would be go? Sometimes the right answer is to stay on board, stay the course, and stay faithful. Are you facing anything right now where you are tempted to jump ship? What is the Lord saying to you?

Ark Life

The God ark is made now of the fine gopher wood; The slave pitch is drying; design sound and good.

The rough hands are bruised, blistered from labor sore.

The shoulders are hunched from cross weight burdens borne.

The pantry is bursting; the close galley stocked.

The journey bound vessel from desert block launched.

"It's time; All aboard!" the Divine Captain calls.

"It's time to load up!" the First Herald bawls. There's no time to dally; the launching won't wait

So climb up the gangplank, each one with your mate.

There'll be no confetti; this isn't a cruise--March forward, don't look back, no salt-tear adieus.

It's crowded; it's stinky; it's noisy and dank. The labor is tedious without any thanks. The manna, so daily; the chaos--the norm. The days in and days out, without any form Except for the constants of pitching and rain

For forty and forty--a long time--inane.

Though locked in this fortress, with cramped quarters, true,

The Door shut, your safety, protection for you.

The journey seems endless, at time you doubt, hope;

The sorrows of lost ones, the struggle to cope;

There's death all around you, the water is high.

Your eyes, constant tearing; your speech, only sighs.

You strain for a peace sign, an olive branch dove.

You long for a hope word, a voice from above.

You wonder, if ever, your world will rebuild--If ever your flood raining crying will still The waters keep rising, flood deepens on earth

Is this, now, Death's triumph, or Heaven's rebirth?

### **Back on Dry Land**

Scripture GENESIS 8

Devotional

1/16/2024

WEEK 2 DAY 2

Noah's ark floated on floodwaters for 150 days. But it took another couple hundred days before the land dried up and the family could leave the ark. Those days of waiting must have been challenging. When they were sailing along, there was no place to go. But when the land began to become visible, there had to be a great temptation to get out of there. But neither humans nor animals would survive until the renewing earth could sustain them.

Waiting is hard. Proverbs 19:11 tells us, "A person's wisdom yields patience." It's true. God's will is most often perfected on a slow cooker, not in a microwave. Patience is one of the fruit of the Spirit. Ecclesiastes 7:8 sums it up: "The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride."

Why are we so often in such a hurry? Do you sometimes value fast over effective? How is God challenging you to slow down and wait on Him?

For Noah and his family, the wait was worth it. After he lowered the door, out came the giraffes, honey bees, and bald eagles. I'm guessing the turtles and sloths were last. What a sight to behold!

Once on dry ground, the first thing Noah did was to build an altar and worship God. This pleased the Lord beyond our understanding. Humans were still born with Adam's sin in their hearts. But God promised never again to destroy the earth because of it.

Take time right now to worship God, praising Him for all the blessings you have in your life. Know that your prayers rise to Him as a pleasing aroma to His throne in heaven!

Poem

Attention, please!

I need your attention. Can you see me, O God? Do you see all my chaos? I'm stuck in the bog of Sorrow and crazies Above and below Around and around And around me they go.

I need your attention— Should I get on my knees Am I properly saying What's bothering me? Should my prayers be more fervent? Is my heart true enough? Did you notice my offering? Should I give up more stuff?

I need your attention God, listen to me! Hello, are you out there? Do you care? Do you see? I know, I'll lie prostrate I'll get on my face I'll lie here in waiting My pride I'll abase.

I need your attention (I'm not looking, Lord--Okay,... I am peeking What more can I do?) Should I whistle my shrillest? Should I climb up a tree? God, stop all your silence Stop hiding from me!

I need your attention! I'm waving my arms Yoo-Hoo! do you see me! Should I sound an alarm? Remember your promise You said you would show I'm here on your stage Are you out there, or no?

### **God's Covenant with Noah**

### 1/17/2024 WEEK 2 DAY 3



Devotional

As Noah's family began to repopulate the earth, they were given great privileges and responsibilities. Humans would be responsible for the earth and be free to eat foods from animals and plants. But mankind would be responsible to treat blood as sacred, the carrier of life itself. Since people were created in the image of God, human life is particularly sacred from womb to tomb.

Covenant is an important word in the Bible. We will see it time and time again throughout this study of the Old Testament. A covenant is a legal contract between two parties. In Bible times, it served as a binding agreement that could not be broken. The primary covenants in the Old Testament are those that God makes with Noah (Noahic Covenant), Abraham (Abrahamic Covenant), Moses (Mosaic Covenant), and David (Davidic Covenant). All these point to the ultimate covenant God makes through Jesus (The New Covenant). We will look at each of these throughout this study.

Today we read about the Noahic Covenant, where God promised never again to destroy the earth with a flood. The sign of this covenant is the rainbow, a reminder to God and to humans of His good promise. What is one of the most stunning rainbows you have seen?

Note that God made this covenant despite the fact that He knew that humans would continue to sin. It wouldn't be long before they built the Tower of Babel in order to make a name for themselves. God didn't wipe them out with a flood, but He did scatter them geographically and linguistically.

The desire to make a name for ourselves persists through all time. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God. The Israelite nation wanted to have a king so that they could be like other nations. The disciples of Jesus fought over who was the greatest. Proverbs 11:2 says, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom."

How is the Lord calling you to greater humility? Are there any parts of your life where you are secretly seeking to make a name for yourself? What would it take for you to turn that into making God's name great?

Doem

Naked

There's times when I'm dressed up and coifed and made up There's times when I'm wholly togethershirt stuffed I'm confident proud and need narv a thing Independent on track mv life in full swing

More often than not, though I'm tired from the day I grab for the spirits. they come out to play They strip me and mock me and lav me full bare And many who see me just mockingly stare

Do I have a friend, a dear sister or two a brother a mother a stranger will do who'll cover my uglies my nakedness skin Who'll walk kindly backward and blanket my sin?

# **The Call of Abram**

firipture GENESIS 12

Devotional

1/18/2024

WEEK 2 DAY 4

Abram, later renamed Abraham, is the first of the patriarchs of the Bible. The Lord used the patriarchs to establish the nation of Israel as the people of God. Their legacy carried all the way through the Old Testament, when prophets were proclaiming the coming Messiah. Turning the page to the New Testament, we see that Jesus, the Son of God, is that long-awaited Messiah. Today, Christians trace their spiritual ancestry back to Abram and the patriarchs.

At the end of Genesis 11, a genealogy of Noah is given. Ten generations later Abram was born and raised in Ur (think Iran), where Abram married Sarai, later renamed Sarah. The two of them went with Abram's father and other family members toward Canaan (think Israel). But they stopped and settled in Harran (think Turkey), which became their homeland.

Genesis 12 opens with the Lord telling Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you." Imagine God telling you to uproot from your family and leave them forever. They didn't have the safety net of auto or air travel. They didn't have Facebook, Facetime, or any other means of ever seeing each other's faces again. Goodbye meant forever.

Yet verse 4 tells us that Abram went, as the Lord told him. They relocated to Canaan, which would become the nation of Israel. They simply obeyed God. Life there would have many challenges. There would be famines, internal family struggles, and battles with neighboring peoples. Saying yes to God doesn't guarantee a life on Easy Street. It simply signifies a life in the center of God's will.

Without that level of obedience, the promises of God in verses 2 and 3 would not have been realized, at least through Abram. But because he said yes, God's promises of a great nation bringing great blessings became a reality. Praise God for that! This applies to us as well. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God."

How about you? Is God calling you to anything, great or small, in your life? Are you eagerly saying yes? If not, what's holding you back?

Poem

Nomadic Life

I cleaned out the closet I threw out the excess I packed the essentials I loaded the car I'm leaving...time to go!

I started the engine I drove out the driveway I looked in the mirror I saw my mother waving, crying I'm leaving...on my way!

I traveled beyond the familiar I came to new vistas I stepped on new soil I met foreign people I'm traveling...almost there!

I unpacked my suitcase I made up a strange bed I learned a new language I embraced a new family I'm coming...settling in!

I was exposed to new ideas I was challenged by courses I was on a strange time schedule I was on a foreign path I'm here...adjusting!

I'm not who I was I'm very different now I'm a mix of past and present I'm a new person I've arrived...comfortable!

I'm cleaning out the closet I'm throwing out the excess I'm packing the essentials I'm loading the car I'm leaving...time to go!

### Abram & Lot Go Separate Ways

### 1/19/2024 WEEK 2 DAY 5

Scripture GENESIS 13

Devotional

When Abram relocated to Canaan, he was accompanied by his nephew Lot. They traveled together to Egypt during a famine, then returned together to Canaan. Each of them had great amounts of wealth and servants and livestock. The land would not support both of their groups in addition to the other people who lived in the area. So Abram and Lot's herders began to spat like two toddlers fighting over a favorite toy.

Abram suggested they separate to make peace. Lot chose the lush valleys, and Abram settled in the dry hill country. As the elder, as the uncle, and as the one through whom God made the promises, Abram could have taken whatever land he wanted and sent his nephew packing. But Abram wasn't in it for himself. He trusted God completely for his future. As a result, God told Abram that the entire land would belong to him and his offspring.

Sometimes we need to step back in order to trust God for the future. Admittedly, that's hard. Looking out for number one is normally our favorite hobby. Yet the Bible is consistent throughout that we are to love others in real and tangible ways. Romans 12:3 says, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought" and Philippians 2:3-4 adds, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

In the end, Lot's lush valley was nothing more than sin city. Perhaps others who made a life in Sodom thought they deserved to parade their wickedness before the world. After all, they lived in the best land. And Abram simply made an honorable life where he settled. I love how this chapter ends: "There he built an altar to the Lord." It doesn't matter what you have; it matters what you do with it.

Poem

My Lot in Life

My Lot in life Always wants the best Always sees the richest Always claims the fattest Always wants more

My lot in life Is to sacrifice the best Is to see the very poorest Is to claim to live the simplest Is to always want Shalom

### **God's Covenant with Abram**

Scripture GENESIS 15

Devotional

1/22/2024

WEEK 3 DAY 1

We return to the word covenant that is so prevalent in the Bible. Recall that in the Noahic Covenant, God set a rainbow in the sky as a reminder of His promise to never again wipe out life through a global flood. Now we turn to the Abrahamic Covenant made with the patriarch Abraham.

Covenants in the Old Testament times often took the form known as Suzerain-Vassal treaties. That is, a greater power (the Suzerain) promised to provide and protect, while the lesser power (the vassal) promised to serve and sacrifice. Here in Genesis 15, God is the greater power promising to provide a nation of countless offspring coming from Abram, whose wife Sarai is still childless. As unbelievable as this sounded, verse 6 tells us, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

In the New Testament, the brother of Jesus quoted this passage, saying that because of this Abram "was called God's friend" (James 2:23). Paul also quoted this verse, saying it proves that we are saved by faith and not works (Romans 4:3). Belief in the face of doubt is powerful.

When a Suzerain treaty was enacted, it was common practice for animals to be sacrificed and laid with their bleeding sides facing each other. Both the lesser party and the greater party would walk through the blood path, with blood splattering up on their garments as a sign that the covenant was unbreakable. If the lesser party tried to walk away from the covenant, he paid for it with his life.

Here, God walks through the blood path as BOTH the lesser party and the greater party (the smoking firepot and the blazing torch) while Abram was in a deep sleep. If Abram or any of his descendants broke the covenant with God by sinning, God Himself would pay for it with His life. Yes, two thousand years later Jesus would fulfill this covenant by shedding his own blood for our sins. Now, two more thousand years after that, you and I are recipients of that covenant. Praise be to God!

Take time to thank God for His covenant promises, that He not only provides and protects, He also serves and sacrifices. Glory be to God.

Poem

Can you count the stars?

Can you count the stars? Can you imagine the universe? Can you understand outer space? Can you comprehend eternity?

Can you count the grains of sand? Can you change the tides? Can you rein the ocean? Can you explore the depths?

Can you count your hairs? Can you move what is paralyzed? Can you heal yourself? Can you add to the number of your days?

I created the universe I power the ocean I know you I AM

### **Hagar and Ishmael**

Scripture GENESIS 16

Devotional

1/23/2024

WEEK 3 DAY 2

Time marched on. Abram was seventy-five when he relocated to Canaan. God promised offspring to him and his childless wife Sarai. Now it's ten years later. Abram is eighty-five and no spring chicken. If he is going to have descendants, he would have to take matters into his own tent. That's where he impregnated Sarai's Egyptian slave Hagar.

There was no joy in Mudville when the slave girl conceived so easily and the aging wife remained barren. Contempt. Jealousy. Abuse. Escape. Return. Submission. Birth. It was a messy scene. It looked like the messianic line would pass through an Egyptian slave, not a faithful wife.

At her lowest point, Hagar named the Lord, "You are the God who sees me." Have you ever wondered if God sees you when things are going badly? Psalm 33:13 says, "From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind." The Lord is not distant in our times of need; He is right there with us.

Hagar would need that memory of God speaking with her in future times. For fourteen years her son Ishmael was the heir apparent to Abram. But when her mistress miraculously had a baby in her extreme old age, Ishmael became expendable. She would recall that God told her that Ishmael would live a contentious, hostile life among his relatives. Yet she would remember that God sees her no matter what.

Is there anything you are hiding from God? Maybe something you wish God would notice? Know that "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry" (Psalm 34:15).

Poem

It's All Your Fault

It's all your fault It can't be me You're in my way Oh, can't you see I'll just blame you For the mess I'm in It's not my fault It's not my sin That got me to This messy place It must be you Taking my space Don't make your list Don't try to be The one who's right Or make me see Mv contribution To this mess I'll just blame you I think that's best.

### **The Covenant of Circumcision**

Scripture GENESIS 17

Devotional

1/24/2024

WEEK 3 DAY 3

What's in a name? Abram means "exalted father." God changed his name to Abraham which means "father of many." By this point, Abraham was ninety-nine years old and had one child, Ishmael, through his wife's Egyptian slave. How could he become the father of many? With this, God renewed His covenant with Abraham to give him countless descendants and the promised land of Canaan (later to be known as Israel).

Recall that the sign of the Noahic Covenant was a rainbow. Now the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant is circumcision, for eight day old baby boys all the way up to the ninety-nine year old patriarch himself. I wonder if Abraham asked God for a double rainbow instead.

This circumcision sign of the covenant would set the Israelites apart from their neighbors for millennia to come. They required men to be circumcised to marry their daughters. They called their enemies uncircumcised Philistines. And two thousand years later Paul ran into trouble when he allowed uncircumcised Gentiles to become followers of Jesus the Messiah.

The problem wasn't just that Abraham was ninety-nine, but also that his childless wife was ninety. And God renewed His promise to bring Abraham a son through Sarai, now renamed Sarah. Both Abraham and Sarah laughed at God. So they were told to name their son Isaac, meaning "he laughs." God has a great sense of humor!

Are there any promises of God that seem laughable to you? Can you trust God for the miraculous, the unbelievable? What is one of those promises?

Poem

Circumcision

I'm here, O God, I understand You called a meeting You have a plan To bless me and My family I've showed up, God I'm here, you see.

You want to bless? Now there's a plan! You say my name Will now expand? A great idea What's next, LORD? I'm with you now I'm all on board

You say you want To mark my flesh? A fashion statement? Let me guess A cute tattoo Or some mod piercing? Something to show My blessed existing?

You want to WHAT? Whoa, that's too close! You're way off base! I must oppose Your intimacy Costs way too much I'm scared of this... Your cleansing touch.

My privacy is Mine alone Your word, it pierces To the bone Your cutting sword Can strip my heart All this needed? My "new birth" mark?

### **Abraham Pleads for Sodom**

firipture GENESIS 18

Devotional

1/25/2024 WEEK 3 DAY 4

When Abraham and Lot separated to live in different regions of Canaan, his nephew chose the lush valley that was dotted with wicked cities. Sodom was one of those cities. The blatant sin of the residents of Sodom was so great that God decided to level the city.

Abraham's interactive negotiation with God is the stuff of legend. He whittles God down from looking for fifty righteous people in the entire city to only ten. Perhaps he was thinking of his nephew Lot and his wife and family. Maybe that's just the kind of person Abraham was. Always compassionate. Always interceding on behalf of others.

Sometimes we think that our culture has invented treating sin so flippantly. But this has always been the case. Sodom was a prime example and became a warning to followers of the Bible for all generations. Look at these other passages about Sodom and see what you can learn:

"The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves." (Isaiah 3:9)

"And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that not one of them turns from their wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah." (Jeremiah 23:14)

"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy." (Ezekiel 16:49)

Jesus said, "But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you." (Matthew 11:24)

God "condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:6)

"In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire." (Jude 1:7)

Poem

How much good?

How much good is needed to counteract bad? How many white gloves need to be thrown into the dirt Before the dirt no longer soils the glove But instead, the glove makes the dirt Clean?

How many cloths does it take to sop up an ocean? What is the formula to stop the rotting process Of vegetation or flesh and instead make Everything fruitful again, without death Eden?

How many good men does it take to save a city? Can the thoughts and voices and tears of a few Stop the tides of violence and greed And poverty and injustice Now?

"For the sake of only ten, won't destroy the city." --GOD

### 1/26/2024 WEEK 3 DAY 5

# The Destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah

Scripture GENESIS 19

Devotional

In yesterday's devotion, we saw how other passages of Scripture used phrases to summarize living like the people Sodom. Parade their sin. Commit adultery. Live a lie. Strengthen the evildoers. Arrogant, overfed and unconcerned. Do not help the poor and needy. Give themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.

Proverbs 6:16-19 says, "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a person who stirs up conflict in the community."

Neither this nor the descriptors of Sodom is an exhaustive list. Simply put, God hates sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, He kicked them out of the garden. When the people of Noah's time were notoriously wicked, God flooded the earth. And when the Sodomites shamelessly steeped themselves in sin, the Lord brought down fire and brimstone.

But the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah did not eradicate sin. Not much later, Lot's daughters committed sexual sin with their own father. They got pregnant, and their descendants became the Moabites and the Ammonites, two groups which would war against the Israelites for centuries to come. Sin has far-reaching repercussions.

The Bible teaches, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). Verse seven of that same passage promises that "the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." Praise God that we don't have to be stuck in sin for all eternity. We don't have to live the lie. With Jesus, we can be forgiven and walk in freedom!

Tonight when your head hits the pillow, have an honest discussion with God. Ask Him to reveal to you any ways that are out of alignment with the holiness He has called you to live. Confess your sins. Walk in freedom. That too has far-reaching repercussions!

Poem

Don't look back

You're on the way to a new place You've been rescued from your past You've been given a clean slate Your sins are forgiven You've got all you need Your future is bright You've put it behind you Don't look back!

## The Birth of Isaac

Jiripture GENESIS 21:1-21

Devotional

1/29/2024 WEEK 4 DAY 1

I can't imagine having a child at a hundred years old. The thought of bending over to change diapers, waiting in the elementary pick up line, and attending high school concerts and sporting events is overwhelming. But Abraham and Sarah had literally waited a lifetime for this moment. They finally had their own son. They named him Isaac. Everybody was thrilled.

Everybody except Sarah. She was still filled with jealousy toward her slave girl and her son Ishmael. She didn't want that boy sharing in her son's inheritance. She didn't like the way the slave girl mocked the old woman turned mama. She didn't even want them in the family. So she asked Abraham to get rid of them.

God reassured Abraham as he appeased his wife, but this is a sad story. Ishmael's descendants became the Ishmaelites, another contentious enemy for the Israelites in the ensuing centuries. Abraham and his family kept creating their own future problems. Today, the Ishmaelites are known as Arabs. The conflict between Jews and Arabs continues, 4000 years later.

Yet Isaac would indeed become the next patriarch. His son Jacob would be renamed Israel. The nation was beginning to take shape. God used them and blessed them in spite of their shortcomings. Eventually Jesus Himself came from that family line.

That's how God works. He doesn't give up on us when we try to take matters in our own hands. He doesn't turn His back on us when we cause problems. He wants the best for us, and doesn't stop loving us when we are at our worst.

Isaiah 41:10 reminds us, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

There is no better place to be than in the hand of God!

Poem

Tears of Ishmael

It doesn't matter that you've done no wrong It doesn't matter that you're the first born It doesn't matter that you're tall and strong

It doesn't matter that it isn't fair It doesn't matter that no one cares It doesn't matter that your place is heir

It doesn't matter that your mother obeyed It doesn't matter that she was afraid It doesn't matter that she was betrayed

It doesn't matter that you've now been banned It doesn't matter that I understand It doesn't matter; it was God's command

### God provides a Ram

Scripture GENESIS 22:1-19

Devotional

1/30/2024

WEEK 4 DAY 2

Child sacrifice to false gods was a common practice of the people throughout the ancient world. In Leviticus 20:1-5, God declared that anyone who does such a heinous act deserves the death penalty. In that passage God said that child sacrifice defiles His sanctuary and profanes His holy name. So why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac? A couple of passages in the New Testament give us clues. Let's take a look.

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death." (Hebrews 11:17-19)

"You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did." (James 2:20-22)

The key word in each of these passages is faith. Abraham had faith that God would come through. He told his son Isaac, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" (Gen. 22:8). He trusted God. God had made a promise, and He wouldn't go back on it.

What stands out to you in these passages from Genesis, Hebrews and James? What do they say about God? What do they say about people? What about you?

Poem

Yes, LORD

Sometimes God asks us to do crazy things And as we climb the next mountain We wonder Go here Take nothing Do this Trust me

Sometimes God asks us to do things that don't make sense And as the walk gets longer We ponder Go where? Take what? Do this? Yes, LORD

### Abraham Finds a Wife for Isaac

Jeripture GENESIS 24

Devotional

1/31/2024

WEEK 4 DAY 3

Decades earlier Abraham and Sarah obeyed God and left their homeland to relocate to Canaan. But the Canaanite people practiced pagan rituals (including child sacrifice) that were offensive to God. It makes sense that Abraham would want a better choice of a wife for his son Isaac than the local Canaanites.

But Abraham didn't send his only son away to find his own wife. Maybe he thought that was too dangerous. Perhaps he was afraid Isaac would find somebody and never return. Or possibly it wasn't the job of a young man to find his own bride. So off went a servant, toting ten camels loaded with untold gifts. Nothing but the best for the father of his future daughter-inlaw.

The servant's prayer was simple but bold. He asked God to show him Isaac's future wife by providing a young woman to volunteer to water his ten camels. Let's think about this request.

A thirsty camel will drink twenty five gallons of water. The servant had ten camels. In order to water all his camels, a person would have to walk down to the spring, lower and lift the jar, walk back up, and pour water from their jar into a trough. They would have to repeat this a hundred times. This job would take up to two hours. The servant was asking for a stranger to do this without being asked.

Enter Rebekah, a beautiful young woman. At first she minded her own business. But when the man asked her for a drink, she complied, then said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink." The servant watched her run back and forth from the well for a couple hours, trying to discern if she was the one for his master's son.

Rebekah's actions speak volumes to us. She was willing to do something without being asked. She did the hard work with quickness and kindness. She didn't give up as she got tired. She did it for nothing. But she got everything. She became the wife of Isaac, and the mother of Jacob and all the people of Israel for ages to come.

Proverbs 14:23 says, "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." When is a time that you have gone the extra mile? Is there a time that you wish you had stuck it out and done more? What do you learn from the story of Rebekah?

Poem

Meet me at the well

I've dreamed of you, dear, all my life I've prayed about you daily I've longed to hold you in my arms And give me to you solely

Will you meet me at the well My love? Will you offer me your wine? Will you meet me at the well My love? Will we sup and will we dine?

Will we dance upon the moonlight? Will we waken with day's light? Will you meet me at the well, My love? Will you, thus, complete my life?

### Jacob, Esau and the Birthright



Devotional

2/1/2024

WEEK 4 DAY 4

Isaac and Rebekah's twins were as different as night and day. Esau, the firstborn, was a man's man. His younger brother Jacob was a mama's boy. Esau was rough and covered with hair, and his name meant "hairy". Jacob was tender but sly, and his name meant "deceiver". Esau liked the open air and going hunting, which pleased his father. Jacob was content to stay home and help around the tent, which delighted his mother. Can you spell sibling rivalry?

In Biblical times, the older son always received a double share of the inheritance. It was his birthright. This would give him greater wealth and control of the family property, especially with only one brother.

Jesus utilized this when he told the story of the Prodigal Son. In that epic tale, the younger son cashed out his third of the estate for some carousing. Once broke, he came home with his tail between his legs. His father restored him to the family with great honor. His faithful older brother was incensed (see Luke 15:11-32).

Here in Genesis, two thousand years earlier, the real life younger son swaps his older brother's birthright for a pot of porridge. Jacob would now receive two-thirds of the wealth and controlling interest in the estate. The family line would pass through him, not his older brother. Jacob would be renamed Israel, and the rest is history.

As for Esau, he was renamed Edom, a play on words for the red, blood-looking stew he heartily exchanged for his birthright. In Malachi 1:2-3, God tells the descendants of Jacob of His love for them by saying, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."

Paul references this in Romans 9:10-13 in explaining why His people are the chosen: "Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

This raises some interesting questions. Did God love the person Jacob and hate the person Esau? Did God love the actions of Jacob and hate the actions of Esau? Did God love the descendants of Jacob (the Israelites) and hate the descendants of Esau (the Edomites)? What do you think?

Poem

### **Birthing Pains**

After invasion Ripping of soil Seeds planted Blanket's cover Rest allowed In secret Seed hunkers Drawing life From host

Best foods Tasteless, abhorred Worst foods Craved, desired Fodder, gorged Evenings exhausting Mornings retching Earth swells Holds water Eyes pool

One day Knock within I'm here! Notice me? Flipping, turning Kicking, sprawling Hogging bed Making space Taking space

Ankles swell Skin stretches Breasts tender Bones creak Stomach growls Cheeks glow Waist disappears Legs bear Joy's child Indigestion? Stomach cramps? Whoa, a big one! Abdomen ripples Back arches Knife stabs Pressure, pressure Pubic ripping Birthing screams

Uterus contracts Eyelids close Baby to breast Tender nipples Bleeding, bleeding Urine flows Waddle walking Sleepless nights Celibate bed

Work begins Constant tending Protective herding Planting wisdom Hoping, hoping Disappointment Unknown joy Heart wrenched Birthing pains

### **Jacob gets Esau's Blessing**



Devotional

2/2/2024

WEEK 4 DAY 5

When Rebekah was pregnant with her twin sons, the Lord told her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). God had already declared that Jacob would receive his father's blessing. There was no need for Rebekah to scheme to deceive her dying husband, nor for Jacob to carry it out.

Jacob had already swindled his older brother's birthright for a bowl of chili. Now he only needed his father's dying declaration to complete his supremacy in the family. He lived up to his name Jacob, which means "deceiver." He won. Until he lost.

Because of his actions, Jacob's brother threatened to kill him. His mom sent him back to her homeland, and he would never see her again as she died while he was away. His uncle Laban would turn the tables, deceiving the deceiver into working years for him. And when he finally returned, Esau's descendants (the Edomites) would have longstanding strife with Jacob's descendants (the Israelites).

Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death." Doing whatever we want, whenever we want, to whomever we want is not the best way to get ahead. Arriving at the top by stepping on others only leaves broken bodies and bruised egos.

Rebekah knew what God had promised her about her younger twin Jacob. This woman who went the extra mile when watering a man's camels didn't need to put in the extra effort to ensure that God would fulfill His promise.

Are you trusting in God's promises for your future? Are there any ways in which you are "helping" God by manipulating others? What else stands out to you from today's reading?

Poem

Tug of War

Let's play a game Called tug-of-war Here's a rope I'll hold this end You hold yours Now pull...

We're neither moving Holding still Yet I'm pulling hard My hands are blistering My feet are slipping A game?

I'm getting angry I want to win How can I trick you? I'll slip you up Another game I'll play Hangman

### Jacob's Dream of a Stairway to Heaven

Scripture GENESIS 28

Devotional

2/5/2024

WEEK 5 DAY 1

Step up on a stool in the home and you can paint the ceiling. Ascend a ladder outside the house and you can reshingle the roof. Climb the 897 steps to the top of the Washington Monument and you have a breathtaking view of our nation's capital. But a stairway to heaven on which the angels of God are ascending and descending is another level.

Jacob was on the run from his angry brother and on the way to find a wife from his family's homeland. But the Lord stopped him just a short way into his journey to remind him that he would always have access to Him. God reiterated the covenant he had made with his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac, promising to give him descendants, the land of Israel, and blessings enough to spread to the whole world. God promised to stay with Jacob at all times. The stairway to heaven was a mental picture of those promises.

Jesus once said about Himself, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man" (John 1:51). In His New Covenant, Jesus promises to give us spiritual descendants, a home in heaven, and blessings to share with the whole world. Jesus even promised to never leave us, saying, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Jacob called the place Bethel, which means "house of God." When he returned in the future, he dedicated himself to serve the Lord, worship Him, and give Him a tenth (tithe) of everything he has. This would set the people of Israel on the right course for their future.

In the same way, we have an opportunity to dedicate ourselves to Jesus. How is He calling you to serve Him, worship Him and give to Him? Are you lacking in any of these areas? Take time to praise Jesus for being the stairway to heaven for us!

Poem

Stone Pillow

Deceived trust Stolen blessing Torn family Enemy brother Slammed door Crumbly picnic Damp bed Stone pillow

### **Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel**

Scripture GENESIS 29

Devotional

2/6/2024

WEEK 5 DAY 2

In yesterday's reading, we saw Isaac telling his son Jacob to return to the family homeland with this instruction: "Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother" (Genesis 28:2). Four hundred miles later, Jacob arrived and who should come to the well but his Uncle Laban's daughter Rachel, preparing to water her father's sheep.

It was love at first sight. But he had to wait a whole month before he worked up the courage to tell his uncle that he would work for seven years in exchange for his younger daughter Rachel's hand in marriage.

The problem was that Rachel had an older sister named Leah, who was not nearly as good looking as the younger sister. But in the dark of the night, who can tell? When dawn's daylight illuminated Jacob's tent, he discovered that he had consummated the marriage to the wrong girl. Oops.

In a masterful stroke, Uncle Laban offered Jacob his younger, prettier daughter as well. His dowry would be another seven years of labor. The deceiver got deceived. If you're going to swim with the sharks, prepare to get bit.

Proverbs 14:5 says, "An honest witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies." Is there anything in your life that you are hiding? Anyone you are deceiving? Any truth you are avoiding? Ask the Lord what He wants you to do about it.

In the end, Jacob loved Rachel. So he agreed to the offer. As time went on, Leah bore Jacob the first four of his sons. But Rachel just couldn't get pregnant. We've seen this story before. The tension between the sisters had to be unbearable. Tomorrow we will see how this unfolds.

Poem

Roll the Stone Away

Come to the wellspring of my life Covered with the weight of the world I need a strong Shepherd who'll fight for me Defend my flock from the enemy And roll the stone away

Come to the tomb of my death Covered with the curse of sin I need a victorious Savior who'll stand for me Defend my case against the Enemy And roll the stone away

### 2/7/2024 WEEK 5 DAY 3

## Rachel's Jealousy and Jacob's Flocks

Jeripture GENESIS 30

Devotional

Yesterday we saw that the older sister Leah produced four sons for Jacob, while Rachel was childless. In desperation, Rachel told her husband to sleep with her servant. He did, and more sons came along. Not to be outdone, Leah got in the game too, and her servant produced a couple more sons. Leah herself added a few more.

By this time, Jacob had ten sons, but none through his beloved Rachel, until she finally gave birth to Joseph. Little did she know that her son Joseph would be the focal point of the last fourteen chapters of Genesis. Joseph would become the second most powerful person in the world power of Egypt. Joseph would end up saving his entire family from starvation.

We don't know what will happen in the future. In the New Testament, James 4:13-15 says, "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"

In the concluding part of Genesis 30, Jacob became "exceedingly prosperous" by cutting a deal with Laban. It's hard to tell if Jacob was manipulating things or whether God was simply providing him an abundance to take back home with his growing family. Again, we don't always know the future. At this point, Jacob did not know that his name would be changed to Israel, and that an entire nation of the same name would result.

But he did know about God's covenant with his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. He had received his father's blessing and his older brother's birthright. And he accumulated large herds and numerous servants through his uncle Laban. His future would have many trials and troubles. But it was in God's hand.

Are you trusting God for your future? Are there any ways that you are trying to manipulate the outcome or hurry it along? What do you sense that God has in store for you?

Poem

### Whole Lotta Matin' Goin' On

Roll over, Baby Whole lotta matin' goin' on I said, roll over, Baby Whole lotta matin' goin' on We've got our mandrakes Whole lotta matin' goin' on

Here's my maid Bilhah Here's Zilpah, mine Havin' lots of sons All the time

Roll over, Baby Whole lotta matin' goin' on I said, roll over, Baby Whole lotta matin' goin' on We've got our mandrakes Whole lotta matin' goin on

Got my speckled ewe sheep Got your ram too Put a branch before them And watch what they'll do

Roll over, Baby Whole lotta matin' goin' on I said, roll over, Baby Whole lotta matin' goin' on We've got our mandrakes Whole lotta matin' goin on

# Jacob Wrestles with an Angel & His Past



Devotional

2/8/2024

WEEK 5 DAY 4

After twenty years in exile from his family in Canaan, Jacob had accumulated two wives and their two servant girls. These four women produced eleven sons for Jacob. In addition, he amassed great wealth, large flocks of sheep and goats, numerous camels and donkeys, and a great number of servants. This impressive entourage would travel hundreds of miles across difficult terrain.

There was one problem. Jacob's older brother Esau was back at home, waiting for him. Twenty years earlier Esau promised to kill his little brother for robbing him of his birthright and blessing. In preparation for what could be a hostile reunion, Jacob divided his people and livestock into two groups, thinking one could escape if his older brother attacked the other. He was gripped with fear.

Jacob was paralyzed by his past. But both the angel and his brother were more interested in his future. The angel blessed Jacob and renamed him Israel, which means "he struggles with God." Esau embraced Jacob and welcomed him back into the family homeland. The past was past. The future was now.

Later in Israel's history, this theme of moving on from the past would continue to come up. In Isaiah 43:18-19, the Lord said, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!"

This is how it is with our lives as well. Jesus has called us out of our past and into His bountiful future. Philippians 3:12-14 says, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Are there some things from your past that are holding you back? How is God calling you to forget them and let go of them? How would moving on from them help you as you step into God's preferred future?

Poem

**Bruised Hip** 

In restless sleep I dreamed a dream So violent and so real it seemed The straining, gripping, pinning down Of all the weakness in me

I'd throw a left to get some space To land a right upon a face So hidden, holy, regal crowned Not wanting to be 'round me

My filth, my stain, my ugly sin My past, my present, all within It threw me, sweaty, to the ground Counting loud its vict'ry

But something in me won't let go There is a blessing, this I know Much better than the one I stole The one I sought usurping

The blessing, first intent for me The blessing which will set me free The blessing now to know, my God The one I've always wanted

It wasn't wealth or glorious fame It wasn't mine to win my name But long instead to see God's face The blessing leaves me limping

But now Your blessing's truly mine Not stolen from my brother's line But what You just intend for me The one planned from beginning

A new day dawns, my hipbone aches From blinded slumber, now awake I see as I have never seen My future now before me

What pain I caused, I carry now Which each day's limp, I make a vow To never grab or steal again But trust the God I wrestled

I thank you, LORD, for this bruised hip Your praise shall rise from pummeled lips For Peniel I'll name this place It's where Love finally won me

### 2/9/2024 WEEK 5 DAY 5

## **Dinah and Shechem**

Scripture GENESIS 34

Devotional

This passage raises all kinds of difficult questions and dilemmas.

Simeon and Levi's concluding question to their father was a good one, asking if they should have treated their sister like a prostitute, trading her to the man who raped her in exchange for acquiring property, trading goods, and exchanging daughters for marriage with the offender's people. The answer, of course, is no.

But in real time, it wasn't so simple. Jacob understood that his sons' actions would create future struggles and war with the surrounding peoples. He would be right. For centuries to come, Israel was in continual conflict with the Canaanites and many other nations. Countless lives would be lost.

Jacob seemed to be functioning out of fear, while his sons responded out of honor. On the other hand, Jacob was speaking wisdom, and his boys were reacting hotheadedly. Which was the right thing to do?

Life raises all kinds of quandaries and conundrums that aren't easy to solve. Proverbs 16:2-3 says, "All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the Lord. Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." Jacob and his sons all thought that their way was the right way, that their motive was the right motive. But this passage doesn't tell us how much Jacob or his sons consulted the Lord before taking action.

In the heat of the moment, how should a follower of Jesus respond? When someone speaks, posts, or acts in an offensive way, what is the best reply? How do you know whether retaliation or retreat is the best answer?

Poem

Stench

You bad, bad boys You cheat, deceive And then expect Me to receive Your prayers, your tears Your begging cries You think that I have Blinded eyes? I see your bare Hypocrisy You are a stench Surrounding Me

### 2/12/2024 WEEK 6 DAY 1

# Joseph Dreams End in Nightmare

firipture GENESIS 37

Devotional

In Genesis 35, Jacob's favorite wife Rachel died in childbirth, yielding a son he named Benjamin. This gave Jacob twelve sons: six from Leah, two from Leah's servant, two from Rachel's servant, and two from Rachel – his two favorite sons.

Here in Genesis 37, Jacob (Israel) makes no secret that Joseph was his favorite of the favorites. Joseph had is father's love, wore a fancy robe, and had dreams showcasing his own superiority. His ten older brothers hated him so much that they could taste it.

Their only predicament was how to get rid of him. Kill him? Leave him in a pit? They decided the merciful thing to do was to sell him for half a pound of silver and fake his death by a wild animal. Their father would get over it and they would rise up to a higher position in dad's eyes.

Sibling rivalry is often about who has what perceived position in their parents' eyes. Romans 12:16 says, "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited." Joseph could have benefited from this New Testament verse.

And his brothers could have benefited from the verses that follow: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:17-19).

How do you handle feelings of jealousy? How about feelings of pride? What is the godly way to deal with those two emotions, which are all about comparing ourselves to others? What is the Lord saying to you?

Poem

The Dream

I fell upon my pillow Exhausted from the day Body returned To fetal position Sleep took me away A place where craziness Became reality Heavy stalks With thickened husks And ears of golden mane They danced upon The distant field Twirling, swaving, Stepping And circlina Mine center stood While others Bowed to around And then the stalks Turned into stars While one was Sun And one was Moon Their orbit like A dizzy dance Holding hands With me amidst Full center Then all was still As one by one The dance turned into Music No longer movement Only bows In humble submission I held my hand To each Inviting a dance And though we Were in this crowded Room I stood Alone

## Joseph is Betrayed by Potiphar's Wife

Scripture GENESIS 39

Devotional

2/13/2024

WEEK 6 DAY 2

Joseph's ten older brothers sold him for half a pound of silver to Midianite traders, who turned a profit by selling him to Pharaoh's captain of the guard, Potiphar. But God was not done with Joseph. He worked hard for his master and earned his trust. In time, Joseph was running the place.

And Joseph wasn't going to destroy that trust with a little tryst with his master's wife. She made him pay for his integrity by having him tossed in prison. Sometimes life isn't fair. Nobody could have blamed Joseph if he had given up.

Later in Israel's history, there was turmoil and distress in the surrounding nations. But the Spirit of God said to King Asa, "But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded" (2 Chronicles 15:7). There is something to be said for not giving up when things get tough.

When Joseph was back at home in Canaan, he rose to the top of his father's favoritism. When he was sold into Egyptian slavery, he was placed in charge of his master's estate. And when he got wrongfully dumped into prison, he became the warden's right hand man. The final verse of today's reading sums it up: "the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did."

Joseph didn't give up. Neither did God. When we think all is lost, God is right there, ready to guide our lives through the troubles. The 23rd Psalm reminds us of this truth. As you read this, make it a prayer of trust between God and you.

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Poem

A Prayer I Pray

A prayer I pray For this my child "Don't allow beauty Too come too soon For with it comes A blindness in others A greed for possession A missing of the true beauty Within Beneath Around"

A prayer I pray For this my child "Protection, LORD From evil eyes Their plotting schemes To tempt with lust To lure with power To claim innocence Within Beneath Around"

A prayer I pray For this my child "Wisdom to see Beyond the lies To flee from sin And leave behind And shed the dream And run for truth Within Beneath Around"

### 2/14/2024 WEEK 6 DAY 3

# The Dreams of the Cupbearer and Baker

Scripture GENESIS 40

Devotional

Joseph ended up in Egypt because his dreams angered his brothers, who sold him into slavery. After a run-in with his master's wife, he was thrown into prison and there met Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and baker, also doing time. Tormented by vivid dreams, the two officials came to Joseph who was running the prison on behalf of the warden.

I've always felt sorry for the chief baker. He must have been excited when Joseph gave such a favorable interpretation of his buddy's dream. But alas, nothing but the cruelest execution awaited the chef. Even in death, his memory would be humiliated as his impaled body would be left on a pole until ravenous birds devoured his flesh.

Still, there was hope for Joseph. When he gave the chief cupbearer the good news that Pharaoh would restore him to his position, he said "remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison." But he didn't. He forgot that Joseph ever existed.

Sometimes people remember and reward you for kind deeds you have done. Sometimes they forget, ignore, or even discredit you, taking credit for their own good fortune. Proverbs 3:27 states, "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act." We are called to do right, simply because it is right.

Jesus put it like this: "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:32-36).

Admittedly, this is hard to do in a you-get-what-youdeserve world. Actually, sometimes you don't. Love anyway. Do good anyway. Give anyway. That's the way of God.

Poem

Interpretation, please...

Amid the black and stench of prison Three cell mates whispered Of life

Each had been surprised to find Himself with the other Captives

I shouldn't be here, I've done no wrong I'm having nightmares Confusion

Please, interpret my present lot for me Put the pieces together for my Future

Only God knows and holds the Future Present and past, keeping it Secret

Until God chooses to reveal the purpose Through a vessel of the Spirit's Vision

Whether life or death, fame or disaster Who will remember the source of the Dream

And who will remember, in Fortune's seat, The name and care of the Minister

### 2/15/2024 WEEK 6 DAY 4

# The Dreams of Pharaoh Put Joseph in Charge

Scripture GENESIS 41

Devotional

Two years is a long time. Stop right now and try to remember what you were doing two years ago. Quickly list off all the things you have experienced in those twenty four months.

For Joseph, it was two full years of nothing but prison. He had to be wondering if he would ever get out. His teenage dreams that so angered his ten older brothers were nothing but a faded memory. His accurate interpretation of his fellow prisoners' dreams were over 700 days in the past. How do you imagine that he dealt with all those weeks and months of being forgotten?

But Pharaoh's disturbing dreams triggered the chief cupbearer's memory. Perhaps God gave Pharaoh those dreams so that Joseph would be remembered. Or maybe the dreams were meant to save Egypt from starvation and Israel from extinction.

So Joseph was dragged from the dungeon, the same Hebrew word to describe the pit his brothers had thrown him into over a dozen years earlier. He was then presented in the palace, all cleaned up and wearing non-prison clothes to hear Pharaoh's dreams. Not only did Joseph interpret Pharaoh's dreams, he gave the ruler a strategic plan for the next fourteen years, and a description of the kind of leader it would take to pull it off. Pharaoh believed that Joseph fit the bill.

With the snap of a finger, Joseph became the second most powerful person in the most powerful nation in the world. His Egyptian street clothes were swapped for regal robes. Prison chains were replaced with a gold chain and a signet ring. His prison cell was exchanged for an imperial chariot, with crowds shouting words of honor as he rode by. Solitary confinement gave way to a royal wedding to a priest's daughter. It had to be heady stuff for a thirty year old man who had lived a lifetime of ups and downs.

By the time he was in his late thirties, the whole world was bowing before Joseph, hoping to stave off starvation back at home. For those seven years, Joseph became the most sought after person in the world.

Previously we wrestled with how Joseph endured being a nobody unjustly sent to prison. Now we must grapple with how Joseph handled being The Man who was tasked with feeding the world and making Egypt rich. My guess is that he handled these two tensions the same way. He put his trust in God.

Proverbs 2:7-8 says about God, "He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones." God didn't forget Joseph in his years of imprisonment, nor did He ignore him in his fourteen years of unparalleled success. God is with us in every valley and on every mountain we will traverse.

Poem

### Abracadabra!

Abracadabra and fiddle dee dee Magicians and sages play tunes around me Dancing and swirling and waving their arms Mixing their potions and casting their charms Looking at charts and reading the stars Shuffling their decks and dealing out cards Do they have access to answers for me? Abracadabra and fiddle dee dee

Zippidee do dah and Razzamataz I've had a wild dream which is driving me mad Symbols arrange into new paradigms Creatures with strange ways play games in my mind Can you see the truth here, or is this a show I don't want theatrics, I just want to know Stop trying to please me with all of your jazz Zippidee do dah and Razzamataz

Shalom and Selah and Shema, Israel I speak for the one God who now all will tell This God is the only one able to clear The stench of the magic inhabiting here With hyssop of truth and the water of love This knowledge of mystery comes here from above There you will find Wisdom's true Living Well Shalom and Selah and Shema, Israel

### 2/16/2024 WEEK 6 DAY 5

# Joseph's Brothers Return to Egypt

Scripture GENESIS 43

Devotional

In Genesis 42, Joseph's ten older brothers traveled from Canaan to buy food in Egypt. By this time, Joseph was more than twenty years older than when they had sold him to slave traders as a seventeen year old. He had learned the Egyptian language fluently, and wore the clothes of one of the most powerful men in the land. They didn't recognize him, but he knew them in an instant.

After inquiring about their family, Joseph sold them grain in exchange for the promise to bring their youngest brother Benjamin on their return. As collateral, Joseph ordered that Simeon be kept in Egypt. Without their knowledge, Joseph put their silver in the bag with their grain. They returned home to their father Jacob (Israel) with food and money, but without his second oldest son.

Here in Genesis 43 the story continues. Israel reluctantly agrees to send his youngest son Benjamin to Egypt, while his fourth-born son took full responsibility for the young man's safe return. So they headed off to Egypt.

When Joseph last saw his only younger brother, and the only one born to Jacob's favorite wife Rachel, Benjamin was a boy of around ten years old. The sight of him, now a young adult, made Joseph weep in his private quarters. Simeon was released from his captivity and allowed to feast along with his brothers.

Joseph had a number of options when it came to dealing with the brothers who betrayed him over twenty years earlier. He could have denied them food and sent them away. He could have arrested them and thrown them into the same prison cell where he was sent. He could have given them a taste of their own medicine by selling them to slave traders. He could have killed them.

Instead, Joseph chose to give them a feast and sell them grain at no cost. Proverbs 17:9 says, "Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends." What does this verse teach us?

In the New Testament, Paul wrote, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). Truly forgiving someone who has deeply hurt you is the way of God. How is God challenging you to forgive others?

Poem

Starving

My belly is aching I need some more food The crusts are all eaten My body stench rude The water has dried up My belly swells big I'm starving A famine's descended On me

My gut now is twisting Wrenched sore with my guilt The root of my hatred Knife pains to the hilt This parasite madness Consumes all my life I'm starving A famine now feeds on My strife

## A Silver Cup in the Sack

Scripture GENESIS 44

Devotional

2/19/2024

VEEK 7 DAY 1

Judah is a main player in the tense history between Joseph and his brothers. Let's take a look.

Judah was the fourth son of Jacob born to Leah, the less loved sister of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel. Joseph was Jacob and Rachel's oldest son, and Jacob unashamedly loved him more than all his other sons.

When Joseph the teenage dreamer went out to check up on his ten older brothers, some of them wanted to kill him. But Judah intervened and said, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood" (Genesis 37:26-27). Yep, it was Judah's idea to sell his brother into slavery. He had to carry that guilt and shame around for over twenty years, while Joseph carried family rejection every day of his life.

Two decades later, when famine struck the Middle East and North Africa, Joseph had stored up enough food in Egypt to feed the world. After their first visit to Egypt, Joseph told his brothers (who didn't recognize him) that they couldn't return for more food unless they brought Jacob's nowfavorite son Benjamin along. Jacob refused. Again, Judah intervened, telling his father, "I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life" (Genesis 43:9).

And in today's reading, it was Judah who offered to remain in Egypt as Joseph's slave in place of Benjamin, who was framed for stealing a valuable item. Think about it. When Joseph was dad's favorite, Judah sold him into slavery. When Benjamin became dad's new favorite, Judah offered himself into slavery.

Perhaps he learned something over the years. Certainly the guilt and shame that he bore weighed on him. People can either learn from their mistakes or repeat them. Proverbs 24:16 states "though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again" while Proverbs 26:11 says, "As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly." You can either learn from your mistakes or repeat them. Your choice.

Judah had other issues in his own personal life. He was far from a perfect man. Yet one of his descendants was King David. The southern kingdom of Judah was named after him. And God chose to pass the Messianic line through him, making him an ancestor to Jesus Himself.

God is never finished with us. He doesn't look at our past and cast us aside. Rather, the Lord sees a bright future if we walk in His ways. How is God calling you to cast off your past and step into His future?

Poem

Trick

I've thought long And hard I've devised My plan To get back at you For the web of deceit You spun Which nearly Strangled me I have a trap Now set for you I'll capture and hold And trick you back... Back into loving Me

### 2/20/2024 WEEK 7 DAY 2

# Joseph Makes Himself Known to His Brothers

firipture GENESIS 45

Devotional

Finally, we come to the denouement of the story. After toying with his brothers, setting them up, threatening them, giving them feasts to eat, and returning their money along with ample food, Joseph couldn't take it anymore. He wept like a baby and told his brothers, "I am Joseph!" Their response was terror.

Who could blame them? The teenage brat they hated was now the powerful man they feared. The scenes of all they had done to him must have flashed through their minds like a bad nightmare. They were the walking dead.

Joseph then flips the plot on its head. It wasn't them who sent Joseph to Egypt; it was God. It wasn't for death, but for life. It wasn't to break up the family of Israel, but to preserve a remnant of it for all time. This was not a time of retaliation; it was a time of embracing.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 reminds us that "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens... a time to tear down and a time to build... a time to tear and a time to mend... a time to love and a time to hate..." Joseph understood this principle. This was not time for payback. It was time to pay it forward. The family of Israel would be saved. The nation of Israel would be preserved.

Has there ever been a time when something terrible turned out to be a blessing in your life? Even now, are you in the middle of something that is difficult or painful? How might God be using that to shape you and to call you to benefit others?

Make a short list of some of the most difficult things you have experienced over the past handful of years. How has God been present in those times? What might the Lord do with them in your future? Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Amen!

Poem

Tears

How many Years Have I Held back These tears Too afraid To allow them To form Knowing that Once they Spilled Over the Dam They'd crumble My control And never Stop flowina Until They watered Both of our Souls Rack to Life

### **Joseph Provides for His Family**

Scripture GENESIS 47

Devotional

2/21/2024

WEEK 7 DAY 3

After more than two decades of thinking his favorite son had been eaten by a wild animal, Jacob (Israel) arrived in Egypt to see that Joseph was the second most powerful man in the world. But his son's credentials were meaningless. He only cared that his boy was alive. In Genesis 46:30 he says to Joseph, "Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive." What a blessing for an old man. His entire family of seventy people resettled in Egypt.

What about you? Do you have any family members you need to reconcile with? Any ancient grudges that need to be wiped clean? Any repentance you need to do or forgiveness you need to offer? What's keeping you from taking action?

Most of today's reading is dedicated to describing Joseph as a savvy businessman. Joseph sold the people food from his storehouses for all their money, then their livestock, and finally their own land and freedom. Next, he let them plant crops on what was once their own land for a twenty percent tax. Their response? "You have saved our lives," they said. "May we find favor in the eyes of our lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh" (v. 25). When is the last time you sent the IRS a thank you note along with your tax payment?

Even more to the point, think about your relationship with God. He challenges to give him our tithe (10%) and offerings (above the tithe). And the Lord is a much better master than Pharaoh or the IRS! Imagine giving your offerings to the Lord by saying, "You have saved our lives!"

The Israelites settled in the best land Egypt had to offer. Jacob died seventeen years later, but his family remained there. Three hundred years pass between this moment and the first page of the book of Exodus. By that time there were hundreds of thousands of Israelites living in Egypt. That became a major problem for a new Pharaoh four centuries later who never heard of Joseph. But God never forgot Joseph, nor did He abandon His people.

Proverbs 13:22 says, "A good person leaves an inheritance for their children's children, but a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous." How might the Lord use you to leave a legacy for future generations who won't even know your name?

Poem

Goshen

You once sent me away Now I call you to draw near And settle in my Goshen

You once refused my embrace Now I provide for your comfort And settle you in Goshen

O, Goshen, Whose name means Draw near to me

Thank you for opening the arms of your fields Thank you for the shepherd's call to the sheep Thank you for embracing our pain

And anointing our heads To settle us down In the fold of your nearness

## The Israelites are Oppressed in Egypt

Scripture EXODUS 1

Devotional

2/22/2024

WEEK 7 DAY 4

Three hundred years had passed since the time of Joseph and seventy of his family members were living peacefully in Egypt. By the time of Exodus 1, there were perhaps a million or more Israelites living in Egypt. The current Pharaoh was worried that the Hebrew population might revolt. So he turned them into slaves. Maybe that would curtail the Hebrew population growth.

But the plan didn't work. They continued to multiply and spread. So Pharaoh ratcheted up the harsh labor and treated them ruthlessly. Then he came up with the ultimate plan to slow Hebrew population growth. Kill all the newborn baby boys. Moses was spared, and ended up leading his people out of bondage into freedom. We'll explore this more deeply in tomorrow's devotion.

Over a thousand years later, another king in another land came up with a similar strategy to stop baby Jesus from becoming the king of the Jews. Paranoid King Herod ordered the execution of all the baby boys age two and under in Bethlehem (see Matthew 2:13-18). Jesus was spared, and led people out of spiritual bondage into true freedom.

It's amazing to see God at work even when others are bent on manipulating and terrorizing others to get their own way. In Isaiah 55:9 God says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Sometimes evil prevails for a period of time. Horrible things are done by horrible people. But God is far above even the most powerful people on earth.

What are some of the things happening in your community, nation or world that are disturbing? Do you believe that God is far above the forces at play? Take time to offer these to the Lord, trusting that His ways and thoughts are above any human ways and thoughts.

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12)

Poem

I don't know Joseph

You come to me expecting some kind of favor You say we have a mutual acquaintance You want me to remember someone I never met I tell you, I don't know Joseph

You come to me thinking we are friends You say I owe you for what I received You want me to share what I've worked so hard to achieve, I tell you, I don't know Joseph

You come to me again and again with familiarity You say our partnership was divinely appointed You want privilege, well, I don't think so...I tell you, I don't know Joseph

#### 2/23/2024 WEEK 7 DAY 5

# The Prince of Egypt Becomes Fugitive to Midian

Scripture EXODUS 2

Devotional

Pharaoh's infanticide order was being ignored by the midwives. So Pharaoh extended the order to every Egyptian: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live" (Exodus 1:22). The river was awash with dead babies and refilled with the tears of grieving parents on the shores.

It was fitting that God chose to rescue baby Moses from the same river where so many others were drowned. Pharaoh's daughter could have held his head underwater until he was lifeless, as her father had ordered. Instead, she chose to make him her own. In an instant he went from being a nameless, worthless baby to being a prince of Egypt.

There in the palace he grew up with the finest of everything imaginable. He was raised with Egyptian royalty, culture and language. But he must have known his Hebrew heritage as well. This conflicted background caused him to intervene for the Hebrews and be rejected by them at the same time. It also caused Pharaoh to turn on him and try to kill him. Moses was forty years old at the time (Acts 7:23).

Moses was a man without a country. He made a new life in yet another culture, marrying a Midianite woman and raising a family with her. His son's name was a daily reminder that he was a foreigner in a foreign land.

So far, Moses' story is one of abandonment and estrangement. He was taken away from his Hebrew mother and raised by an Egyptian princess. He ran away when he killed an Egyptian man and was ratted out by a Hebrew man. He became a fugitive in Midian, but felt like a foreigner for the entire forty years he was there. Through all this, God chose him to lead the Hebrews out of harsh bondage into freedom.

The Bible doesn't gloss over its heroes. Adam and Eve took a bite of the forbidden fruit, yet became the ancestors of all humanity. Abraham lied about his wife's identity, yet became the patriarch of God's chosen people. Jacob was a deceiver and manipulator, yet God renamed him Israel. And Moses was a nobody who killed a man and ran for his life, yet the Lord used him in mighty ways.

Are there any dark chapters in your life story? Do you wish things could have been different? Any regrets? Know that God is not done with you. He wants to do great things in you and through you. Psalm 147:3 reminds us that God "heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Praise be to God!

Poem

#### The Levite Woman's Prayer

Tar pitched ark upon the Nile Bear now safe my tiny child Keep him from destruction's curse This I pray, Dear Abba

Jeweled palace far away Distant from God's hallowed Way Do not bar my child's high call This I pray, Dear Abba

Desert sand of exile scorn Polish him for why he's born Blow away his violent streak This I pray, Dear Abba

Burning bush with calling voice May you be my child's life choice Set his feet on freedom's trail This I pray, Dear Abba

Shepherd's staff, Jehovah's rod Teach my child to speak for God Give him strength and courage true This I pray, Dear Abba

Wilderness and mountain High Bringing now God's people nigh To the throne of mercy, save This I pray, Dear Abba

Fiery pillar, cloud by day Lead his people in your way 'Til at last he crosses o'er This I pray, Dear Abba

## 2/26/2024 WEEK 8 DAY 1

# God Speaks through the Burning Bush

Scripture EXODUS 3

Devotional

After forty years living in Midian, Moses was a Midianite. His Hebrew heritage and Egyptian upbringing were far away. He probably thought he would never see either again. He was no longer a Hebrew slave or an Egyptian prince. He was a Midianite shepherd with a Midianite family.

So when God tapped him to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses had a good question for God: "Who am I?" It's a question many of us ask God.

Who am I, that I should share my faith in Jesus?

Who am I, that I should help the poor?

Who am I, that I should reform a denomination?

When Moses asked, "Who am I?" God simply said, "I will be with you." That's all we need. Look at these verses that promise that truth:

"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." (Deuteronomy 31:8)

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

The next time you ask God, "Who am I, that I should go?" remember that His answer is always, "I will be with you."

Poem

**Burning Name** 

burning, non-consuming Fire, who brands your seal upon my heart Your name, ever-present, demands, yet waits, for my yielding to its purifying Flame

## **Moses Returns to Egypt**

Scripture EXODUS 4

Devotional

2/27/2024

EEK 8 DAY 2

Excuses, excuses. After God promised to be with him in his return to Egypt, Moses unfurled a litany of reasons that he was the wrong man for the job. Some are in Exodus 3 and the rest in today's reading.

"Who am I?"

"What if they ask me hard theological questions?"

"What if they don't believe me?"

"What if they don't listen to me?"

"I'm not good with public speaking."

"Please send somebody else."

With that final excuse, the Lord's anger burned against Moses. That's not a good thing. But that wasn't the end of it. Verse 24 says that God was going to kill Moses if he refused to circumcise his son. He might have spent half his life in the Egyptian palace and half of it in the Midianite wilderness, but Moses could never forget that he and his offspring would always be Hebrews.

As Moses headed southwest, his brother Aaron traveled southeast. Both had heard the voice of the Lord. Both obeyed. They met at the mountain of God, probably Mt. Sinai where later Moses would receive the Ten Commandments while Aaron was in the valley below making a golden calf. These brothers missed their first eighty years together, but the next forty would be filled with adventure.

But for now, their task was to return together to Egypt and convince Pharaoh to release his Hebrew slaves, now numbering up to two million people. No wonder Moses came up with a bunch of excuses.

In Luke 9:57-62 and Luke 14:15-24, Jesus told stories and ran into people who were making excuses:

"I have just bought a field, and I've gotta look after it."

"I recently acquired some oxen. I've got to try them out."

"I just got married. And it's our honeymoon."

"My dad's going to die sometime. Can I wait until after he dies?"

"I really have to say goodbye to my family. I need their blessing."

None of the excuses of Moses or these guys are evil. They are all valid parts of life. But when even good things stand in the way of saying yes to God, that's a problem.

Are you doing everything God is calling you to do? What's your excuse?

Poem

Throw it down

That staff in your hand That rod of your strength That weapon of self protection That crutch on tough turf That branch which you lean on That idol you've carved Throw it down!

This staff of my shepherding This rod of my comfort This weapon of my Word This yoke of my discipline This cross of my will This cup of my blessing Pick it up!

# **Israelite Labor is Intensified**

firipture EXODUS 5

Devotional

2/28/2024

WEEK 8 DAY 3

Leadership can be lonely. Moses knew that God had called him to convince Pharaoh to let his people go. Initially, he only asked for a three-day worship retreat, a long holiday of sorts. But Pharaoh would have none of it. Instead, he doubled down on the Hebrew workload, making Moses' own people turn on him and his brother. Feeling totally alienated, Moses could only ask God why things were turning out so poorly.

Here's a question worth pondering. Is God more interested in your success or your faithfulness? Don't dismiss success out of hand. God certainly doesn't call us to great things only to watch us fail. But along the path to success it sure can feel like failure. It didn't work. Everyone says I told you so. You feel alone.

That's when it is important to hang in there with faithfulness. Achieving great things for God is not like an easy Sunday afternoon drive. The decision to stay the course is tested when the road hits a dead end. It's even harder when all the other cars are driving in your lane the opposite direction, with drivers honking horns and shaking fists and shouting profanities.

If the Book of Exodus ended with chapter 5, we would only have Moses making one attempt, failing, then questioning God for all the trouble that resulted. Maybe that would be more like how some of us try to do what God is challenging us to do. We volunteer to help with students at church, and fall flat on our faces. We invite a neighbor to church, and they say no. We offer help to somebody who is in need, and they take advantage of us. We openly express our faith, and are threatened with expulsion from our school or job.

James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him." Persevere is a good word. Give it a try tomorrow. And the next day. And the next.

Poem

Slavery's Bricks

I'm building a pyramid A tower to prove The power of my master Who beats me with chains I'm covered with mud My feet ache from bearing My backs bent from carrying Straw, which will blow away With even the slightest wind My sweat mixes with the murky muck I'm bruised and beaten From the drudgery of work I have no time for You, O Rock, O Living Stone I have my own bricks to make

### 2/29/2024 WEEK 8 DAY 4

# Let My People Go

Scripture EXODUS 7:1-24

Devotional

Moses was forty years old when he fled Egypt to live in Midian (Acts 7:23). Forty years later, he was eighty when he appeared before the most powerful man in the world to demand the release of all his Hebrew slaves. After Moses' people were freed, he led them another forty years in the wilderness, until he died at the ripe old age of 120. Have you ever thought you were too old (or too young) to do what God is calling you to do?

Moses' life could be broken down into three phases: Forty years as an Egyptian prince, forty years as a Midianite shepherd, and forty years as the Hebrew national leader. How might each of these phases have prepared him for the next? How have the previous phases of your life prepared you for what is ahead?

When Moses got ready to go present his case before Pharaoh, God said, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart... he will not listen to you." How discouraging! But at least he knew going in that Pharaoh would turn him down flat. Verse six says that he and his brother "did just as the Lord commanded them."

After the showdown with snakes, this chapter spells out the first of the ten plagues that God brought upon Egypt. The following plagues include an infestation of frogs, a dust storm of gnats, a pervasive cloud of flies, a pestilence of death on livestock, an epidemic of boils, a fierce storm of hail, a destructive swarm of locusts, and a thick darkness for three straight days.

Psalm 105 tells the story of all we have studied so far in poetic fashion. Open your Bible and read it aloud, giving God praise for all His wonderful deeds!

Poem

**Boxing Ring** 

The boxers stood face to face

The one sneered: "I beat all who challenge me; I pound on them until they whimper And then I silence them With my hook. So, bring it on. You think you can move me? No way! I am the Champion; I hold the lives of many In my hands. They are my slaves! I'm the king of the world!"

The other looked the challenger in the eye. He had seen him before but in a different form.

"I will strike you down; no longer will you reign terror on my people. From their silenced lips Shall come shouts of victory! You cannot even stand before me Without me agreeing to fight you. You are not the Champion; I am the Lamb And with ten mighty blows, You will kneel And name me The King of Kings and the Prince of Peace."

The boxers moved to their corners. The bell rings. Round One.

Blood.

## 3/1/2024 WEEK 8 DAY 5

# **Death of Firstborn**



Devotional

God made several promises to Moses with this plague:

It would be the final plague.

Pharaoh would refuse to listen, again.

Every Egyptian firstborn son would die, including Pharaoh's son.

Even Egyptian owned animals would be affected.

There would be loud wailing throughout Egypt.

Not even the dogs who belonged to the Israelites would be harmed.

Pharaoh would let the Hebrew people go and drive them out completely.

The Egyptian officials would beg Moses to take the Hebrews and leave.

Egyptian neighbors would give the Hebrews articles of silver and gold.

Look at each one of these promises again. How would each of them would have impacted the Egyptians physically, emotionally, and in any other way? How would they have impacted the Israelites, as they prepared to flee? How would this have sustained the Israelites over the next forty years as they awaited entering the Promised Land?

Psalm 119:41 says, "May your unfailing love come to me, Lord, your salvation, according to your promise." What are some of the promises of God that sustain you as you journey through life? Are there any promises of God that you long to experience? Any you have walked away from?

Poem

Did it have to come to this?

It started with a little fight Between the two of us I just wanted this and that You wanted to be right We soon forgot the real issue And focused on the pull Me. grabbing, snatching, wanting more Hands on the rope now bruised If one of us would just let go And let the rope fall slack I wonder if the thing would rest And we'd see friend, not foe But, no; we just could not resist We both just want our way The conflict has become our drug Did it have to come to this?

# **The Passover and Exodus**

firipture EXODUS 12

Devotional

3/4/2024

WEEK 9 DAY 1

Let's review the first nine plagues God brought upon Egypt: water turned to blood, an infestation of frogs, a dust storm of gnats, a pervasive cloud of flies, a pestilence of death on livestock, an epidemic of boils, a fierce storm of hail, a destructive swarm of locusts, and a thick darkness for three straight days. Each time, Pharaoh stubbornly said he would not let the Hebrew people go.

This tenth plague would strike the final blow. With death visiting every household, Pharaoh and the Egyptians pleaded with the Israelites to leave, giving them whatever they needed for the journey.

Two phrases stand out in this encounter: pass through and pass over. In verse 12, God says, "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord." In the next verse God says, "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."

God passed through Egypt, causing the death of every firstborn. God passed over Israel, resulting in freedom from cruel bondage. For them, the Passover meal was eaten and the Passover lamb was sacrificed. The annual Passover meal and Feast of Unleavened Bread became a centerpiece of the Jewish faith for all time to come.

Centuries later, on the last night of Jesus' earthly life, He celebrated the Passover with His disciples. When He took the unleavened bread, He said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." When He took the cup of wine, Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:19-20). Hours later, He was crucified for our sins.

Jesus didn't just celebrate with unleavened bread and a sacrificial lamb. He became the Bread of Life and the Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Because of His sacrifice on the cross, God promises to pass over us when we receive Him as our Lord and Savior. God rescued the Israelites from the bondage of slavery, and in Jesus, God rescued us from the bondage of sin. Thanks be to God!

Poem

Pascal Jingle

Hyssop, Blood, Doorpost, Lamb Hyssop, Blood, Doorpost, Lamb Hyssop, Blood, Doorpost, Lamb I AM the LORD, I AM, I AM

Hyssop branch, Soapy scrub Hyssop branch, Soapy scrub Hyssop branch, Soapy scrub Cleanse me, LORD, by your love

Scarlet blood, Give me life Scarlet blood, Give me life Scarlet blood, Give me life Mine the joy, Yours the strife

Doorpost marking, Whitewashed sign Doorpost marking, Whitewashed sign Doorpost marking, Whitewashed sign Death protection from Divine

Pascal Lamb, In my place, Pascal Lamb, In my place, Pascal Lamb, In my place, Shelter from my own disgrace.

Hyssop, Blood, Doorpost, Lamb Hyssop, Blood, Doorpost, Lamb Hyssop, Blood, Doorpost, Lamb My LORD, my God, The Great I AM

# **Cloud by Day, Fire by Night**

Scripture EXODUS 13

Devotional

3/5/2024

WEEK 9 DAY 2

According to Exodus 12:37, there were six hundred thousand Israelite men who left Egypt, besides the women and children. It would be safe to say that some two million people in all made the journey. That's the population of the greater Indianapolis area including all the surrounding cities. Getting them from point A to point B was a logistical nightmare.

So God provide a pillar of cloud to guide them by day, and a pillar of fire as a beacon by night. That is so like God. What would be impossible for us is simply a touch of God's finger. This chapter concludes with God's abiding presence: "Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people."

To build their faith, Jesus once told his disciples, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27). God is in the business of making the impossible a reality.

Hebrews 10:4 says, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." But the blood of Jesus did exactly that. 1 John 1:7 promises us, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

In what ways is God guiding you by day and by night? How are you aware that His presence has never left its place in front of you? How is God calling you to consecrate yourself and your family to following Him?

Poem

Consecration

Consecration first fruit born Separation for God alone Dedication full life given Indication for whom I'm living Big decision marked in skin Circumcision heart within

## 3/6/2024 WEEK 9 DAY 3

# Crossing the Red Sea on Dry Land

Scripture EXODUS 14

Devotional

After four hundred years living as exiles and slaves in Egypt, the Israelites were finally headed toward freedom. They arrived as a small band of seventy family members. They departed two million strong.

But they had a big problem. They were trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. In an instant Moses went from hero to heel. Their accusatory cry of "What have you done to us?" betrayed their lack of confidence in him and God. The back-to-Egypt committee was in full voice. This was not the last time Moses would hear from them.

But God was not done. He first moved the pillar of cloud so that it formed a barrier between the pursuing army and the fleeing slaves. Then, in the miraculous way only God can do, He divided the waters of the Red Sea and two million Israelites walked through on dry ground. The Egyptian army pursued, only to be swallowed up by the crashing walls of water returning to their rightful place.

Psalm 77:13-20 captures this moment in poetic form. As you read this, reflect on the greatness of our God.

<sup>13</sup> Your ways, God, are holy.

- What god is as great as our God? <sup>14</sup> You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. <sup>15</sup> With your mighty arm you redeemed your people,
- <sup>16</sup> The waters saw you, God,
- the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed.
- <sup>17</sup> The clouds poured down water, the heavens resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth.
- <sup>18</sup> Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and guaked.
- <sup>19</sup> Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen.
- <sup>20</sup> You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Poem

Drown

All my sorrows Days of tears Constant burden Years of fears Drown this day By Love's monsoon Burst me free from Slavery's tomb

# **Miracles in the Desert**

Scripture EXODUS 17

Devotional

3/7/2024

WEEK 9 DAY 4

Moses had to be exhausted. He was an eighty year old shepherd when God told him to go back to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of slavery. He faced obstacle after obstacle. But even when everything was a complete success, the people found fault in his leadership. What have you done for me lately? Every leader knows this accusation.

Moses understood that the people were not only quarreling with him, they were also doubting God. Though the Lord had provide one miracle after another, the people weren't really sure they could trust Him to provide for their immediate needs. So Moses cried out to God, pretty sure they were ready to kill their once-valued leader.

What is it about people that we so easily forget what God has done when we are caught up in life's moments? The first verse of the hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness" speaks of God's unchanging nature and goodness:

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father There is no shadow of turning with Thee Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be Great is Thy faithfulness Great is Thy faithfulness Morning by morning new mercies I see All I have needed Thy hand hath provided Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

Here in Exodus 17, God provided extensions for the reach of Moses. When there wasn't enough water, God told Moses to use the staff He had provided. When the enemy army was prevailing, God provided two men to hold up the arms of Moses. We have no idea how each of these miracles worked. If we did, they wouldn't be miracles.

Psalm 145:15-16 says, "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing." This is an acknowledgement to God for how He faithfully provides. How has God provided for you? Don't forget the miracles and don't overlook the small stuff.

Poem

Grocery Checkout Theology

Give me. Give me I want more! See the goodies In earth's store? I see this And I want that Grabbing, grabbing's Where I'm at As you're in the Checkout aisle Don't you see the Candy pile? Instant pleasure's My desire I'll consume-You be the buyer

Stop it, now You naughty child You're desires are Wicked, wild All vou want is More and more But I've better Things in store Stop this pester--Testing Me Don't choose fruit Forbidden tree Hush, now stop This selfish whining Let me choose On what you're dining

# Jethro Teaches Moses about Leadership

Scripture EXODUS 18

Devotional

3/8/2024

WEEK 9 DAY 5

Moses was a great leader, but he tried to do too much himself. He probably thought, "If you want something done right, do it yourself." That's some of the worst leadership advice ever spoken. The key to really great leadership is developing other leaders.

Moses' father-in-law Jethro understood this principle. When Moses was forty, he fled Egypt to live in Midian. There he met Jethro, who gave him his daughter in marriage and put him in charge of his flocks. Jethro probably wasn't kicking back in the tent watching Netflix. He undoubtedly did other things to make the family successful.

Here, Jethro suggests the same approach to his son-in-law. Jethro hadn't seen the showdown with Pharaoh, the parting of the sea, or the armsraised victory over the enemy. Even if he had, he wouldn't have been impressed. To him, Moses was just a guy who was married to his daughter. And the way he was trying to serve as the solo judge for a couple million people was not smart. So dad offered his son a plan to reorganize the judicial system.

Moses could have said, "We've never done it that way before," which is the cop out for "I am too stubborn to change." But he didn't. Moses took Jethro's advice. At eighty years old, he restructured his way of life. My respect for him just went way up.

1 Peter 5:5 tells us, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." After all the success Moses had right in front of the Israelites' eyes, he was humble enough to publicly admit that the solo judicial system he had set up was not very effective.

Here's a thought. If you want something done right, train a whole team of people to do it.

Poem

#### Don't attempt this by yourself

Lists on the refrigerator Chores planned written down Calendars all penciled in Sticky notes abound

I am pulling out my hair My blood pressure is rising My house of cards will topple If a task comes up surprising

Delegate, the experts say, Enough's enough for you Even then my breath is short No rest in future's view

In my worries, in my work There's something missing, LORD I've forgotten whose the Boss And sought my own reward

# **The Ten Commandments**



Devotional

3/11/2024

WEEK 10 DAY 1

The Ten Commandments are some of the most well-known words of the Old Testament. Before God gives the first command, He reminds the people of who He is and what He had done for them: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Remembering who God is and what He has done is always the starting point for our obedience.

Then God gives four commandments concerning our relationship with Him: Have no other gods. Don't worship images or idols. Don't misuse God's name.

Keep the Sabbath holy.

This is followed by six commandments concerning our human relationships: Honor your father and mother. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Don't covet what others have.

In verse 20, Moses gave the reason for these commandments: "God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." God is not a cosmic killjoy. Rather, He wants the very best for us.

Psalm 119:33-35 is part of a beautiful poem, where the psalmist expresses a deep desire to follow God's commands. Read this as your commitment to the Lord.

<sup>33</sup> Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end.

<sup>34</sup> Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law

and obey it with all my heart.

<sup>35</sup> Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.

Poem

Exodus 20:20

Don't be afraid But fear the LORD For the commands are True Nannies Custodians and Guardians To guide and protect you

Don't be afraid But have reverent awe For the "you shall nots" are Strong hedges Fences and Walls To keep and protect you

Don't be afraid But obey the LORD For God's warnings are Great grace Freedom and Victory To sustain and protect you

## 3/12/2024 WEEK 10 DAY 2

## **The Golden Calf**

Scripture EXODUS 32

Devotional

Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 20. He remained on the mountain for the next eleven chapters as God gave him instructions about human relationships, personal property, social responsibility, and proper worship. The people desperately needed these instructions. They had been slaves in Egypt for generations. They had no idea how to structure and manage a proper society.

Moses was gone for a long time. Down in the valley, the people were getting restless. If Moses wasn't coming back from his private time with God, they would have to create their own god. Everybody has to worship something. In their case, it was a golden calf.

On the mountain, Moses was holding the two tablets of the covenant law. In the valley, Aaron was leading the people in breaking the very first commandment inscribed on those tablets. When Moses descended, he was appalled to see them indulging in revelry, dancing before the calf, and running wild.

What are the golden calves of your culture? What takes the place of God in your life? Are there any things or people that draw you away from God's best and toward your worst?

Psalm 135:15-18 talks about the danger of idols in our lives. As you read, reflect on your own life and your own culture.

- <sup>15</sup> The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by human hands.
- <sup>16</sup> They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see.
- <sup>17</sup> They have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths.
- <sup>18</sup> Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

Poem

Idle Idol Worship

I'm waiting, Lord, You take too long You know I'm weak I'm not that strong Temptation's knocking At my door "Only one God? You need some more!" I'm tempted, Lord To fill your seat To make some idols: Needs to meet. From stone or wood. I do not care Just rescue me From Worry's stare Do something! Make a god for me! You're tardy, Lord I have this need To see and touch And shape and mold I want a god I can control

### 3/13/2024 WEEK 10 DAY 3

# **The Tent of Meeting**

firipture EXODUS 33

Devotional

As Moses was struggling to figure out how to lead the stubborn and rebellious Israelites, he needed time alone. Actually, he needed time alone with God. Where do you go when you need to be with the Lord? Do you have a particular time of day that you best hear from God? Do you go someplace special in your house, at a church, or maybe in nature that you connect most deeply with God? Does your time with God involve music, reading, praying out loud, or being silent?

For Moses, the "tent of meeting" was where he be alone with God. Notice that it says, "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend." Does it surprise you that God wants to be that intimate with us? Their relationship was so personal that Moses felt free to make special requests to God.

How should we press into these same longings to be with God? Here are some of his requests:

Show me whom you will send with me.

Teach me your ways so I may know you.

Help me to find favor with you.

Show me your glory.

Was there a common theme to how you answered these? Psalm 119:166-167 says, "Lord, I'm longing for more of your salvation, for I want to do what pleases you. My love for your ways is indescribable; in my innermost being I want to follow them perfectly!" (Passion Translation).

If God stood in front of you right now, what would you express to Him?

Poem

Pastoral Prayer

Here I am, LORD. You called me to lead Your people. Like a border collie You sent me to herd Your sheep. Like a crafter You gave me tools to shape Your treasure. But they are Hard hearted. Lord. Stubborn willed. They do not yield To the fire's Refining. You called me, LORD And now you want to Abandon? You thought up the plan And now you decide to Rip it up? You put us in this wilderness And now you say Forget it? They are your people, LORD Not mine YOU do something! Personally, I'm tired, Spent, Frustrated. And in need of a Sabbath.

#### 3/14/2024 WEEK 10 DAY 4

## The Radiance of God

firipture EXODUS 34

Devotional

Not much earlier, Moses had hit bottom. He had come down from Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments, only to find his brother leading the people in idolatrous worship of a golden calf. In disgust, he smashed the stone tablets. But things were beginning to look up. In Exodus 33, Moses had conversations with God in the tent of meeting.

Perhaps this gave him courage to say to the Lord, "Now, show me your glory" (Exodus 33:18). God promised him, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you... When my glory passes by..." (Exodus 33:19, 22).

Here in Exodus 34:6-7, God passed in front of Moses. He didn't see God's face, but he did experience God's character. Here's what the Lord looks like: compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, forgiving yet disciplining for sin.

Malachi 3:6 says, "I the Lord do not change." God's character is the same today as it was when He met with Moses. He is unchanging. Hebrews 13:8 proclaims, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." We can count on God!

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with a second set of Ten Commandment tablets, he was a changed person. The people could literally see the radiance on his face. Have you ever been so close to God that others could see it on your face? How did your radiance affect them? How has it carried you forward into your life today?

Perhaps none of us will have a task as great as leading an entire nation out of slavery toward a promised land for forty years. But great or small, each assignment from God is holy. To carry it out, we need the presence of God. What is your plan to press into God more intimately so that you can experience his radiance?

Poem

Engraved in Stone

My commands are not for pen and paper-Homework done messily With spilled milk And pet dog chews. My commands are not for sticky pads--Reminders forgotten On refrigerators Or bulging Day Timers. My commands are not for answering machines-Blinking random In empty homes And instant messaging. My commands are to be engraved in stone Eternal tablets On hardened hearts Now transformed vessels

## 3/14/2024 WEEK 10 DAY 4

## The Tabernacle

firipture EXODUS 40

Devotional

The last sixteen chapters of the book of Exodus are largely dedicated to preparing a house of worship for the Israelites. Since the people were not yet in the Promised Land, then needed a sanctuary that was portable as they moved from place to place. In Exodus 25:8-9 the Lord said, "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you."

The tabernacle was so important to the ordering of their spiritual lives that 50 chapters of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are about it. This includes the construction of the tabernacle itself, the contents (including the ark of the Covenant, altar table, lampstands and basins) and instructions for priests (including their garments, duties, feasts, and sacrifices). This larger tabernacle Tent of Meeting used by the priests replaced the smaller Tent of Meeting used by Moses

Here in Exodus 40, the tabernacle is set up exactly according to God's instructions. When it was finished, the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. When have you sensed God that intimately? Have you ever been in a worship setting where His presence was thick? How did it affect you?

God's presence was so thick that the people determined whether to stay put or move on based on the cloud of the Lord covering it. Back when the people were trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army, they were led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Now, as a people freed from slavery, they were again led by the cloud covering by day and the fire by night (see also Numbers 9:15-16).

Take time to thank God that He guides your life, day and night, year by year. Make Psalm 25:4-5 a prayer to Him: "Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."

Poem

Finish the Work

I've listened, LORD, to your commands I've fashioned, hued with my own hands I've done all that you have required Now finish the work, O LORD. You formed the temple in my womb You birthed them from death's darken tomb You taught them from your precious word Now finish the work, O LORD. My children, LORD, are just like me In need of fashioning from Thee I've done my best and offer them Now finish the work, O LORD. Your cloud of cover, your glory fill Your Spirit's call to do your will You are the potter, they are the clay Now finish the work, O LORD.



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