

JUL | AUG | SEPT

# DISCIPLER

ADULT QUARTERLY | 3RD QUARTER 2023



*Old Testament*  
In the World,  
Not Of the  
World

*New Testament*  
Hanging On  
for the Ride

*Old Testament*  
Called to  
Ministry



**GROWING TOGETHER**  
Sabbath School Curriculum

# Discipler Quarterly

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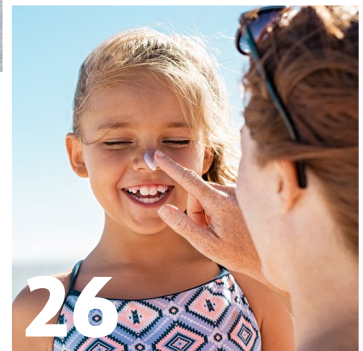
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from the  
**editor**

"This world is not my home; I'm just a passing through." Most of us have sung the strains of that song in more ways than just around the circle to the accompaniment of guitars. At other times we may find ourselves singing, "This is my Father's World." It is in the tension between those two ends of the spectrum, or perhaps in that place on the spectrum where those two realities overlap and merge, that we live.

In July, we will explore and linger in that place of tension as we think about the experience of the exiles in Babylon. We will see how God works in and through them to both reinforce their own faith and to make an impact in the lives of other Babylonian leaders.

In August, we will reflect together on the counsel of Peter, and how he draws from his own experience of walking with Jesus and caring for the sheep that were entrusted to his care, as those same believers faced hardship and persecution. Hanging on for the ride can indeed be hard, but it is not something we do alone, or without the joy that comes from knowing our destination is assured.

And in September, we will take some time to listen in on the experience of Jeremiah and the Jewish people who were on their way to exile. He brings to them God's messages of warning about what was coming, and hope for the future that would be coming after that. It is not easy to be in a place where suffering the consequences of poor choices is in the immediate future. It is, however, good to know that there is a future beyond that makes returning to and continuing to live faithfully trusting in the grace of God a huge source of hope.

While each month focuses on that place where the music of our lives overlap, they ultimately do so in a place of assurance and hope.

# How to Use This Quarterly

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## WELCOME TO DISCIPLER—

## A DEVOTIONAL STUDY GUIDE FOR ADULTS

*Discipler* is a tool to help you integrate God's truth, the Christian faith, and your daily life.

That process begins with spending time with God each day. Because of that, every issue of *Discipler* contains three months of daily devotions. Be sure to read the introductions to this issue's devotions. Then use the **Sunday** page to examine the heart of each week's study and follow the daily Bible reading and devotional plan throughout the week.

Each week's Bible readings and devotional thoughts revolve around that week's **Family Theme**. If you attend a church that uses GT curriculum, these daily studies will help you apply the biblical principles of Sabbath's study to your Monday-Friday life and provide you with a preview of the next lesson on Sabbath. Use the margins to answer the questions or jot down a note of your own.

If you are a parent, you will want to make use of each week's **Home Connection**. This sheet provides a simple way for parents to teach biblical truth to their children.

As important as Bible study is, the Christian life has other facets, and God wants to be part of them all. That's why *Discipler* also gives you practical advice from top Christian authorities, insightful articles, and even a little humor about life at home and at church.

The goal of *Discipler* is simply to help you weave God's Word and your faith into the fabric of your daily life. Use it in the way that best accomplishes this goal in your life. Once you have had some time to utilize this tool, take a moment to give us your feedback and suggestions. We would love to hear what you think.

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## In the World, Not Of the World

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As a teenager, he was a POW (prisoner of war), exiled to a foreign country that ridiculed his faith, steeped him in its culture and educational system, and threatened him at every turn. Yet, God gave Daniel wisdom and favor and exceptional opportunity to stand for Him. In response to God's faithfulness to him, even in the midst of exile, Daniel's faithfulness, and that of his companions, had a profound impact at the highest levels government in Babylon. What God shared through Daniel also gives us, literally, a vision of what God will ultimately bring about in our world.

That God is with us—even in the uncertainty of the Babylonian captivity—is a major theme of the book. As Daniel recounted how God was with him and the other exiles who stood with him, we see people who continued to define themselves as children of God even in the midst of powerful influences to live differently. We see victorious believers whose faith was securely anchored in the God who rules over all the affairs of humanity. Like Daniel, we too are in significant ways strangers and exiles living in a foreign culture away from our home. Daniel's faithfulness and courage to stand speaks to us, even centuries later.

Remember, these weekday devotions are designed to help you build upon, apply, and respond to the presentation of the lesson in class. **The devotions are meant to follow the lesson rather than precede it.** In this way, the focus is on integrating God's truth, your faith, and your daily life rather than merely attending a Sabbath School class.



## Week 1 [July 1-7, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**SEEKING GOD'S KINGDOM FIRST**

STUDY TEXT:

Daniel 1:1-21

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# SUNDAY

Read Daniel 1:1-21

Daniel lived in a world hostile to his faith and devotion to God. While there was a very real temptation to conform to the world around him, Daniel stood strong.

### 1. The Impact of Culture is Powerful But Not Decisive (Daniel 1:1-7)

The Hebrew captives were immersed in Babylonian culture, but still sought to remain faithful, nonetheless.

- *What had Daniel and the others been before captivity (verse 3)? Why did the king choose these people?*
- *Was the change in their names significant (verses 6-7)? Why or why not?*

### 2. We Need To Practice Wise Discernment (Daniel 1:8-16)

Daniel and the others exemplified how Christians should make wise choices as they continue to remain faithful in the midst of a very different culture.

- *Notice how Daniel's resolve or purpose (verse 8) help him to withstand the urging to eat the food intended for them?*
- *Why did Daniel and his friends request to eat other foods rather than the king's provisions?*

### 3. God Blesses Us When We Seek To Live With Integrity And Grace (Daniel 1:17-21)

God blessed them with wisdom and skill they could use to serve the king.

- *Why did the king go to Daniel and the others (verse 20)?*
- *How do God's gifts enable you to serve others?*



# COUNTERCULTURAL LIVING

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To be in the world but not of the world.*

When Scripture speaks of "the world" in a negative way, it's not speaking of the rocks, mountains, and seas that declare the glory of God. Rather, it is making reference to a way of life that puts self first and leads to the corruption of what God created us and our world to be. It is the way of life that does not flow from a loving response to God's love, grace, and generosity. This results in injustice, exploitation, and worse. That is "the world" that scripture is making reference to when that term is used in a negative way. Scripture says Satan is the god of this world who controls the various ways the world seeks to influence us away from Jesus. His great desire in this is that our beliefs, behavior, and bearings would be built on something—anything—other than God's character as revealed in scripture, particularly by Jesus. The devotions this week will invite you to continue to reflect on what it looks like to be in the world but not of the world.

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## MONDAY

Read Matthew 5:38-42

In today's passage, we get a glimpse of the power the culture we live in has over us and how it can shape our thinking. Jesus begins by saying, "You have heard that it was said," as He quotes the way God's law was understood in at a time when justice often looked more like retribution. At such a time, limiting people's response to something proportional (like only one eye for an eye) rather than something more brutal or severe was, in that time and place, a "just" guideline. However, that kind of law was clearly not the last word on justice, as it goes on to tell them turn the other cheek and get out of the revenge business. That was much closer to what God wanted them to see, but with the way people had been shaped by culture in the time of Moses, "an eye for an eye" was as far as they would get. Jesus here suggests that we need to move on from that, listening more carefully to Who God is, and responding appropriately. How does the life and ministry of Jesus help us to see the "Countercultural" growing edges in our own lives?

**Thought for the Day:** *Staying focused on Jesus is what helps to keep us from being conformed to the norms of our culture.*

## TUESDAY

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Careful thought, thorough study and honest reflection matters. One of the great needs in our day is godly wisdom. As our world continues to change at such a rapid rate, while we may not be able to keep up with the speed, we do need to keep our eyes on the compass, making sure the needle is pointing to the right place. Taking the easy path of either receiving or rejecting everything that challenges us in some way is a long way from wisdom. Wisdom gives us the discernment we need to receive, redeem, reject, or just pause to consider things more deeply and honestly. Faith and wisdom are not in tension with each other, but rather support each other. How does Solomon summarize his understanding of wisdom in today's Scripture reading? How was this reflected in their lives, even as prisoners of war? How can scripture guide our pursuit of wisdom?

**Thought for the Day:** *Wisdom from God involves engaging the world from God's perspective.*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Matthew 6:31-34

Many people, even those who follow Jesus, at some level at least, seem to live with anxiety and fear. It seems to be something like, if we really make Jesus the primary pursuit of our lives, we will never have enough, will live with chronic financial insecurity, and probably wind up homeless. They probably wouldn't say it in those words, but for many it is a bit of a haunting fear. So, to make sure we can stay secure, and have enough resources in a world troubled by scarcity, they put their trust in other things, just in case. That's not to say we don't plan wisely and act responsibly. But it is the inner life that is being addressed here, and whether we want to live more out of an awareness of scarcity, or one that celebrates generosity. So, what do you make of what Jesus is saying in today's passage? What do you sense God inviting you to consider? Where are the growing edges for you?

**Thought for the Day:** *Properly pursuing Jesus leads to profound peace.*

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## HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Seeking God's Kingdom First**. Take your child to the mall or to a park or any other crowded place. Walk with your child in the same direction that everyone is walking and then walk with him or her in the opposite direction as everyone else. Which was easier? God calls us to live in the world but not be of it, which

# THURSDAY

Read Hebrews 11:17-19

Sometimes, God invites us to live in ways that turn the "usual" way of doing things (as least as it would be defined by popular culture), on its head. Following where Jesus leads can indeed be quite Countercultural! And because of the powerful ways we are shaped by culture, it can be challenging to find ourselves swimming against the current. Today's passage is one of those moments when God invited Abraham to do something that would have seemed culturally acceptable in the world Abraham lived in. Telling Abraham to offer Isaac is exactly the kind of thing you might expect of the ancient near eastern gods to do. But as you know, God surprised everyone by subverting the whole system of sacrifice as a way to appease or please God by what you could bring, to an example of how it is God that supplies the lamb, not us. God's amazing grace surprised everyone in ways that flipped cultural expectations! What surprises do you think God might have in store for you?

**Thought for the Day:** *God delights in surprising us with grace.*

# FRIDAY

Read Hebrews 11:13-17

The passage today reflects on the experience of living a life of faith. The word used for stranger in this verse means a person who dwells in one place while his home is somewhere else. It is the picture of a foreigner who is in a country long enough to rent or lease a house but isn't a permanent resident of that country. The word pilgrim has a more temporary connotation than stranger. It carries the idea of being a visitor or a sojourner. One would be staying for a short period of time. It might be long enough to visit but not long enough to buy, lease, or even rent a house. The Hebrew believers were strangers and pilgrims, not mainly in a geographical sense, but in terms of what it was that defined who they were, and who they owed their primary allegiance to. They consider themselves to be residents, but their primary citizenship was in God's Kingdom, even as they pray for God's Kingdom to come, and will be done here as there.

**Thought for the Day:** *Citizens of Heaven should stand out from citizens of earth.*

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means that sometimes we'll be walking in the same direction as others, but at other times in the direction God invites us to walk, even if others aren't going the same way. Talk about ways we might invite others to join us, and ways we can stay faithful to following Jesus.



## Week 2 [July 8-14, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**STAYING FAITHFUL WHEN IT COSTS**

STUDY TEXT:

Daniel 3:1-30

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# SUNDAY

Read Daniel 3:1-30

The situations we find ourselves in can often create dilemmas for us. There are cultural pressures and conflicting commitments that are sometimes configured in ways that cause us to have to make choices. In Daniel 3, we look at the example set by the Hebrew captives when faced with one of those moments.

### 1. Remaining Faithful to God May Put Us in the Minority (Daniel 3:1-7)

King Nebuchadnezzar had an enormous golden image made and set up, and gathered all the officials of his empire to dedicate it.

- *What were the consequences for not bowing down (verse 6)?*
- *What kind of dilemma did this create for the Hebrews?*

### 2. Remaining Faithful to God May Put Us at Risk (Daniel 3:8-23)

Some of the astrologers came to the king to report that three Hebrew appointees refused to worship the king's golden image.

- *What do you notice about the king's response (verse 15)?*
- *What do you notice about the Hebrew's response (verses 16-18)?*

### 3. Remaining Faithful to God Is a Witness to Those Around Us (Daniel 3:24-30)

The Hebrews' faithfulness provided an opportunity for God to be glorified.

- *How does God indicate that God is with them (verses 24-25)?*
- *What do you think about the king's response to what happened (verse 29)?*

# TRIAL BY FIRE

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*Living faithfully even when it costs us to do so.*

Throughout history, we can read about how living as a part of the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed has clashed and been in tension with the kingdoms that are created within our cultures. At times, those clashes have been painful and costly for those who seek to live faithfully. While some have created problems for themselves and even acted in ways that are unhelpful in the name of Christ. There have also been times of widespread genuine persecution of followers of Jesus over the centuries, and it continues in tragic ways in too many parts of the world today. For many, the admonition to be faithful to God even to the point of death is more than just a religious sentiment (see Revelation 2:10). In Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced those issues with profound, courage, faith and grace. In the midst of that we see God present in a powerful way. We continue to reflect on that story this week.

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## MONDAY

Read Psalm 56:1-13

No one likes the experience of feeling like they are under attack or in the midst of a hostile or toxic situation. Our bodies have built into them ways of sensing threats and responding that are largely automatic. The classic summary of the two basic responses are fight or flight. That often translates into anger and even hostility on one hand, and fear and the desire to withdraw on the other. Not bad in terms of survival instincts, but not always pleasant or the best in terms of navigating the challenging interpersonal crisis we experience. In the midst of those moments, God invites us to move in the direction of faith and trust, literally "encouraging" us, and assuring us of God's presence with us. Notice how in today's scripture reading David processes what he is experiencing with God in this prayer/song he composes. Notice how he is honest about his feelings, fears, hopes, and his commitment to continue to trust in and through it all. What speaks to you in this psalm?

**Thought for the Day:** *We are invited to embrace "faith conquers fear" rather than slipping into fear conquering faith.*

## TUESDAY

Read Ezekiel 34:11-16

The Jewish exiles in Babylon were deeply discouraged. They had been conquered, their Temple was destroyed, and they had been taken captive into exile. Imagine the personal loss and devastation they had experienced. In the midst of it all, Ezekiel writes about those who had been tasked to care for the people (described as shepherds). Having not cared for God's people as they should have—some having even exploited and abandoned their "sheep." Ezekiel contrasts these examples of bad shepherding with the Good Shepherd. In contrast, their Great Shepherd loved the sheep and cared for them. The Great Shepherd's care is expressed through a series of "I will" statements. Read through these verses and notice all the "I will" statements. What does God say God will do for us? How do these "I will" statements apply to your life? How can they encourage you?

**Thought for the Day:** *Others may fail us, but God will not.*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Luke 17:11-19

So, do you tend to live with a sense of scarcity or abundance? Scarcity is that sense that there is not enough to go around, so I need to make sure I get mine if I can. Abundance is the sense because of what we have received, we cannot help but generously share with others as well out of gratefulness. Scarcity is asking, "How can I get?" Abundance is expressing thankfulness for what we have. Oddly enough, it is often those who seem to have the least who are the most generous, and those who have the most that live the least generously. The story in today's passage illustrates the difference between how people who received a generous gift responded. Nine enjoyed the benefits with seemingly little thought of gratefulness. One realized the gift they had received and responded in gratitude. How does this story speak to us about how our inner stance can change the way we weather difficult times?

**Thought for the Day:** *5 loaves and 2 fish can seem like not enough, or like a feast in the making.*

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### HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Staying Faithful When It Costs**. Strategize with your children to give them vocabulary and encouragement about standing up to peer pressure, when peer pressure is about pushing us to act in ways that do not reflect loving God and loving people. Help them to think about ways they can be faithful, even when others

## THURSDAY

Read John 8:1-12

Persecution is perhaps the most ugly when it claims religious motivation. Whether it is devotion to the king of Babylon as in this week's lesson, or apparent devotion to God's law being imposed in cruel and humiliating ways. It leaves a bad taste in one's mouth. Perhaps even worse when it is being done by people in the religious community that you are a part of. The lack of self awareness (or the disregard there of), the rank injustice of the setting, and hidden agendas are too often features of persecution. So is the trap that is set for those who are genuinely seeking to live in a way that reflects the character of God. We know the story in today's passage well. And once again, as we reflect upon it, it is hard not to be impressed with Jesus' amazing ability to navigate it so well as He sets things back in their proper light. As you read and reflect on the story, what characters do you identify with the most? What impresses you the most about Jesus' response?

**Thought for the Day:** *Wrong doesn't become right because you put a religious label on it.*

## FRIDAY

Read Acts 4:13-22

In today's passage, we get an interesting glimpse of what it often looks like for those following Jesus. It is not only well schooled faithful Hebrews that God works through in powerful ways, but also those who did not have the same opportunities that experience resistance when living faithfully. In this case, religious leaders sought to prevent them bringing healing to people who were struggling. It was not so much that they were against people getting help (at least when it came to people like them), but that they didn't like people doing it in ways Jesus did. Somehow, this threatened things they valued, which is reflected in the efforts they went through to try to squash it and the extent to which they were willing to go, in spite of the gratefulness of people who benefitted. Persecution often looks like this. Persecution can happen for lots of reasons (racial, economic, etc.), but in this case, it is due to reflecting the character of Jesus—the only thing worth being persecuted for.

**Thought for the Day:** *Time with Jesus enables us to stand for Jesus.*

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aren't, and even when it results in others acting badly toward them. Talk about ways they can encourage others to trust in God too, and how they can be supportive friends.



## Week 3 [July 15-21, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**THOUGH KINGDOMS FALL,  
GOD REMAINS**

STUDY TEXT:

Daniel 5:1-31

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# SUNDAY

Read Daniel 5:1-31

Pride has been the downfall of many, including Belshazzar. Thinking himself safe, he exalted himself against God and learned God alone is to be glorified.

### 1. Those Who Focus On Their Own Greatness Often Find Themselves Humbled (Daniel 5:1-6)

The writing on the wall signaled the end of the Babylonian kingdom.

- *What is the significance of Belshazzar's drinking wine in the vessels taken from God's Temple (verses 2-4)?*
- *How would you have felt seeing a hand write on the wall?*

### 2. God Uses People of Integrity In Times Of Crisis (Daniel 5:7-16)

Daniel was the person the king ultimately turned to in order to understand the writing on the wall.

- *What was Daniel known for (verses 11-12)?*
- *Are you someone others look to for support in times of crisis? Why or why not?*

### 3. Speaking Truth To Power With Humility (Daniel 5:17-31)

The written message meant that time had run out for Belshazzar and his kingdom, which would not pass to others.

His kingdom would be given to others.

- *Belshazzar, even though he should have known better because of father Nebuchadnezzar's experience (chapter 4), repeated his father's mistake (verse 22)?*
- *How can we avoid falling into the same trap as this king?*



# THE WRITING ON THE WALL

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To live humbly but confidently for Jesus.*

We understand that it was through pride that an angel became the Devil. Even under ideal conditions, selfishly making things all about ourselves does not end well. That's a powerful thought, isn't it? Once we move from joyously embracing life as a gracious gift to thinking that we are entitled to or deserve more than others, everything changes for us. People wind up seeking validation and recognition, feeling they deserve only the best—or at least better than others. They justify decisions and make excuses for themselves. How do we know this? Because, if we are honest, we would have to admit that we have first-hand experience battling it every day. Scripture has much to say about the impact of pride on ourselves and others. It also reminds us that we are loved and secure in Christ. So, we don't have to try to generate our own credentials, but can live gratefully and with humility. Humility is not self degradation, but rather letting go of making things all about us, and being free to serve others freely and unselfishly. The devotions this week provide opportunities to find encouragement for you to walk humbly with God and others.

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## MONDAY

Read Genesis 41:1-40

The scripture passage today invites us to consider a time in Joseph's life in which he was able to have a profound impact on an entire nation. And he was able to do this not because of his superior wit, charm, or social standing. In fact, he was in a dungeon at the time. Having interpreted the dreams of a couple of cell mates, one of whom had now been restored to his position of service in the pharaoh's household, he was now remembered when Pharaoh was struggling with understanding some dreams of his own. Through his willingness to share what God had given him (the ability to interpret dreams) with fellow prisoners, he was invited to do the same on a much larger scale, which resulted in Egypt being saved from seven years of famine. Speaking the truth with humility, in whatever situation we find ourselves, can have a huge impact!

**Thought for the Day:** *We may be who God wishes to use to humbly share the insights that others may need.*

## TUESDAY

Read 1 Peter 3:8-16

Today's passage seems to take it for granted that we are going to be living in a world where we encounter evil in various forms. This should not surprise us, and we should be prepared to deal with it when it happens. What is remarkable about this passage, however, is what Peter has to say about how we go about doing just that. The best way to deal with evil is by being good. That does not sound too profound at first, but pause for a few moments and let that sink in. More specifically, take a few moments to read through the passage noticing how we are invited to live as we engage with evil. These are not battle tactics in the way we usually think of it, but rather an admonition to greater self-definition. Not just know what to do, but be who you are called to be. Your life will be your greatest asset in facing tough things, as you live it in a way that reflects who God says you are.

**Thought for the Day:** *Our greatest testimony to Jesus is a good life lived in response to His amazing grace.*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Jeremiah 13:15-17

It has been said, "pride is the mother of all sins and is pregnant with all the rest." This passage in Jeremiah is an appeal to Israel to turn from pride before it brings the loss upon them that pride always ultimately does. Pride has consequences, not because God has a need to punish, but because choices always change things and bring those consequences in their wake as an outworking of what was chosen. Think about the many scandals we see among people in positions of leadership, and you will likely find pride playing a central role. Pride is what arises within us when we make everything all about ourselves. My possessions. My influence. My image. Maybe even my salvation—if everything I do is motivated by getting into heaven, rather than accepting God's gracious gift and the assurance that comes with it. Then we are free to love others unselfishly (see Paul's experience in Philippians 3). What are the ways I need to let go of self-centeredness?

**Thought for the Day:** *Pride is a vice not a virtue.*

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### HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Though Kingdoms Fall, God Remains**. Buy or borrow the game of Life and play it with your child. Talk with your child about the way she had a hand in all the decisions in her character's life, making decisions for the driver of the car. Talk about how we get to decide many things in our lives that determine how our

## THURSDAY

Read Matthew 19:16-30

As you listen to the story in today's passage, what do you notice about what seems to be motivating the question that this man brought to Jesus? What good thing must I do to get? It is interesting how Jesus responds. How does the way Jesus is thinking reflect a different train of thought than the one the man was on? Goodness has to do with what Jesus says. Kingdom life has to do with how we treat others. What hangs us up when it comes to fully experiencing what Jesus offers us has to do with what we treasure the most? Jesus goes on in His usual thought-provoking style to get them to think about how those who have a lot often find Kingdom life difficult to grasp, but with God it is quite possible. All those things that one might fear they are giving up when switching how they think, they actually get back in greater abundance. In what ways do you struggle with Kingdom thinking?

**Thought for the Day:** *Focusing on what we fear we are giving up robs us of embracing what we are given.*

## FRIDAY

Read Luke 18:9-14

How does self absorbance and looking down on others get pared with religious high profile people? No wonder this man stood by himself as he prayed! Did anyone else really ever get close for authentic connection? What is it that gets someone to the point that, even in prayer, they see themselves as better than others, backing it up by the contributions they think they are making? In contrast, as the passage for today goes on, we find a man who stood at a distance. That word distance is a disturbing word for someone who seeks to pray, isn't it? How do people get to the place where they feel unqualified to even pray, and who are so aware of their own faultiness that they can ask for nothing but mercy? The genuineness is palpable in the prayer of the second man, and his pain in need of the relief he seeks. As you allow yourself to be present in the story, how do you connect with it? What do you hear?

**Thought for the Day:** *Both Pride and humility can cause a sense of distance, but pride prevents God from closing the gap.*

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lives will turn out. What matters is making sure it is God Who is guiding our decisions, and that we are living in a way that honors God. Wherever the game of life takes us, we do not travel alone, and God guarantees how it ends if we stick with God's Kingdom.



## Week 4 [July 22-28, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**REMAINING FAITHFUL WHEN OPPOSED**

STUDY TEXT:

Daniel 6:1-28

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# SUNDAY

Read Daniel 6:1-28

Though this is probably the most familiar story from the book of Daniel, there is still much to learn from it.

### 1. Following God Doesn't Make Us Exempt From Political Manipulations (Daniel 6:1-9)

Daniel, who had been promoted and made governor, was targeted by others who wanted to bring him down, and used religion as a tool to do so.

- *In what ways was Daniel faithful in the kingdom (verse 4)?*
- *What do we learn here about the significance of how we live?*

### 2. Faithfulness to God is Not Always Welcome and May Be Costly (Daniel 6:10-18)

Daniel continued to be faithful to God even when people used his devotion as a tool to bring him down.

- *What do we learn from Daniel's willingness to continue to be faithful to his personal devotion as he had before (verse 10)?*
- *What are some ways faithfulness to Christ can be costly to us?*

### 3. We Can Trust God in All Circumstances (6:19-28)

Daniel continued to be true to himself and his walk with God, and left the results with God.

- *Does God always save us from the "lions" (verse 22)? Why or why not?*
- *In what circumstance do you need to do what is right and just trust God with the results?*

# WHEN THE ENEMY ROARS

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*Faithfully serve Jesus no matter the consequences.*

It can be quite challenging at times to keep ideas from our culture from shaping, and sometimes distorting, what we believe. God's people struggled with this all through the Old Testament, as did the Jews during their exile in Babylon, and after their return. One unfortunate example of this is what is sometimes referred to as the "prosperity gospel." This is the idea that following Jesus with genuine faith will result in us prospering in all things. The idea is that true disciples of Jesus should never experience sickness or hardships . . . and if we do, it's because we don't have enough faith. While it is true on many occasions that our lives are deeply enriched by following Jesus, that enrichment often comes in the midst of a lot of other stuff, and sometimes in spite of it. While some have indeed done well by material standards, the truth is that those who are faithful to Jesus also suffer lack, sickness, and hardships at times. We are not granted immunity from life, but rather a different way of engaging it. Our faithfulness is seen, not so much in escaping these things, but rather in the kind of people we are in the midst of them.

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## MONDAY

Read James 5:10-11

Writing to the young church, James points them to the experience of the prophets as a source of encouragement. Patient in the face of suffering, it would be hard to make the case from scripture that following God always leads to an easy life; quite the contrary in fact. It does, however, lead to a meaningful one, even if we don't see it at the times. James reminds us, in fact, that following Jesus often involves perseverance—that ability to keep on keeping on even especially when things get challenging. Citing Job as his example, he reminds us that the life of faith is not one that grants us immunity from the tough things of life. But it should remind us that whatever it brings, we can navigate through it trusting that the God who is full of compassion and mercy will have the final word in the end.

**Thought for the Day:** *Followers of Jesus are not known so much for what they get to avoid as for who they become as they stay faithful.*

## TUESDAY

Read Matthew 5:10-12

In the days of the early church, a time in which concepts of religious freedom being protected was not ingrained into the culture, being a disciple of Jesus could be quite costly and even result in persecution. Those who dwell on how bad things have gotten today may not have a good grasp of just how bad things could be then! We find lots of stories in scripture of God's people suffering at the hands of others, and in history, too many examples of others suffering at the hands of those who believed themselves to be God's people! So, in the midst of all of that, what could Jesus possibly have meant when He declared those who suffer persecution for His name's sake as being blessed? Take a few moments to think of those who have suffered because they have been like Jesus. Those who have stood for what is genuinely good and right. What is that kind of suffering like? How is that blessed? Who would draw comfort from His words?

**Thought for the Day:** *Disciples of Jesus are devoted to Jesus even when it costs.*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Acts 6:8-15

The scripture passage today is a profound case study in what it means to suffer for the sake of Jesus. It is both profoundly sad and profoundly inspiring all at the same time. He is described as a person of both grace and power, who impacted people's lives in genuinely good ways. It also describes how some responded to this with resistance and outright opposition and hostility, to the point of dishonestly plotting his demise. Sadly, they found ways to enlist religious people in the cause. How does this kind of thing happen? How do people develop such huge blind spots that they wind up attacking someone or something that is genuinely good, and allow themselves to be convinced that what they are doing is somehow what God wants? How does someone claim to be a Christian and at the same time being call for someone to be hanged? Yet, Stephen does not abandon the message, or the God he serves. It's a passage worth contemplating!

**Thought for the Day:** *Better to stand for what is good, than to fall for what is evil.*

### HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Remaining Faithful When Opposed**. Set up an obstacle course with two routes, one visibly easier and one harder, ending at the same place with a snack or small toy. Hide an additional prize along the way in the more difficult course. Tell your child to go through the obstacles to get to the prize.

## THURSDAY

Read Acts 7:54-60

And this is how yesterday's story concludes. You can read about all that transpired through chapter 6 and 7, and sadly this is how it concludes. It follows the same pattern as the trial and death of Jesus. The same inability for people to see and hear clearly. The same opposition to what is actually good, in the name of protecting some other strange version of good. And as they literally stone Stephen to death, he remains focused on who Jesus is and refused to be drawn into the chaotic sentiments that animated those seeking to destroy him. Polycarp, the second century believer (a student of the Apostle John) showed a similar spirit at the time of his execution (Google it and read about it). These (and many others) took the words of Jesus in Revelation 2:10 seriously and were faithful unto death. It is a strange irony that we live in a world where what is good is often seen as a threat, but we are called to stand with the good! Even so, come Lord Jesus!

**Thought for the Day:** *The path of Jesus is not the path of least resistance.*

## FRIDAY

Read Romans 8:18-25

You don't have to be particularly perceptive to see that we live in a world that is struggling in so many ways. In today's passage, Paul describes creation itself struggling and suffering, but also in the midst of its groaning, anticipating what is coming with joy. The imagery of childbirth is a both powerful and profound. How is it that something that results in joy and new life is so often so excruciatingly difficult and painful along the way? We still suffer the curse of sin, but we also look forward to the resurrection and new life. This is the imagery that Paul uses to describe this moment in which we live, groaning with labor pains, but anticipating the joy. Unlike physical birth, we get to begin to experience the joy before the final delivery, but we also feel the contractions. As you read today's passage, what parts do you relate to the most? How is your hope? Embrace it now more fully!

**Thought for the Day:** *Hope in Jesus keeps us faithful even in difficult times.*

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Most likely she will go the easy route to get to the prize faster. Have her go through the hard course, where she will discover the extra hidden treat. Sometimes we think the easier way is the better way, but when we are willing to face even the hard stuff, there are even greater things awaiting us! God does not make things hard for us, sin does that, but when we keep focusing on God even in the midst of hard stuff, in the end, whenever that comes, which may not be until Jesus comes, there will be joy.



## Week 5 [July 29-Aug 4, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**GOD'S KINGDOM ENDURES FOREVER**

STUDY TEXT:

Daniel 7:1-28

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## SUNDAY

Read Daniel 7:1-28

On some occasions in Scripture, God pulls back the curtains and gives us a glimpse of what is ahead. However you understand all the details of the various parts of the vision, it certainly points to a time when evil is no more and God restores all things once again.

### 1. Earthly Rulers and Empires Will Rise and Fall (Daniel 7:1-8, 15-17)

Daniel's prophetic vision was interpreted before the dream was over!

- *According to verse 17, what did the four beasts symbolize?*
- *How do you respond to the prophetic passages in Scripture?*

### 2. The Fourth Great Ruler and Kingdom Will Rise Up Against God and His People (Daniel 7:19-25)

This unusual fourth beast, with all the big and little horns, concerned Daniel most.

- *What was this fourth beast doing, according to verses 21, 23, and 25?*
- *What hope does verse 22 give about the situation?*

### 3. God's Judgement is About Bringing Sin To An End, And Christ Will Reign Forever (Daniel 7:9-14, 18, 22, 26-28)

Daniel saw more than the fearsome beasts in his vision. He also saw the Lord, the Ancient of Days, and His everlasting kingdom.

- *How did Daniel describe the Ancient of Days?*
- *How did he describe the kingdom of God?*



# NOT YOUR AVERAGE DREAM

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To remember that whatever happens in politics, government, and in our daily struggles, God has the final word.*

I've had some strange dreams, but never anything like the one Daniel had! God gave Daniel a vision of the future, but did not leave him to fret and tremble about its implications. With the coming disaster and persecution, God also provided a vision of Himself—ruling, reigning, judging, great, powerful, and everlasting. If we know the hero returns in the next episode, we aren't as anxious when we come to the cliffhanger in the show. When the world news—and even the local news—threatens to rob us of peace and security, while we can't just change the channel, we can know how the story ends. When we place our trust in the One who is with us now, and Who will have the last word when all is said and done, our anxieties can give way to adoration and our worry to worship. While current viewing may be challenging, even a glimpse of what is ahead makes all the difference.

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## MONDAY

Read Exodus 15:11-18

The passage today is an excerpt from the song that Moses and Miriam led the people to sing as they stood victorious on the other side of the Red Sea. Notice what God did, and what they did. They did not initiate their deliverance. They did not win any battles. They did not defeat the Egyptian army. They literally did not do anything except follow Moses. The song they sang was not all about them, it was all about God. They got to celebrate the victory. They benefited from the victory. But the victory was God's gift to them, not something they earned from God. Oh, that would have remained the refrain they sang during their journey ahead! Too soon, the appreciation for the amazing gift of grace they had received would slip into the background as tunes about returning to Egypt, longing to eat what they had eaten there. Even when we are given amazing gifts of deliverance, we too often drift back into the old Egyptian sentiments of the culture in which we live. What is the predominate song that you most often find yourself singing?

**Thought for the Day:** *God invites us to sing a different kind of song that those we often hear in our culture.*

## TUESDAY

Read Psalm 146:1-10

While government and governmental leaders are people and entities we can work with for the common good, they are not the ultimate object of our trust. We take our primary cues from God, the source of all life, and upon whom we are dependent for our very existence! That is what this psalm of praise proclaims. All people and earthly entities derive their life from God. Verse 4 is a well known Adventist "proof text" that is often cited to support our understanding of the dead. But there is more here going on than that. Not only are we invited to embrace God and all that God has shared with us, but also the reminder that God is also at work to bring restoration and healing in our world. This is a God who delights in setting people free, giving sight, lifting burdens, and watching over the most vulnerable among us. Even those who come from somewhere else. What do you find yourself drawn to in this picture of God's heart towards us?

**Thought for the Day:** *We can trust in the love and graciousness of God's heart toward all of us.*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Mark 14:60-62

The scripture reading today touches on one of those moments when we see two kingdoms clashing with each other. One, represented by the high priest who had sought to build a case against Jesus, and was now demanding that Jesus answer to him, and Jesus Who remained silent in the midst of the demands and false depictions of Who He was. Finally, when the high priest asked Him directly if He was indeed the Messiah, Jesus responded with a straightforward answer. He was. Drawing from the imagery of Daniel 7:13 describing Himself as the Son of Man and the coming Messiah, Jesus confidently spoke the truth. The high priest did not understand that, despite how things may have appeared, Jesus did not answer to him, but rather, he would ultimately answer to God. Whatever else was going on in the rise and demise of earthly kingdoms and authorities, God's kingdom remains as the one that holds our primary citizenship.

**Thought for the Day:** *Jesus embodied, "Thy Kingdom Come"*

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### HOME connection

This week your child learned about **God's Kingdom Endures Forever**. "*Happily ever after.*" What does that phrase mean? Do we think of the Bible's promised victory for God and His people as another fairy tale, or as something real? Talk about how the very best stories we tell and the way they make us feel good when they end well are

# THURSDAY

Read Revelation 21:1-8

We all live in the midst of a world where governments rise and fall, or go through significant shifts. This certainly was what was being described in the vision that Daniel had that we looked at last Sabbath. But what Daniel also saw was that in the midst of all the turmoil that goes with it, there is one thing we can be certain of, and that is assurance that God's Kingdom endures. The passage today describes what we can look forward to with certainty when the great controversy that we are a part of finally comes to a close. As you take a few moments to sit with the passage for today, allow John to paint the picture for you of the Kingdom that look forward to with anticipation. A kingdom in which we already are invited to participate. What are the central features of this kingdom? What will be our experience as we dwell there? What will finally be removed forever? What powerful statements of assurance do you find there? Enjoy what John has shared!

**Thought for the Day:** *"God with us" captures the entire story of salvation.*

# FRIDAY

Read Revelation 5:1-14

In the midst of all the beasts and creatures of Daniel 7, one figure emerges that eclipses all others. It is not a leopard or even a little horn. It is one like the Son of man, coming with clouds of heaven in the presence of the Ancient of Days (verse 13). It is important that we don't get lost among the beasts and miss the truly central figure! In the passage for today, in the midst of a book that is also awash with beasts and other figures, we again see the central figure in the book of Revelation and the story it tells. The book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, and it is in this chapter that we see Jesus revealed in a powerful way. What we most have to look forward to is not a place or a condition, but a Person that makes all of those things possible. Take a few moments to reflect on the picture that is painted here of the amazing God that stands at the center of all of created reality. Our hope, assurance, and certainty is grounded in what God has revealed in Jesus. Wow! Just wow!

**Thought for the Day:** *When all is said and done, it is all about Jesus.*

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just little tastes or glimpses of what God really has for us! Our lives here are only chapter one in a huge volume of stories that will go on forever, happily ever after.



## Healthy Skin

By Paul Gentuso, M.D.

We spend a lot of time looking at and attending to our skin, since the skin of our face is what greets us in the mirror each morning and what we present to people all day long. The remainder of our skin is mostly covered up, but still gets our attention as we scrub, moisturize, shave, and generally pamper it. We are born with healthy skin that is perfectly adapted to life on earth. This tough, elastic, waterproof, self-healing tissue is our first line of defense against injury, germs, heat, and cold.

While we are young, the most important step we can take in protecting our skin is to avoid overexposure to the sun. Some sunshine is important for our mood, as well as for the production of Vitamin D. Yet, overexposure to the sun's rays leads to skin damage and, potentially, skin cancer. Because we need the sun, but not too much of it, we face the daily challenge of striking the right balance with regard to our exposure.

For the typical person, 20 minutes of direct sunlight a day, with at least the face and arms exposed, is enough to give us the vitamin D and mood lift we need. Lighter skinned people should aim for less time, and darker skinned people can spend more time soaking in the rays.

If you plan to be out longer than this recommended time, it is important to protect yourself with shade, sunscreen, and clothing. Babies and young children especially need protection from the sun. When applying sunscreen, don't be stingy! Apply generously, and reapply at least every two hours if swimming or sweating a lot. Remember to protect your lips with SPF lip balm.

This generation's adoption of rash guards and other sun protection swimwear for children is wise. Hats are the most important article of clothing for sun protection because the top of the head is so intensely exposed, even in people with a full head of hair. The wider the brim the better, to cover the ears and neck. Pick out a stylish hat and enjoy it!

What about tanning beds? They are to be avoided. Years ago, it was thought that tanning beds were useful to prepare for the summer season, yet it is now clear that tanning bed use is associated with an increased risk for melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer.

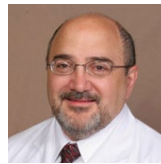
Childhood is a time of rashes, scrapes, and bruises. Rashes are caused by infection, allergy, or irritation. Infectious rashes are typically caused by viruses, some mild and some serious. If your child has a rash and a fever, it's time to contact your doctor. Allergic rashes can be

caused by foods we eat or by contact with plants, such as poison ivy.

Teenage years bring concerns over blemishes and acne. Most teens can control acne with gentle scrubbing and applying over-the-counter products like benzoyl peroxide cream and salicylic acid cleansing pads. For persistent or severe blemishes, see a dermatologist or family physician for prescription medications that can be very effective and prevent scarring.

Once an adult, it is important to monitor your skin for signs of precancerous, or even cancerous, lesions. See your doctor for any moles that grow or change, and other skin lesions that are flaky, peeling, or slow to heal—especially on the face, top of head, ears, arms, and back. Our skin naturally becomes drier and thinner as we age. Moisturizers help, especially in the winter.

Take the time to be good to your skin! As the children's song says, regardless of the hue or shade, you and your skin are precious in His sight.



Paul J. Gentuso, M.D. is a former missionary to Cote d'Ivoire who now serves as the chief medical officer for Heritage Medical Associates in Nashville, Tennessee.





August

## Hanging On for the Ride

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It had been a long time since the day when Peter had responded to Jesus' question with, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:16). Now, Peter found himself approaching the end of his life, writing to Christians who were facing hard times. He had lived through a lot, and had learned a lot, as he continued to follow Jesus on a path he never could have imagined when he began. In the letters of first and second Peter we see him as the humble pastor, shepherd, teacher, and encourager that he had grown to be on that journey. He shared all the thing that he learned along the way, seeking to feed Jesus' sheep as Jesus had asked (John 21:17).

This month, we'll be reflecting together on what he shared as he still shepherds us today. In the process, we may get some good insights on what it means for us to be good shepherds for the flocks that have been intrusted to us as well. Be sure to take time each day to reflect on the passages, and to sit quietly in God's presence listening for how you are being invited to live, who you are being invited to become, and how you can more fully embrace the God Who issues that invitation.



## Week 6 [August 5-11, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**FAITHFUL THROUGH THE FIRE**

STUDY TEXT:

1 Peter 1:1-25

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# SUNDAY

Read 1 Peter 1:1-25

The epistle of 1 Peter was addressed to scattered believers who were experiencing persecution. Peter wrote to encourage them to continue to trust Christ even in the midst of their suffering. In this first chapter, we are reminded of a number of important things.

### 1. Knowing Who We Are (1 Peter 1:1-12)

In the midst of turmoil, we can find security in Christ and in the promises of God.

- *In what ways do the promises of God give you hope?*

### 2. Living a Holy Life (1 Peter 1:13-16)

We are invited to live a holy life in response to the holiness of God.

- *The overwhelming goodness and grace of God inspires to live in ways that reflect that same goodness and grace.*

### 3. Living Reverently (1 Peter 1:17-21)

Knowing Who God is and who we are, we live in the awareness of God being with us and guiding us.

- *How can trust in God be seen in your life?*

### 4. Living Sincerely (1 Peter 1:22-25)

The appropriate response to the grace we have been given is a life of genuineness and authenticity in the love we reflect and express to others.

- *How do your actions demonstrate that you sincerely love your brothers and sisters in Christ?*



# LIVE IT OUT

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To explore what it means to live a godly life even in the midst of trials.*

It is a truly amazing thing to catch a glimpse of God's amazing love and grace for us and to allow the realization of that to fill us and spill out of us into our relationships with others. On days in which that realization is embraced faith seems so easy. But in those moments, or seasons, in which we experience resistance, opposition, or even persecution, things can become much more challenging. It is for people experiencing those times that Peter was writing, encouraging us to stay focused on who Jesus is. We are as His children, and continuing to live as citizens of God's Kingdom even when the other kingdoms we are dealing with are less than helpful or encouraging. This week we'll continue to reflect on what it looks like to do that.

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## MONDAY

Read Romans 8:15-17

We live in a culture where fear and anxiety play a significant role in many people's lives. Most of us probably know someone who actually struggles with an anxiety or panic attacks, if you don't yourself. A quick self inventory of the things that worry us or that we find ourselves feeling stressed about might well confirm that. One of the glorious things about the message of the gospel is that, at the very core of who we are in our spiritual lives, we can let go of anxiety and live free, if we're willing to accept it. Notice how this is emphasized in the passage for today. God's Spirit does not work to make us slaves to fear, but rather to assure us that we are family, children of God, whom we can address with the most intimate of parental terms—"Abba." And because we are children, all the family resources are ours. So then, even if we go through hard times, or suffer for being like Jesus, we know that whatever happens, our inheritance is secure. This frees us to live a truly godly life that reflects the love that we have been loved with the rest of God's children as well. Think about what an amazing gift that is to receive, know and share!

**Thought for the Day:** *There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out all fear. 1 John 4:18.*

## TUESDAY

Read Ephesians 1:3-14

If you have ever been shopping for a house and found one you were planning to buy, you may have been asked to make a deposit to demonstrate your commitment. Sometimes this is called earnest money. It lets the seller know that you mean business and are willing to put up resources to prove it. In verse 14, the Holy Spirit is described as God's deposit. God is with us through the Spirit, and in letting us know the Spirit will be with us now, it is the down payment to let us know that God is serious about us being with God when Jesus returns (recall John 14:1-3). This is one of the many rich insights in today's reading. Take a few moments and take note of the words or phrases that speak to you in a powerful way. Chosen, blameless, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, grace lavished on us, sealed, etc. Continue to soak in the imagery, and notice how it speaks to your heart.

**Thought for the Day:** *God has already made a down payment on our inheritance by be with us now through the Spirit.*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Isaiah 43:1-4

God has promised never to leave us or forsake us no matter what is going on in our lives. Very often we forget this great truth when we are going through hard times. It is important for us to remember God is with us in the hard times just as He is in the easy times. Pray today that you would recognize God's presence in your troubles and thank Him for being with you.

Use the statements below to guide your prayers today:

- Help me, Lord, to trust Your promise to be with me in life's difficult times.
- Help me, Lord, to recognize the signs of your presence in my trials.
- Help me, Lord, to let that confidence in who I am in You to overflow in my relationships with others by loving them well.
- Help me to trust that even in the midst of hard times you are working for restoration and healing.

**Thought for the Day:** *A child of God is never truly alone.*

## HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Faithful Through the Fire**. Play a unique game of dress-up to teach your child the importance of being different from the world. Go through your closets and old clothes to find crazy, mismatched items. Have fun creating unique outfits that would be considered very different in today's

## THURSDAY

Read John 8:31-36

Holding to the teachings of Jesus is not always an easy thing to do, particularly when there are teachings of others that seem to be woven into the fabric of things. Some of those other teachings reflect the temptations Jesus faced in the desert from Satan. The insinuation of doubt about whether we are God's beloved children. The insistence that we are defined by what we have, what others think, or what we can do. The idea that our value is conditional upon our performance. Those are the toxic voices that we often hear. The truth, however, is what is reflected in today's passage. We can listen to the toxic voices that keep us enslaved, or we can listen to who Jesus says we are: children of God who are embraced by God's love and grace. Those are the teachings that Jesus invites us to hold on to! That we are sons, not slaves or servants (see John 15:14-16). When we embrace this, as Jesus says, we are free indeed!

**Thought for the Day:** *You will never go wrong believing what God says about us.*

## FRIDAY

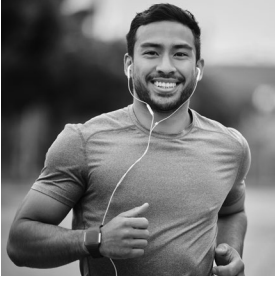
Read 1 John 3:16-18

Imagine driving down a long lonely road on a freezing winter night. You see a car on the side of the road with two flat tires. Pulling up alongside it, you say, "It looks like you have a problem." The owner says, "Yeah, my car won't start, I don't have a cell phone, and I am freezing!" To which you reply, "I sure hope you find a way to get a hold of someone. Well, I've got to go. Don't get too cold. Bye!" You then drive away. Ouch. You know where this is going, don't you? Of course, we would never do that, right? Yet, how often do we see someone in need, have the ability to help, and yet do nothing but say, "I hope things get better?" Today's verses tell us real love isn't shown by words but by actions. It is the sincere love of which Peter wrote (1 Peter 1:22). How have we demonstrated love to those around us this week? How have our actions reflected the holy love of God?

**Thought for the Day:** *We need to love others the way Jesus has loved us.*

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fashion. You may want to take turns displaying your fun outfits. Talk to your child about how God wants us to be unique too, by being people that love others the way God loves us. That's what it means to be holy like God is holy. Take time to pray and ask God to help make your family more holy—more like Jesus.



## Week 7 [August 12-18, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**A WORK IN PROGRESS**

STUDY TEXT:

1 Peter 2:1-12

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# SUNDAY

Read 1 Peter 2:1-12

Peter wrote to believers to encourage them during their suffering. In this chapter he continues to talk about how to grow into who God is inviting us to be.

### 1. Craving What Is Good (1 Peter 2:1-3)

Having embraced God's grace, Peter encourages us to continue to draw our nourishment from there and not from other less nourishing sources.

- *How would you describe what you are hungry for? How does the love and grace of God satisfy that in ways that cause us continue to grow?*

### 2. Building Wisely (1 Peter 2:4-8)

The most important part of any building project is the foundation. Peter reminds us that, as living stones, we are to build together on the cornerstone, which is Jesus.

- *How does seeing yourself as a part of a community of people building on the love and grace of Jesus impact your sense of who you are and how you live?*
- *What is it about Jesus that is a firm foundation for some, and a stumbling stone for others?*

### 3. Be Uniquely His (1 Peter 2:9-12)

We need to let it be known how God in His mercy has delivered us from darkness and brought us together in His family.

- *Other than going to church on Sabbath, in what ways would other people see your life as different from those who do not share your faith?*
- *What difference would you most want them to be able to see?*

# UNDER CONSTRUCTION

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To pursue the spiritual nourishment that brings about growth in my walk with Jesus.*

Athletic trainers tell us that if we want our muscles to grow we have to eat right and exercise. Failing to do either will not result in the kind of growth we could otherwise experience. In a similar way, if we want to grow spiritually, we need to eat well and practice what we learn. Spending time with God through scripture and prayer and being intentional about being aware of God's presence with us are important ways we eat and exercise as well. In a world that marches to a different drummer and is filled with so many distractions, being intentional about taking time to focus God and God's Kingdom is important. This helps us stay on course in the race we are running. The devotional thoughts this week seek to provide you with one more time to pause, remember, reflect, and live out of what you see and hear. Good nutrition and regular exercise make a difference in how we live.

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## MONDAY

Read Hebrews 5:11-14

Sometimes when we have lived a lot of years, or been a Christian for a long time and know the basics of our faith. We can be tempted to think that the real growing edges for us will be found in deep Biblical or theological studies in which we probe the complexities of what we believe. There are, to be sure, some profound and important things that are worth contemplating and seeking to understand better. In fact, we could use more people who take genuine scholarship seriously rather than getting absorbed in sensational YouTube videos or social media offerings. But when it comes to personal spiritual growth and living out our faith, often the places where we struggle are back with the basics. We may know we are saved by grace, but have we allowed the implications of that to sink down deeply into our hearts and change us? We may know we are to love others, but have we allowed the grace extended to us to be extended to others? Sometimes, as today's passage suggests, we just need to return to the basics again.

**Thought for the Day:** *Spiritual maturity is sometimes more about mastering the basics than exploring the complexities.*

## TUESDAY

Read James 1:21-25

One of the mistakes we often make is equating Christian maturity with biblical knowledge. Although Bible knowledge is important and increasing it is good, Christian maturity isn't measured by how much of the Bible we know. It is measured by how much of the Bible we live. If we only know something in our heart, but never allow it to sink down into our hearts, we miss what God so much wants to share with us. It is one thing to hear the words "I love you" and another thing to take the risk of believing them. But how profound the difference when we do. Sometimes, for lots of reasons, it is a struggle to do that, but it is a struggle worth engaging. It is the love and grace of God that makes that journey possible. And it is God's invitation that is always extended to us. Taking quiet, prayerful time to let the good news sink in is well worth the effort. Don't be afraid to ask for help! We are part of a community after all!

**Thought for the Day:** *We need to live what we know, for our own good!*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Philippians 1:3-11

It is often when we listen to people pray that we get a glimpse of what is on their heart. Today's passage is an opportunity to do just that. As we listen to Paul pray for this church community, we can sense his deep feelings for them, and how they are on his heart. Listen to what Paul prays for. That their love might continue to grow and expand in deep and profound ways. He knew that loving well and deeply gives us valuable insights and understanding that will help us make wise choices. He prayed they would grow in love, knowledge, wisdom, and purity, and that their lives would be filled with the fruits of righteousness. He is not praying that they would grasp the intricacies of prophetic charts, but rather the depth of transformed hearts, as we are filled with the fruit that comes through knowing Jesus. Going deeper in to what seems simple to understand is sometimes where we find the most profound things of all!

**Thought for the Day:** *Prayer is the opening of our hearts to God.*

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## HOME connection

This week your child learned about **A Work in Progress**. Using building blocks, select or prepare two special blocks to serve as a foundation for what you build. One should be flat, smooth, and stable; the other uneven, unstable, and without a flat surface. Let each person take a turn adding a block to the uneven foundation first, and see

# THURSDAY

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Foundations are everything. That was the point of Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders that we read about in Matthew 7:24-27. This is also what Paul is talking about in today's passage as he talks about building on the foundation of Jesus. Where we start matters. But Paul goes on to say that what we build on that foundation matters too, as he reminds us that the community we build on that foundation is the place where God's Spirit is to be seen. God wants to reveal God's character to the world through us, together. But that can only happen as we, individually and as a community, stay firmly anchored to the foundation, which is Jesus. He goes on to warn us about not confusing the leaders in the church community with the foundation on which the community is built. It is the foundation on which we build, not those who serve or lead. Spiritual leadership is not about the leaders, but rather is about Who the leaders points you to.

**Thought for the Day:** *We need to be careful about how we build on the foundation of Jesus.*

# FRIDAY

Read Matthew 5:14-16

If you have ever been in a really dark place, where you literally cannot see your hand in front of your face, then you know something about darkness. But what you also know is the power of even a tiny bit of light, and how it can quickly overcome what the darkness had been doing. In fact, in one important sense, darkness is not even a thing in itself—it is simply the state of things when there is no light. In today's passage, Jesus talks about how we can be lights in an otherwise dark world. It is amazing how reflecting just a little bit of grace, love, or hope into places that seem dark can make such a huge difference. Jesus is the light of the world. But Jesus also tells us that we are the light of the world, when we allow the love and grace of God to be reflected through us into the world around us. Jesus wants to work through us as a church community to be those points of light in the world. That is something worth pausing to think about awhile. Why not do that?

**Thought for the Day:** *The way we are with others tells others something about Jesus Christ.*

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how many you can add before it collapses. Repeat it again, but this time building on the solid foundation. Talk about why the right foundation matters, and what Peter meant when he was talking about Jesus being that foundation that we build on.



## Week 8 [August 19-25, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**LIVING IN DIFFICULT TIMES**

STUDY TEXT:

1 Peter 3:8–4:19

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# SUNDAY

Read 1 Peter 3:8–4:19

Peter wrote to provide encouragement and guidance to Christians going through hard times because of their faith. While we in the western part of the world don't face the same degree of persecution as those to whom Peter originally wrote did, what he shares still provides rich insights into what it means to follow Christ, even when it costs.

### 1. Keep a Clear Conscience (1 Peter 3:13-17)

If we are in the wrong, then the challenges we face might be a bit of our doing, and we will need to face those things appropriately. However, if our conscience is clear, and we are living in a way that reflects the character of God, then our innocence will speak for itself.

- *Do we live in such a way that others would doubt false accusations if they were made about us?*

### 2. Follow Christ's Example (1 Peter 3:18–4:6)

As Christ suffered for being Who He was, so when we who seek to reflect His character suffer for being like Him, it should not surprise us. People who reflect Christ's character do live a certain way.

- *How are our lives different since accepting Christ as our Savior?*

### 3. Serve Authentically and Faithfully (1 Peter 4:7-11)

While we wait for the soon return of Jesus, we prepare by keeping on being the kind of people God invites us to be, even when the going gets rough. Who we are speaks powerfully, especially in the face of opposition.

- *How do you feel about Jesus coming soon? Explain.*

### 4. Suffer Joyfully (1 Peter 4:12-19)

It is not unusual for Christ-followers to go through persecution.

- *In what ways has God used hard times in your life for His good?*



# WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To find encouragement and guidance for living for in a world that is sometimes hostile to people of faith.*

Most of us live in places where religious freedom is protected, and where we don't really encounter much in the way of actual persecution that results from us being like Jesus. Even though western culture has been shaped by Judeo-Christian ideas, the separation of church and state ensures that the government does not promote, sponsor, or support any particular religious faith. Religious groups sometimes, rightly or wrongly, get into squabbles over whether or not they have to adhere to certain laws. They do this because they have a religious exemption, but we would be hard pressed to find examples of direct state sponsored persecution. We may at times, however, find ourselves meeting resistance or even hostility by various groups or individuals as a result of trying to faithfully live in a way that reflects the character of God. The lesson this week surfaced a bit of the irony of people who live loving and gracious lives sometimes suffering for being those kinds of people. We'll reflect more on all of this as we consider various passages of scripture and how they speak to our walk with Jesus, even when the going gets rough.

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## MONDAY

Read Acts 5:17-42

Today's passage is an interesting snapshot of the kind of persecution that the early church faced. As you read through the passage for today, pay special attention to the dynamics that surround this instance of persecution. Take note of what it was that the disciples were saying. Notice how those in positions of power responded. And notice also the nuanced voice of Gamaliel, and how he sought to change the conversation and the dynamics. Notice how people, especially if they hold places of privilege, respond to the thought that they might share responsibility for the death of Jesus. Notice also the stance of the disciples through it all. What speaks to you the most powerfully in this story?

**Thought for the Day:** *We should trust God more than we fear people.*

## TUESDAY

Read John 13:1-7

One of the tragic ironies of history is how people who claim to be followers of Jesus have at times persecuted those who believed differently than they did. The Catholic church during the middle ages persecuted other Christians for what they held to be heretical ideas. Some of those who had been persecuted, who later formed their own church at the time of the reformation (e.g. Lutherans) in turn persecuted those who took the reform movement several steps further (e.g. Anabaptists) over issues like the right way to baptize people. In order to participate in the persecution of others in the name of God, you have to have an idea of God that is very different from the one Jesus portrayed in today's passage. As you take a few moments to reflect on the passage and the picture of God it portrays, what speaks to you the most powerfully? How does embracing what Jesus shared diffuse any impulse that would someone to persecute others?

**Thought for the Day:** *We are to have the same mind-set as Jesus—Philippians 2:5*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Hebrews 13:3; Ephesians 6:18-20

Not everyone enjoys the freedom we have to worship according to the dictates of our own conscience. There are places around the world where this is not a protected right, and followers of Jesus are treated badly, imprisoned or even put to death for their faith. The passages for today remind us about the importance of lifting these followers of Jesus in prayer. In the Ephesians passage, Paul asks people to pray for him, and that God might continue to give him the words to speak, and that he would not allow the challenges of the circumstances he is in to keep him from sharing the good news about Jesus. The passage from Hebrews invites us to reach out to those in many places around the world, or even those who may be close by, and let them know they are not alone. Not only is God with them, but we stand with and pray for them as well.

**Thought for the Day:** *It is easy to forget how truly blessed we are.*

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## HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Living in Difficult Times**. Explain to your child that although some people do the right things, sometimes others might make fun of, or even hurt them because of it. Talk about times when others may have made fun of them or someone they know because they were kind to someone who was being

## THURSDAY

Read [Philippians 2:1-11](#)

Today's passage opens with a plea for those who claim to follow Jesus. For those who have tasted in any way the comfort, tenderness and compassion of Christ, to fully become like-minded with Him. On Tuesday, we noticed the story of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples not long after they had been arguing about who was the greatest. In today's passage, Paul describes what Jesus enacted. Contemplate what it means for someone equal with God to not consider that status as a thing to be grasped. That was not what really defined God. It is Who God is, not what God is that causes every knee to bow in an overwhelmed response of love. Not only does having this same way of seeing things that Jesus does protect us from becoming someone who would persecute, it is also at the heart of what helps us get through it should it come our way. What speaks to you the most powerfully in this portrait of Jesus in today's passage?

**Thought for the Day:** *Nothing can separate us from the love of God.*

## FRIDAY

Read [Matthew 5:10-12](#)

The counter intuitive nature of Jesus Kingdom is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in the beatitudes. Blessed are those who we might not at first have identified as blessed. The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the spiritually hungry, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and finally those persecuted because they reflect the character of Jesus. What Jesus offers is something that endures even when all the things that the world around us measures success and happiness by are gone. Those are not the things that define us. Even if our lives are taken, who we are is still held securely by the One who holds the keys to death, and Who assures us that because Jesus rose, we will as well. There is a rich and deep sense of being blessed that comes from knowing that whatever happens, Jesus has us. What are you hearing as you continue to reflect on today's passage?

**Thought for the Day:** *We are blessed even when we suffer for Christ.*

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picked on, or that someone else did not like. Talk about how Jesus experienced this too, and how important it is for us to continue to be kind and loving people, even if others make fun of us, or maybe threaten us, for doing so. Talk about how the important this is that we don't let others change who we are by their meanness.



## Week 9 [Aug 26-Sept 1, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**A SURE AND CERTAIN FAITH**

STUDY TEXT:

2 Peter 1:1-21

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# SUNDAY

Read 2 Peter 1:1-21

In this second epistle, Peter reminded believers of the blessings and security found by abiding in Jesus Christ. To have a sure and certain faith we must . . .

### 1. Recognize God's Provision (2 Peter 1:1-4)

It is through an intimate knowledge of God and Jesus Christ that we become partakers in Christ's many blessings, and are reminded of the foundation on which our spiritual lives are built.

- *How have you experienced God's provision in your life?*

### 2. Let The Growth Begin (2 Peter 1:5-11)

In this passage, Peter lists some characteristics that should be developed in our life as our faith matures.

- *Which of these characteristics do you struggle with the most?*
- *In what ways do you experience growth in these areas as an overflow of God's grace rather than something you do in order to earn it?*

### 3. Trust The Good News About God (2 Peter 1:12-21)

We have the eyewitness accounts of those who saw Jesus in person and lived along side of Him. As well as the writings of the prophets, who were among those who looked forward to the time when Jesus would come. God's Spirit has been at work to inspire and preserve those so we can continue to live in the certainty of the good news that they proclaim and remind us of.

- *In what ways does your trust in the Scriptures Bible help shape who you are, and impact how you live your day-to-day life?*

# CERTAINLY SURE

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To recognize and rejoice in the blessings and security found in abiding in Jesus Christ*

In a world where contradictory ideas are too often asserted as true, or in some cases, where truth and integrity are disregarded altogether in pursuit of other agendas, honest discernment is becoming an urgent need. What can we rely upon as we seek to live our lives in ways that reflect the character of God? With the multitude of voices speaking it is important to be reminded of God's words so that we can build our lives on the basis of Who God is and what God has done for us as we seek to become more like Jesus. In this week's devotions we'll be reflecting on some of those inspired words that shape and guide us as we continue to seek to follow Jesus.

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## MONDAY

### Read Psalm 23

Perhaps one of the best known and most memorized passages of scripture is the Psalm that we are considering today. It is a song about a shepherd. It is a psalm about provision. It is a song about the ways God is intentionally at work in our lives, and the ways that God remains with us when we face challenges, hardships, and even persecution. As you read through the Psalm today, underline or take note of the various ways that God provides in this Psalm. Also highlight the kinds of difficult things that we face, through which we can still be assured that God is with us. In fact, notice the powerful statement of assurance with which the Psalm concludes. What part of the imagery of this Psalm do you feel the most drawn to? Select a couple of those images from the passage and imagine what it would be like to fully live in the awareness of that reality throughout the coming week? If you have a few extra minutes, compare this psalm about God as our Shepherd with Jesus description of Himself in John 10:1-18. What additional richness do you find in reading these two passages together?

**Thought for the Day:** *We can trust in the care of God as our Shepherd.*

## TUESDAY

Read Galatians 5:22-23

Growth is the evidence of life. Bearing fruit is the result of staying connected to the source of life and allowing that life to literally reproduce itself through the fruit it bears. Jesus talks about this in John 15. In today's passage we have Paul's list of the kind of fruit we can expect in our lives when we stay connected to Jesus—the source of life. Take a few minutes to highlight or list the qualities Paul suggests. Now compare those with the list that Peter provides in 2 Peter 1:5-7. What do you notice when you read the two lists along side of each other? When you think of the fruit that your life produces, how does your list compare to these lists? If you are noticing fruit in your life that does not fit well with the fruit on these two lists, take a few moments to think about where that unhelpful fruit is drawing life from. Think about some ways you can more effectively nourish the growth of good fruit in your life.

**Thought for the Day:** *Fruit trees bear fruit because they are fruit trees, never in order to be one.*

## WEDNESDAY

Read 2 Peter 1:5-7

God's ultimate goal for our lives is that we would be like Jesus. Today's reading invites you to consider again the list that Peter makes in this passage. He begins with faith, or trust, as our starting point. We begin by knowing that God can be trusted. Without that, our lists will tend to become a means to an end rather than a response to being loved. Ponder the meaning of each of the words that follow: Goodness. Knowledge. Self-control. Perseverance. Godliness. Mutual affection. Love. How does reflecting on that list make you feel? Does it stir up feelings of self-depreciation? Does it stir up feelings of hope and aspiration? What can you learn from the feelings you experience when you reflect on the list? And finally, what is it that God would most like you to feel as you reflect on these. What makes the difference? Perhaps it returns again to the word we started with—faith or trust. Talk with God about what you are noticing.

**Thought for the Day:** *God longs for us to bear fruit, not manufacture it.*

## HOME connection

This week your child learned about **A Sure and Certain Faith**. Go outside with an umbrella and a water hose. If a water hose is unavailable, you can also use a pitcher of water. Take turns holding the umbrella overhead and pouring water over each person. You may also want to show an example of what it would be like without the

## THURSDAY

Read John 15:1-8

Jesus begins by saying "I am the true vine." The implication is that there are things people look to for life that are not the true source. What might those things be? Jesus says fruitful life only comes when we are connected to Him. A branch firmly connected to a healthy vine will naturally be fruitful. The branch doesn't have to be cajoled into making grapes, it just does. A branch that isn't producing grapes needs to focus less on the grapes and more on being connected to the vine. It is too easy for us to discover that we may be trying to draw life from something other than the true vine as our primary source of life. Take a few moments to think of the other things we sometimes rely upon for life. The affirmation or praise of others. The things we produce or look to as ways to measure our success or value. Our ability to do things. Jesus reminds us that those are not the true vine, and while they produce a lot of things, spiritual fruit is not one of them. What is our primary source?

**Thought for the Day:** *Christians are intentional about from where they draw their source of life.*

## FRIDAY

Read 2 Timothy 3:16

2 Peter 1:19-21 describes scripture and the prophetic message it contains as being like a light shining in a dark place. That reality is not something that people just made up, but is something that God's Spirit has moved people to proclaim. The imagery of Jesus as the incarnate Word and the light of the world certainly draws from that same imagery. It reminds us that Jesus is Who all of scripture ultimately points. In today's passage, Paul uses the imagery of the Spirit's creative work when it describes scripture as God breathed. Think of where else in scripture God breathes in amazing life giving ways. Breathing life into a lifeless Adam, or dry bones scattered in a dry and dusty valley. The imagery is powerful, and may apply not only to how scripture came to be, but what it can do as we engage it. Notice how Paul describes what scripture is useful for in today's passage. What is your experience of engaging the word like?

**Thought for the Day:** *Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:1-18).*

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umbrella. Talk about how, when it is raining, we usually don't spend a lot of time worrying if the umbrella will shield us from the rain; rather we open it and trust that it will work because that is what it is intended to do. The umbrella does not keep storms away, and it doesn't guarantee that we won't get water on us, but it does help us get through rainy weather quite well. Talk about how faith in Jesus is like that.



WHEN YOUR  
**DAUGHTER**

IS ALMOST A TEEN:

Seven Ways to Say I Love You

BY SARA CORMANY





Somewhere amid the middle-school swarm I found her.

Her arms filled with books and bags. Her eyes, a little tired. Her crooked smile, appearing as if on cue to the slide of the van door. All coming together to make her seem more grown-up than little girl.

But it wasn't until she settled down in her seat that something new caught my attention. I had almost missed it against the chaos of car loop. And yet somewhere in-between the buses and the squirrely tween shenanigans, there it was—an almost imperceptible sigh. Sacredly tucked in-between the noise of the mundane. Followed by a deep exhale, a pause, and a single word, *“Mom?”*

*“Yes?”*

*“You know how we’re such a mess?”*

I stifled a snort because to be fair, we are a mess. A mom with a cane, a penchant for medical shenanigans, and four children can be just about as ridiculous as you might think. So, I laughed out another, *“Yes?”*

*“Well, I’ve been thinking about our mess. I mean, we lay it out there. It’s not a secret and everyone sees it. But no matter what the world has thrown at us, home is the place where we feel most loved and known.”*

I fought back a little lump in my throat with, *“You really think so?”*

*“Mom, some people are just really good at hiding the mess. And home is the last*

*place they want to be. I guess what I’m really trying to say is that I’m glad we are messy on the outside if it means we feel loved on the inside.”*

We sat there for a moment under the grace of her words, and then the van door opened, more kids climbed in, and life went on. But that same grace echoed over and over again in my heart, reminding me of a truth we as parents of tween daughters so desperately need.

We will all muddle through these years. We will all get messy. We will all need grace. We will all need wisdom. And despite our imperfection, we will all long to *“get it right.”*

But parenthood is a journey of faithfulness, not perfection. And regardless of the phase or age we find ourselves in, loving your kids and loving Jesus is at the core of that faithfulness. With every transition, with every heartbreak, with every success, with every failure, our love grows and changes.

Yes, the tween years come with their own set of challenges. Yes, it can often feel like the baby we raised is completely different from the person set before us. And yes, the messy parts of learning how to bring our babies into adulthood can often feel insurmountable.

But even though the tween years bring with them a new brand of messy, it is never too late to find our way back to the place where our Father began—with a love so big it was worth His only Son.

# Seven Ways to Say I Love You

**1. Be an advocate.** The tween years are where our babies begin to find their voice. Encourage them to problem-solve and advocate in the small things but be ready to continue advocating for them in the big things. Too often, these years bring adult issues far beyond their maturity, and our natural inclination might be to pull away instead of bend closer. But our daughters need to know that when a situation is beyond their capacity to reconcile, we will fight for them in the same way God fights for us (Exodus 14:14).

**2. Be a parent.** In many ways parenting is a perpetual exercise in letting go. As we begin to navigate the tween stage, it can be easy to confuse letting go with being overly permissive. But love doesn't avoid boundaries and age-appropriate consequences. Love steps into their messy, their hurt, and even their disobedience with patience, intention, and perseverance (Proverbs 3:11-12).

LOVE STEPS INTO  
THEIR MESSY,  
THEIR HURT,  
AND EVEN THEIR  
DISOBEDIENCE  
WITH PATIENCE,  
INTENTION, AND  
PERSEVERANCE

**3. Be faithful.** We live in an age of parenting perfection. Between the countless parenting books and the influence of social media, we feel its pressure before our child is even placed in our arms. And yet no matter how hard we try or how many strategies we implement, we cannot control the outcome. Let me say that again, we cannot control who our daughters become or the path they will take. But we can be faithful to the task of loving our daughters well, even as God is faithful to us (Lamentations 3:22-23).

**4. Be vulnerable.** Nothing can make a greater impact on tweens (or teens for that matter) than knowing their parents also struggle and sometimes faceplant at the foot of Jesus. It does not make us weak nor does it put us at some sort of disadvantage. On the contrary, these are the years to let our daughters see how we struggle and how He is big enough in that struggle. Moreover, when we take the time to identify the mistakes we also made as tweens, we give our daughters the chance to vicariously experience God's grace and the gift of knowing that nothing can separate them from our love or the love of God (Romans 8:38-39).

**5. Be present.** Time feels incredibly short through both the teen and tween years. We see them less and less as life fights for their attention. This makes it even more important to intentionally listen to them in the day-to-day. Sometimes these moments might be found in unexpected places—the car loop, grocery shopping, running errands—but we can use that time to listen and build up our daughters in love. Not only does it create a safe place for them to share their hearts but it also gives us a unique window into their ever-changing world—a world that is made a little less scary by simply knowing that when they call, we will answer and so will He (Psalm 91:14-16).



**6. Be grace-filled.** Sometimes our daughters are going to lose their stuff all over the place. And more often than not, they won't even know why it's happening. Because hormones are real, y'all. And while these meltdowns can be downright ugly, it is important we remember this is not the time to engage in a word battle with them. (Trust me, I've tried and it does not end well.) But it is the perfect time to give space, bring chocolate, draw a bath, and recommend some self-care (even your own). Because at the end of a hard day, His loving kindness always soothes the soul (Psalm 136:26).

**7. Be forgiving.** Even after his son left, the prodigal's father stood at the edge of the city and waited every single day for his return. While this is undeniably the hardest kind of love to give, it must be modeled in the tween years as these years build a bridge into a season where our babies can reject our love and leave. Yes, we need to show our daughters love through creating and enforcing boundaries. But we also need to pair consequences with a tender forgiveness as this is the most important way to speak love over our daughters. No matter how far our daughters might go or stray, our love will be waiting for them the very moment they return (Luke 15:11-32).



Sara Cormany is a storyteller at heart who loves to see the grace of God in the messiest of life. She is wife to one sweet guy and mom to four messy, beautiful kids. Her most recent book, *Born Beautiful*, guides moms and daughters through a God-breathed conversation on beauty and identity. And while most of her journey has been written through the lens of chronic and life-threatening illness, Sara is living proof that a hard story can still be a good story.





September

## Called to Ministry

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We know him as the Weeping Prophet, perhaps because he also authored the poetry of Lamentations. His writings are certainly often in a minor key. Jeremiah often had words of warning, both to Jerusalem, to all of Judah and Israel, and to the nations who opposed them—Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Babylon, and others. He warned them about the course they were on and the destruction it would result in.

He may not have been the most popular guy in town, but Jeremiah endured nonetheless. As a young man, he answered God's call on his life and recognized God's plans for him stretched back to his earliest moments. He was faithful, though his message was rejected and his work destroyed over and over. Alone, except for the scribe Baruch and perhaps one other convert, he spoke and wrote and suffered. He talked about many of the major tenets of Christian belief—God, sin, salvation, creation, missions, covenant. In spite of the hard and often unwelcome things he had to say, he offered a message of hope: the New Covenant would transcend the old; God's law would be written on our hearts; we are loved with an everlasting love.

This month's studies of Jeremiah will be only a brief exposure to the prophet's ministry and message, examining his call and his message as he proclaimed God's warnings and promises. Though the book is not written in chronological order, and detours often to poetry, oracles, and prophetic outbursts, the nuggets of promise will keep you reading. Why not read the entire book as you study this month?



## Week 10 [September 2-8, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**ANSWERING GOD'S CALL**

STUDY TEXT:

Jeremiah 1:1-19; Isaiah 6:1-8

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# SUNDAY

Read Jeremiah 1:1-19; Isaiah 6:1-8

From the earliest moments of Jeremiah's life, God had plans for him. God chose him, God processed his reluctance and concerns, God gave him assurance, and then invited him to go! God invites us to follow in a similar way.

### 1. God Calls People to Do His Work (Jeremiah 1:1-5)

God calls people to serve Him and meet the needs of others.

- *Whose words are mentioned in verse 1 and whose word is mentioned verse 2?*
- *How long had God been involved in Jeremiah's life?*

### 2. God Gives Us What We Need to Do What He Calls Us to Do (Jeremiah 1:6-16)

God gave Jeremiah a promise and spiritual understanding to proclaim His truth.

- *In answer to Jeremiah's fear, what did God promise him (verse 8)?*
- *What did God show Jeremiah that confirmed the Lord's intent (verse 11)? What connection does that have with Moses (see Numbers 17:8)?*

### 3. We Can Trust God to Help Us Do Whatever He Calls Us to Do (Jeremiah 1:17-19)

Our confidence for ministry comes from our trust in God's love and grace.

- *What did God make Jeremiah (verse 18)?*
- *What were God's promises to Jeremiah (verse 19)?*

# BORN FOR THE JOB

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*Make sure God is on our list of preferred callers.*

Do you get unwanted phone calls? If you do, you know how they can come at the most inconvenient time and be addressing issues that you are not particularly interested in. Some people let their answering machine screen their calls. If you have a cell phone and don't recognize the caller's number, you may not even answer, or perhaps even block the call. There are, however, important calls that we don't want to miss. We need to make sure God is on our list of accepted callers. Even when those calls come at seemingly inconvenient times, or be about things we might be unaware of or have been trying to avoid. It is always a good thing to take those calls, listen carefully, and respond appropriately. Even if we have God on speed dial when we want to make a call, it is also important that we take those calls as well. Ultimately, we'll be very glad we did!

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## MONDAY

Read Jeremiah 2:12-13

Early on in the book of Jeremiah, God gives him, and us, a very succinct summary of God's overall message to the people of that time (and our time as well). Out of all the kinds of things that they had done that God could have listed, God boils it down to two. These two things are summarized in the scripture reading for today. First, God says that his people have simply forsaken God as the source of living water. Second, that they had tried to make for themselves their own water containers, but they were seriously flawed and could hold no water. This was a serious thing in a land that depended on good cisterns to store life-giving water. This happens in our day as well. Not unlike the children of Israel of old, we too have the tendency to turn to other sources of satisfaction, that do not satisfy, leaving the real Source of satisfaction. Isaiah 55:1-3 describes this well as well. Jesus offers it freely (John 7:37-39). God's messages through Jeremiah are ultimately an invitation to return to the source of living water? Where do you find yourself seeking to satisfy your thirst? .

**Thought for the Day:** *Our God is an unlimited supply of life-giving love and grace that satisfies our spiritual thirst.*

## TUESDAY

Read Isaiah 6:1-8

The call that Jeremiah experienced was similar in many ways to the one experienced by one of his contemporary prophets as well. Today's passage describes how God called Isaiah to his own prophetic ministry. We are not given a particular location for Jeremiah's call, but Isaiah's seems to be in the context of a vision of the throne room in heaven. As you read the passage today, what concerns does Isaiah seem to have about responding to God's call? How does God address Isaiah's concerns? Once the concerns are addressed, what does Isaiah hear, and how does Isaiah respond? Compare and contrast Isaiah's experience with that of Jeremiah. What do you notice? What do you notice of their responses and the way you might respond to God's invitation to you? In what ways do you need to hear what they heard? In what ways do you need to do what they did?

**Thought for the Day:** *We should constantly rest in the assurance of God's provision for us.*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Luke 5:1-11

Temples or visions (which is what we noticed yesterday) are not the only contexts in which God may call us. Today's passage invites us to contemplate another famous call, but this one took place in or around a fishing boat, and a whole lot of fish. For Peter, in this setting, the invitation involved the same kinds of self-insight and concerns as did those of Jeremiah and Isaiah, but the realization came about in a very different way. Take a few moments to compare and contrast today's example of a call from God with those of Isaiah and Jeremiah. What common elements do you find? Which ones do you identify with the most and/or are the most challenging for you? Also important in reading these accounts along side of each other is realizing while the three recipients are different, the one extending the call is the same. How does seeing Isaiah's and Jeremiah's call through the lenses that Jesus' call of Peter provides impact your understanding?

**Thought for the Day:** *Jesus is the same today, yesterday, and forever.*

## HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Answering God's Call**. Talk to your child about planning a special outing or project. It could be picnic, hike, or even a service project for someone who could use some help. Work with your child to come up of a list of what you will need to have a successful time. Food and serving items for a picnic perhaps.



## THURSDAY

Read John 1:35-42

If the examples of God calling people were limited to those we have been noticing so far, we might get the idea that God's call is always a singular, rather spectacular, headline getting event. But that is not always the way it happens. In fact, in Peter's case, this was not even the first time. Peter, along with Andrew, had already responded to God's call, as we can see from reflecting on the passage for today. While this was a much less intense, rather low-key in comparison kind of event, it was no less significant or life changing. No falling off of horses after a blinding light from heaven (Saul to Paul style), or live coals from the altar. In this case just an inquiry, that led to a conversation, and then spending some time together just being with Jesus. God's call comes as genuinely in the moments of quiet conversation and responsiveness as in the spectacular attention getting events. How do you tend to hear God's invitations?

**Thought for the Day:** *Seek the Lord and goodness will follow you all the days of your life.*

## FRIDAY

Read John 1:43-51

Today's reading continues to highlight another aspect of how God calls us that was also in yesterday's passage, although we didn't note it. Here we see that one of the ways that God extends a call to us is through others. Just like Andrew had found Peter and invited him along in yesterday's reading, so today we see Philip finding Nathaniel and inviting him along. As a result of both of those invitations, two additional people are found by Jesus. Not that Jesus had lost track of them. In both yesterday's reading and today's, we see that Jesus already knew all about them. Just like we noticed in Jeremiah's call, God knows all about us long before we are even aware of God. What is important to see here is that God calls others, often by way of us. We get to extend the invitation to others. We get to participate. It is still all God's work, but God shares it with us. How do you respond to that? Who might you be able to invite to "come and see"?

**Thought for the Day:** *We are the body of Christ.*

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Hiking boots, day hike bag, and related supplies for a hike. Tools and materials for a service project, etc. Then work with them to collect all the things you will need—making sure they are well supplied. Explain that just like you provided them with everything they needed, God works with us to supply what we need for what we are invited to do. Sometimes we work together to gather what we need, sometimes God supplies it, and sometimes God allows us improvise a bit, but God is always with us.



## Week 11 [September 9-15, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**FAITHFULNESS TO GENUINE MINISTRY**

STUDY TEXT:

Jeremiah 7:1-34

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# SUNDAY

Read Jeremiah 7:1-34

Jeremiah was given somewhat of a sad message in this chapter, and God told him that sadly those who heard it would not heed it (verse 27). It was a message about how people had put religious forms above actually living in a way that honored God and others. Instead of embracing the God of love and grace and letting God transform their lives, they turned to other idols that resulted in their own destruction.

### 1. Outward Worship Does Not Make Up for Sinful Behavior (Jeremiah 7:1-15)

We need to seek to develop the character of God and not an outward religious conformity.

- *How did the Lord describe the words the children of Israel were trusting (verse 4)? What was their repeated chant that they thought offered protection?*
- *What was the lesson of Shiloh (verses 12-15)?*

### 2. True Worship Is A Matter Of Integrity (Jeremiah 7:16-23)

A right relationship with God results in living responsively to God's love by loving others.

- *The issues of concern are not limited to any one generation, but involves a whole way of living that everyone participates in (verses 17-19).*
- *What did God want from them (verse 23)?*

### 3. Ongoing Purposeful Sin Leads to Our Destruction (Jeremiah 7:24-34)

God has a remedy for sin, not an excuse to sin.

- *What were the people not doing (verse 26)?*
- *What were the people doing in their worship (verse 30)?*

# TRUTH TO BE SHARED

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To live my faith with greater integrity*

If your church burned down, would you still have a church? Would it have much of an impact on the community in which you live? The temple was certainly the center of religious life in the Old Testament, as were the services that took place there. Unfortunately the symbolic nature of the temple may have almost taken on a life of its own, rather than pointing people to the God Whose character was revealed there. God showed up and manifested His glory in the Temple in an overwhelming way. God's desire was that worshipers might meet with Him there so that their lives might be conformed to His character, which would then be lived out in their own lives and interactions with those around them. In Jeremiah's time, the people had a great fervor for the Temple, but they forgot about God's character. Worship began to focus on ritual. Jeremiah's message reminded them that they were lying to themselves if they thought the presence of the Temple meant they were right with God. God's character was to be lived out, not just symbolized and admired.

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## MONDAY

Read Micah 6:1-8

Jeremiah was not the only prophet who had a message about the systemic hypocrisy that had become embedded deeply in the lives of God's people. Still in many ways as influenced by the messages of the ancient near eastern gods as the God of Israel and Judah, they had distorted the significance worship and its relationship to the way we live. In today's passage, Micah expresses it in the imagery of God bringing charges in court. God reminds them of the grace and deliverance they had experienced in the past, and wonders how in light of that they could be behaving the way they were. So, what it is that God really wants from us? Is it burnt offering, impressive sacrifices, even our first born? The resounding answer is no, ending in the passage that most all of us have probably memorized—Micah 6:8. It is worth reading and pondering again. Why do you think God's people still struggle with wrapping their minds and lives around this?

**Thought for the Day:** *Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly. Simple as that.*

## TUESDAY

Read Matthew 23:1-4

Perhaps nowhere does Jesus speak so clearly and passionately about how we can get things out of balance than in His comments to the religious leaders recorded in Matthew 23. Drawing a clear distinction between what they were saying and what they were actually doing, Jesus spells it out quite clearly. Listen to what they say, but don't live like they do, because they do not practice what they preach! Why is it that those who seem to take such pains to get their religious ducks all in nice neat rows in ways that make life difficult and burdensome, they too often fail so miserably at living with grace and compassion toward others? When the focus is on appeasing and the requirements of a strict and demanding deity, little room is left for much else. Apparently, not much help is given either. What a contrast to what Jesus proclaimed in Matthew 11:28. Which is closer to your experience, Matthew 11:28 or today's passage?

**Thought for the Day:** *Why spend money on that which is not bread? Isaiah 55:1-3*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Matthew 23:5-12

Perhaps one of the most powerful forces that we sometimes have to content with, is our desire to look good in the eyes of others. Today's passage talks about the motivation that springs from this very thing. As someone has said, we do not struggle with who we think we are, or who others think we are, but who we think others think we are. When we are not clear about who God says we are, we are vulnerable to many other voices. Jesus faced them in the wilderness following His baptism, and we face them then at home, at work, in classrooms, on playing fields, and in any other place the evaluation of others matters to us. But when we are free to embrace God's voice which reminds us that we are the "beloved" children of God, then we are free to live out the rest of today's passage, and serve in ways that truly put "self" aside, because self is already taken care of. To what degree do you live in that reality?

**Thought for the Day:** *We are the beloved children of God, and so are free to live like it!*

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## HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Faithfulness to Genuine Ministry**. Have your family make a list of the people you know (not just church members but everyone). Have them think about each person, and what it means for us to act like one of God's children with each of them. Think about how one of God's kids

## THURSDAY

Read Matthew 23:16-22

Today's passage deals with the flip side of one of the issues that Jeremiah was addressing in his message in Jeremiah 7. In Jeremiah's message, the problem was that people thought they could do what they wanted as long as they performed the right temple services. In today's passage, Jesus argues that perhaps the temple services themselves, or at least the God they pointed to should have been taken more seriously than the gifts they brought to the services. In either case, it is the same coin. When we put form over substance, pretense over authenticity, we miss the point of what God longs to share with us, and what we are called to share with the world. Why do you suppose it appears to be so easy for these priorities to become inverted? As you listen to this passage, what surfaces for you as being the issue at the heart of that gets distorted here? What does Jesus most long for us to see?

**Thought for the Day:** *When seen rightly, the giver is always much more amazing than the gift.*

## FRIDAY

Read Matthew 23:23-32

Have you ever had those moments when you struggled to figure out just how much tithe you should pay? Net Income? Gross Income? How about those deductions? What interest on savings? What about retirement income from retirement savings accounts? Sometimes attention to detail can be a good thing. Sometimes it just makes you neurotic. When it is most troublesome, as today's passage points out, is when working out those kinds of details consumes more interest and energy than issues that impact people's lives in much more profound ways. Things like Justice. Mercy. Faithfulness. (Hearing echoes of Micah 6:8 again here?). So, what about that? Do gnats take more of our energy than camels? Are there perhaps ways that living generously could relieve us of endless hours of sharp pencil calculations? What do you hear Jesus inviting us into here? Where are the growing edges for you?

**Thought for the Day:** *We can never out give, out love or out grace God.*

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would interact with them. If you come up with new ideas of things you could do or so, jot those down next to each name. Then, make some plans to actually do what you wrote down. Make plans to get together after a week to go over the list again and notice what happened. Be ready to make changes and try new things.



## Week 12 [September 16-22, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**PATIENTLY TRUST IN GOD**

STUDY TEXT:

Jeremiah 12:1-17

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# SUNDAY

Read Jeremiah 12:1-17

Why does life seem unfair? How long do I have to wait? We've asked those questions too. God hears and answers them by pointing to Himself—our Sovereign God. He answers us as He did Jeremiah: "You can trust Me."

### 1. Life May Sometimes Seem Unfair (Jeremiah 12:1-4)

God knows our hearts. We can take our questions about fairness to our righteous God.

- *What did Jeremiah say God did for the wicked (verse 2)?*
- *What did Jeremiah ask God to do to the wicked (verse 3)?*

### 2. God Will Have The Final Word, Despite The Chaos (Jeremiah 12:5-13)

The wheels of justice may grind slow, but they grind sure.

- *What did God say He had done to His house (verse 7)?*
- *What did God say all people would be without (verse 12)?*

### 3. God Offers Forgiveness and Compassion to All Who Will Turn to God (Jeremiah 12:14-17)

The Lord does not want to condemn but to redeem all men.

- *Whom would God pluck out or uproot (verse 14)?*
- *What were the people to purposefully learn (verse 16)?*

# GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF IT ALL

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To remember That God's Heart Is One That Extends Mercy*

We love it when the bully gets karate-chopped by the little guy he picks on. We delight when the deputy outsmarts the outlaw. We want justice for our oppressors and for our enemies to be held accountable. But sometimes it seems like God is not paying attention. How long will God put up with a wicked person or persons? Yet, we also know that God is not willing that any should perish, and will put off ultimate consequences as long as possible so people might have opportunity to repent. Because God is so long-suffering that people often mistake God's mercy as indifference or even approval. But God is a God of holiness, righteousness, and justice. What sometimes appears as compromise is instead an expression of God's compassion and patience. Our questions are answered by the unfailing character of God. We must learn to rest in the certainty that the God of all the earth will do what is right.

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## MONDAY

Read Jeremiah 14:7-9

The prayer in these verses seems to be one of confession to God. It acknowledges shortcomings and even rebellion (verse 7). It then moves its focus and appeal to God, acknowledging that any real hope they have will be because of Who God is, not who they are. And yet, they are troubled by what seems to them as God's inaction and inattentiveness. They feel isolated and alone, as they cry out to God to not forsake them because they are God's people (verse 8-9). It is difficult to know if this is Jeremiah's prayer as a true follower. Is he praying for God to act in spite of the failures of his fellow Jews, or is it somewhat of a hypocritical prayer that wants God to deliver them in spite of the injustice they are practicing? We can readily identify with the feelings being described. The sense of God being a stranger, or that God is not acting as you wish God would in the midst of suffering is a hard place to be. When we look to Jesus, however, desiring to be responsive to His leading, we can know God is present with us.

**Thought for the Day:** *God is never far from anyone who turns the face towards God, even when it may seem otherwise.*

## TUESDAY

Read Jeremiah 14:20-22

It is difficult for many of us to place ourselves in the place of the Jews in this passage. The passage describes the suffering that would come because of what they had done, and the sense of hopelessness they felt as a result. This is a time of lament, where they begin to experience and acknowledge the loss they are feeling, and cry out for help to God. Sadly, the experience of lament does not undue or stop that damage that is being done, but it does give voice to the heart cry of those who are suffering. While they are now realizing that their only hope is in God, they come to the realization late. Fortunately, there is still hope, and God remains with them through the time of exile and loss, with a promise to bring them out on the other side. God has not stopped loving God's people, or suffering along side of them, but the way out is the way through. It is a hard path to travel, but we don't have to do it alone.

**Thought for the Day:** *Sometimes the way out of a hard time is the way through the hard time.*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Jeremiah 15:19-20

Serving the Lord does not mean things will always be easy. You tell the truth in love, you do what is right, and you think everyone will like you! But when people aren't telling the truth and are not living right, they often don't want someone around who reminds them of their sins. The prophet Jeremiah felt the hostility of the people. He welcomed God's reassurance. When your good efforts are rejected, it is good to know that God has your back. What promises did God make to Jeremiah in verse 20? God does not promise that things will always be easy in the present situation, but rather that God will be with us. Read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews as a reminder of how varied the experience of faith can be for God's people. But God's presence with us is not small things. No matter the circumstances, God has promised to be with us.

**Thought for the Day:** *God does not forsake us when things get hard but draws us closer to Him.*

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## HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Patiently Trust in God**. We can trust God even when we don't understand how God might be at work in the midst of what we are experiencing. Gather some glass jars, food coloring, water, and bleach. Fill a glass jar with water, and have your child put some food coloring in the water. The water is like your child's



## THURSDAY

Read Jeremiah 18:5-10

God sent Jeremiah to watch a potter throwing a pot, shaping it on the wheel as it came together into a form that might be surprising. The potter's touch and tempo determined the curves of the vase or the shape of the bowl he had in mind. However, when the clay refuses to "cooperate" sometimes the potter has to start over again. Clearly, the illustration begins to break down a bit because clay has no will of its own while people do. But the point here is that it is the potter who brings about the ultimate outcome—and that God as the potter can decide to take what was once an unruly lump of clay and shape it into something good. Even clay that starts out well, may need a restart. And clay that seemed inferior at first, in the hands of the potter can become a beautiful vessel. The good news for us is that the potter who shapes us, is a loving and gracious crafts Person.

**Thought for the Day:** *We should yield ourselves as willing pieces of clay to the creative hand of our Savior.*

## FRIDAY

Read Jeremiah 23:5-6

The rebellious kings of Judah and of Israel had brought their nations to the place of destruction. They would be conquered by their enemies, and Judah and Israel would disintegrate. In view of this terrible time, the Lord announced a day would come when a new King would be installed. How is this coming King described in verse 5? This King will reign and prosper; He will bring a time of peace and safety. King Zedekiah, whose name meant "Jehovah is my righteousness," would fall (2 Chronicles 36:11-14), but the new King would set the standard for righteousness so profoundly that He will be called "Jehovah is our righteousness." What encouraging news for those who grieved over the spiritual condition of their nation. What encouragement for us as we wait for King Jesus to come and set up His righteous reign where evil will no longer exist.

**Thought for the Day:** *Jesus will make everything right, and it will stay right for ever.*

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life and the color represents the choices they make. Every choice has consequences, just as the water turned to different colors as they added the food coloring, things change when we make choices. The good news is that God is always at work to make our lives clear once again. Ultimately, God absorbs all the color that dirties our lives through Jesus. Pour a little bit of bleach into the water, and it will turn clear again. Our water may not be fully clear until Jesus comes, but Jesus has already taken care of it.



## Week 13 [September 23-29, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**JOYFULLY HOPE IN GOD'S PROMISE**

STUDY TEXT:

Jeremiah 31:1-40

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# SUNDAY

Read Jeremiah 31:1-40

Our relationship with God starts with God's offer of forgiveness and our responsive hearts, but blooms with so much more as we grow.

### 1. God Will Restore Joy and Peace to God's People (Jeremiah 31:1-14)

We can be reunited and restored and have a renewed relationship with God.

- *What characterized this restoration (verses 4-14)?*
- *What characterizes your relationship with God? Are you celebrating God's goodness so those around you can see what God means to you?*

### 2. God Welcomes Us When We Return Home (Jeremiah 31:15-22)

As a loving Father, God comforts and loves God's children through the darkest of times.

- *What hope does the Lord offer when life is falling apart?*
- *What actions do we need to take (verses 19 and 21)?*

### 3. God Desires to Bless and Live With God's People (Jeremiah 31:23-40)

A new covenant bridges the way for us to walk closely with God.

- *What promises from God are found in this passage?*
- *How can we celebrate those promises in our lives?*

# HAPPY AND RESTORED

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To be reminded that God's promises are life-changing and bring hope when our faith is weak or our hope is gone*

If each of us were honest, we would probably admit that we all have moments when we struggle in our walks with God. Whether our devotional lives are well structured and disciplined or fairly free flowing, we have times when we get distracted and derailed by other things. That may lead to times when we struggle with feelings of failure, or perhaps never measuring up to our own goals. Let alone what we sense are God's goals for us. In that sense at least, probably not much has changed since the time of Jeremiah. They had times of celebration, living right, making wise choices, and feeling close to God. But they also had times when they didn't trust, didn't obey, made poor choices, and felt as far from God as humanly possible. In fact, they became quite good at that. God had not changed, for God remains ever constant, always faithful, gracious, and loving. This week, let's celebrate what God offers and Who God is.

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## MONDAY

Read Jeremiah 30:10-11

I imagine Jeremiah's hands may have been shaking a bit as he recorded the words he writes here about the people of Israel and Judah. In the midst of all that was happening, these words were life-giving, bringing hope to the hopeless and rest to the weary! During a time of great distress and turmoil, what these people needed to hear were words of peace and comfort. In a day of captivity, they needed deliverance and assurance. Who would not hope and long for relief and healing? While most of us face nothing as daunting as what they did then, still this words continue to speak with power and assurance to us in the midst of the situations in which we may find ourselves. Because we are serving the same God, their promises are ours as well. We can rest in the assurance of the same hope and salvation. Take a few moments to allow the words of this passage you remind you of what you most need to hear.

**Thought for the Day:** *God's promises provide a lifeline in a world of hopelessness.*

## TUESDAY

Read Isaiah 65:17-25

Today's passage invites us to reflect on the imagery of the future and the assurance that these pictures communicate. There are themes that weave together in this description. The end of former things that have brought so much heartache and pain. The imagery of new life springing up seasoned with words like gladness, rejoicing, delight, and abundance. Life that is not needlessly cut short, but is long lived and enjoyed in fullness. A place where everyone has a home, and has enough. Labor expresses creativity and gives life instead of draining our energy away and leaving us spent and empty. Predatory relationships are replaced with mutually supportive alliances between lambs and wolves, lions and ox, and where serpents no longer pose a threat. No more harm or destruction in all of God's holy mountain. Spend a few moments today basking in the imagery and enjoying the anticipation of what we have to look forward to.

**Thought for the Day:** *Trust in the One who can do even what seems impossible.*

## WEDNESDAY

Read Jeremiah 33:6-13

Today the imagery of restoration continues. In today's passage, we find much that is similar to yesterdays, but with additional nuances. Notice the words used here. Peace, security, rebuilding, cleansing and forgiveness. Its place among the nations restored with honor, and where God is honored within it. It was a place that had been known for desolation, but now was a place vibrant with life and the sounds of joy and gladness; the voices of the bride and bridegroom; the voices of grateful people living out their thankfulness. This too is a place of abundance. Today as you reflect on the imagery of this passage take note of the imagery to you feel most drawn to, and notice what it stirs in you. What do you think God would most like you to see or hear as you reflect? Spend a few moments in prayer responding to God out of what you find here.

**Thought for the Day:** *God's everlasting covenant is offered to each of us and changes each of us.*

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## HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Joyfully Hope in God's Promise**. Take a walk with your children and talk about life while walking around. Ask them about their day, their friends, and their hopes and fears. What are they looking forward to in the coming weeks? What prayer requests do they have? Remind your children that

## THURSDAY

Read Revelation 21:1-6, 22-27

After spending the past couple of days basking in the imagery of Isaiah and Jeremiah as they contemplate the future God has for us, it should come as no surprise that when John wants to describe what had been shared with him about the future of God's people, that he drew heavily from the same familiar imagery to do so. With the vocabulary of Isaiah and Jeremiah, John describes the vision of a new heaven and new earth. The New Jerusalem—God's people—are described as a bride prepared for a bridegroom. Heaven itself announces that we are home. Tears are wiped away, the old order of things are past, and God is present in a powerful way. No need for sun or moon to give light or regulate life, because God provides all we need. The gates are open, and the life is pure and clean. Take a few moments to enjoy how the Old Testament imagery is made even more amazing seen through the lens of Jesus here in Revelation.

**Thought for the Day:** *To regain what was lost is more than refreshing; it's a new beginning.*

## FRIDAY

Read Revelation 22:1-5

Yet one more day to bask in the imagery and allow what we beheld to do its changing work within us. Notice once again how the rich imagery of the Old Testament is expanded and enriched as we see the future through the lens of Jesus and the final restoration of all things. Flowing from the very throne of God through Eden restored is the river of life that flows through the tree of life. The tree bears its life giving fruit in abundance, and its leaves provide healing for the nations. The curse that had wounded God's creation and brought so much pain is now gone. The imagery of the throne of God and that of the Lamb are joined as one inseparable entity, and it is in response to this that we live. The One Who is the Light of the World continues to shine here, and the darkness is indeed gone. It is a breathtaking climax that John depicts here. What's even more, it is home. How amazing is that?

**Thought for the Day:** *Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true!*

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this is what our walk with God should look like. Their walk with God is a relationship, and it would be pretty hard to have a relationship with someone they never talk to. Encourage them to find joy and delight in know that God is with them, ready to share with them, and hear from them, all through the day. Just knowing that God is right there with us actually helps shape us into the kind of people God is growing us to be.



## Week 14 [Sept 30-Oct 6, 2023]

FAMILY THEME:

**CONFIDENTLY HONOR THE BIBLE**

STUDY TEXT:

Jeremiah 36:1-32

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# SUNDAY

Read Jeremiah 36:1-32

Although man may reject the Bible and even try to destroy it in the hearts and minds of others, God will have the last word.

### 1. God's Word Is A Continual Call To Turn From Destructive Ways of Life and Embrace God's Grace & Forgiveness (Jeremiah 36:1-10)

God always gives us a choice to return to Him.

- *What was the message that the Lord shared with Jeremiah, Jeremiah with Baruch, and Baruch with the people?*
- *How was this message also a message of hope?*
- *What message might God be inviting you to share with those in your sphere of influence?*

### 2. Not Everyone Will Want To Hear God's Message (Jeremiah 36:11-26)

Not everyone receives, or even wants to hear, God's messages.

- *How did each individual or group of people differ in their responses to the reading of the message God gave to Jeremiah?*
- *How do you respond when you read God's message?*

### 3. The Message of God's Word Endures Regardless of Opposition (Jeremiah 36:26-32)

People may ignore or reject God and/or God's messages, but God's messages will still endure.

- *How was the message recorded and delivered?*
- *Describe how King Jehoiakim failed in his attempt to destroy God's message (verse 32)?*

# THE ETERNAL WORD OF GOD

## THIS WEEK'S GOAL:

*To Rest In The Assurance That God's Gracious Message Will Endure No Matter What*

There are many books we have come to trust in life and believe the information within is true—dictionaries, cookbooks, encyclopedias, appliance manuals, scientific and historical works, etc. They are all good sources of information. God's word to us is the most reliable and trustworthy source of revelation as to Who God is and what God is like that we have. While the Bible may be written in the language of ancient cultures and even reflect many of the imagery and ideas of that time, the character of God that is revealed there, and made clear through Jesus is as clear as it gets for us. While that revelation of the character of God has been assailed and its destruction attempted over the years, God's Word continues to prevail. This week, we will continue to reflect on this amazing revelation of the character of God, and how God has provided, preserved, and protected scripture down through the ages.

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## MONDAY

Read [Luke 1:1-4](#)

While we have all experienced the richness of life that the scriptures provide for us as we read and reflect on them, we sometimes miss the occasional description they give of how these Spirit-inspired documents came together. People often assume that it must have come about via a vision, dream, or some similar source of information. Here in today's passage, Luke actually tells us how he went about writing the gospel that bears his name. If you have not read the passage for today, take a few moments to read it now. What Luke describes is not a supernatural vision or dream, but rather a lot of listening to stories and collecting accurate and reliable accounts of the events in the life of Jesus. The Gospel of Luke was a Spirit-guided research project that shared an amazing picture of Jesus. It was not the product of just one man, even a visionary one, but rather one of gathering information and accounts from lots of sources, vetting them, and organizing them in a way that would make sense to his friend Theophilus. And we are so glad he did! A gift from God!

**Thought for the Day:** *We learn much by overhearing the stories written for others, but preserved by God for us!*

## TUESDAY

Read Colossians 4:16-18; 1  
Corinthians 16:19-21

These two passages today give us another glimpse into the kind of material the scriptures are, and how they were written. In the footnotes of these documents we are reminded that they are letters that were written to specific church communities, sometimes addressing specific needs or situations. As we overhear Paul giving counsel to these church communities, we glean much that can give us insight and guidance still today. God has preserved these conversations so that we can take things we learn there and apply them to our own situation in our own time and place. We also learn something else interesting here. Many of the writers did not do the actual writing. They dictated to a scribe, who likely helped with grammar, spelling, and all those things editors do. In this sense, the Bible is like inspired case studies rather than a detailed owner's manual. We get to learn and be blessed by a larger community we are still a part of!

**Thought for the Day:** *God's grace really is amazing!*

## WEDNESDAY

Read 3 Timothy 3:10-17

In this letter to a young church leader into whom Paul had poured so much of his own life. We find some helpful insights into the nature and purpose of scripture. Paul begins by talking about how he and Timothy had shared not only teaching, but life together. Timothy had seen how Paul had been impacted by persecution because of his faithfulness in sharing the message of Jesus. Paul then encourages Timothy to continue to be faithful in his own sphere of ministry as well. Timothy had heard the stories recorded in scripture since he was young, being part of an extended family of faithful believers. Paul tells him to stay the course, and continue to cherish and benefit from the life that emerges from being immersed in the life-breathed scriptures. Notice how Paul describes what scripture is useful for. Reflect on Paul's words to Timothy, and the impact that scripture has in your own life.

**Thought for the Day:** *The scriptures as the Word of God actually record the coming of the Word of God (John 1:14).*

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## HOME connection

This week your child learned about **Confidently Honor the Bible**. If you haven't already, start a weekly family devotional time. Find a time that is convenient for your family whether it is at the beginning or end of the day. Some things you can do are read a few verses from the Bible and ask how your child can apply it to her life, talk



## THURSDAY

Read Matthew 12:1-8

Today's passage gives us yet another insight into the amazing scriptural resources with which we have been blessed. As we read the story of Jesus walking with the disciples as they pick some grain and eat it on the Sabbath day, an interesting scene unfolds. First, Jesus' disciples are accused of violating a teaching of Scripture. Next, Jesus responds by referencing a story of David seeming to violate scripture, but under the circumstances was not. Jesus went on to give another example that emphasized the importance of understanding context, and what the purpose of scripture was. Just a plain, literal reading of the text without regard for context and purpose was apparently not enough. As you reflect on this story, what insights can you glean that are helpful to you in knowing how to handle scripture well? What kinds of questions should you have in mind when reading and reflecting?

**Thought for the Day:** *No one likes being quoted out of context, not even God.*

## FRIDAY

Read Isaiah 40:7-9

How has the way you think about things changed over the years? Are there things you were quite sure about when you were very young that you think very differently about now? Are there things you have learned that have caused you to have to unlearn some things you thought you had all figured out? This is a normal part of growing and maturing, and in many ways our understanding of scripture is much the same as we continue to learn and grow. And yet, while our understanding of scripture may continue to grow, there is a central core to what scripture reveals that remains ever the same. While our depth of appreciation may deepen and expand. The core message of scripture that reveals the character of God, and God's posture toward us, remains ever the same. Notice how this is celebrated in today's passage. What part of this passage speaks to you the most powerfully?

**Thought for the Day:** *God, the faithful One, will go before us and will not fail us.*

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about prayer requests, and pray for them, or have a family memory verse for the week. Your child may have a GT quarterly that has daily devotions with the same Scripture as yours from this quarterly to help you talk about the Bible together. Look for helpful and creative ways to help your child engage the Bible in ways that are meaningful and responsible. Don't just do Bible trivia, look for ways to make it life giving.



The sense of dread crept in as it did every morning. Again, my mind scrambled for a reason not to leave the house. What sickness could I come up with this time? Heart pounding, hands slightly shaking, every minute brought me closer to that place. When I walked inside the school building, my heart felt like it was beating so hard that it might stop, just as it felt most days. I stared at the floor desperately trying to avoid eye contact, but I could evade the inevitable for only so long. As they began their jokes, pushed me around, and knocked things out of my hands, the only thing that could keep them at bay were my own jokes. Deflecting their attention even for a little while would ease the pain.

As I made my way back home, I relied on the safety of my jokes again to redirect questions from my parents. As much as it hurt to keep this from them, it was easier than expressing the anxious pain that lingered beneath. As I lay my head down to sleep, I began to dread the following day—same vinyl school bus seats, same bullies pushing me around, same old jokes. In my middle school years, the fear, the nervousness, the feeling that my heart would explode and the entire world was pressing in on me was a level of anxiety I had never experienced before.

Parents want their children to be honest and open about how they feel, especially when they are anxious. However, through middle and high school years, children often struggle to identify the true sources of anxiety, so trying to communicate these feelings requires an incredible amount of insight and vulnerability. For me it was the anxiety of having to return to the same place of torment every day. For others it may be large crowds, one-on-one interactions, bodily insecurities, or other things that bring anxiety. Layer in other

obstacles such as previous negative experiences with being vulnerable, complications of differentiating anxiety from typical levels of stress, and the general difficulty of trying to identify their anxiety while they are anxious, and you may have a nightmare situation.

All the difficulties associated with anxiety may seem intimidating to a parent; however, there are some ways to help identify whether your child may be struggling with this mental health issue. First, though, here are two words of caution. Make sure you are not searching for problems where there are not any. As a school-based therapist, I have seen and discussed with other therapists how difficult it is for children to improve when parents go looking for problems. It only breeds distrust and can continue to increase your child's anxiety, as well as your own. Second, don't take these ways of identifying anxiety as guarantees that you know exactly what your child is feeling. These suggestions can help identify potential feelings of anxiety in your child, but it is always best to have children communicate their feelings to you directly if they are willing.

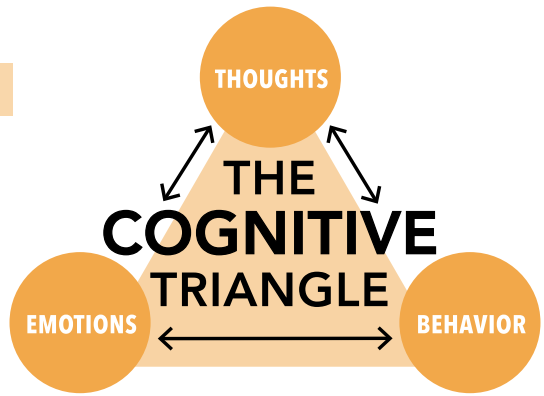
## Mental Indicators of Anxiety

Let us begin looking at these indicators of anxiety by breaking them down into three areas: mental, emotional, and physical. Begin with the mental piece. While working with my clients, I will often draw something out called a Cognitive Triangle. Put simply, it shows how our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors all affect one another. When addressing issues with my students, we always begin with the thought, because the thoughts we have about ourselves (whether we realize it or not) affect how we feel about ourselves and thus affect how we behave.

In this case, listen to the statements your children make. Do they talk about worse case scenarios in even minimally stressful situations? Do they become concerned when someone in the family has to go somewhere? Do they suddenly become quiet when you bring up a certain topic or memory? Do they frequently joke about stressful situations? Being aware of these subtle responses that indicate anxious thoughts is very important for keying in on your child's concerns.

## Emotional Indicators of Anxiety

Though the emotional domain may seem like the more obvious area to identify anxiety, it can actually be misleading as anxiety can show up in a variety of emotions. Anger is often viewed as the root of children's negative behavior, when typically, anger is actually a secondary feeling to a much deeper



feeling (such as fear, anxiety, or pain). In younger children, this can appear as simple things such as refusing to eat, yelling at others, or not being able to find a certain toy. For adolescents, it may include different and sometimes more extreme behaviors. Subtle responses, such as constantly being on edge, defiant or disrespectful behaviors, or defensiveness about basic things such as how they are dressed, may be signals of anger. More extreme behaviors, however, include things such as substance use, fights, and verbal or physical violence. All of these can be symptoms of a much deeper struggle with anxiety.

The word "depressed" gets thrown around a lot in society today to identify someone who is sad. However, sadness can be a result of anxiety just as much as true depression; in fact, they often go hand in hand. Continually dealing with anxiety triggers can be overwhelming and result in sadness. This can be seen through things such as low energy, crying, lack of motivation to do basic things such as school work or even social activities, melancholy attitude, or even, in some more extreme cases, suicidal thoughts.

Avoidance may be the most common emotional reaction; getting away from the stressors that bring about anxiety is logical. Avoidance can manifest itself in a variety of different ways, and as a parent, this may be one of the more notable areas you can readily identify as anxiety. Some warning signs of avoidance may include things like refusing to go to school, redirecting conversations (even joking about something else), meltdowns over how to dress in the mornings, finding excuses to not participate in certain activities, etc. If we can discover those areas our children clearly keep their distance from, it may help us more easily identify sources of this anxiety.

### Physical Indicators of Anxiety

The physical components of anxiety may be more easily identifiable but equally as overlooked, because it is easy to assume other things are the cause. Your son's or daughter's brain is in constant change, especially through teen years. This already takes a physical toll on them, and strong emotions such as anxiety can be equally as costly to young bodies. Some of the more common physical signs of anxiety include, but are not limited to, exhaustion, difficulty

focusing, headaches, stomachaches, restlessness, and muscle tension.

Anxiety can be a challenging thing to address as a parent. We desire to see our children grow and thrive. However, to pretend that our children do not have things they should be worried about, even though they may seem to be less significant to us, does a great disservice to getting them the help they need. By showing our children we are concerned, loving them enough to listen to their pain, and encouraging them to get the help that they need, we instill in them that same love and guidance God seeks to give us.

The most valuable question you can ask your child when they are struggling is also the simplest: How can I help? Beyond being alert for these warning signs, I would encourage parents to keep that question in mind. This opens the door for conversation that very well may shape the relationship between you and your child.

HOW CAN I  
HELP?



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