

3RD QUARTER 2023

Junior High

QUARTERLY | Jul • Aug • Sept

In the World,
Not Of the World



ALSO...

*Hanging On for the Ride
Called to Ministry*



Junior High Quarterly

3RD QUARTER 2023

JUL • AUG • SEPT

VOLUME 5 • NUMBER 3

DESIGNERS

Tanner Nababan, *BFA*, Ellie Chuah, *BFA*

LAYOUT EDITORS

Robi Gozzo, Judi Jeffreys

PASTORAL CONTENT DEVELOPERS

Danielle Berumen, *BA*, Linda Biswas, *MTS*, Ken Curtis, *DMin*, Cliff Lim, *MDiv*, Kevin Straine, *MTS*, Christine Pitt, *MDiv*

CONTENT EDITORS

Jen Classen, *BA*, Amilia Hoffman, *BA*, Alpha Islas, *MAT*, Joseph Santos, *BA*, Ann Sauder, *BS*, Vianay Valadez, *MAT*

COPY EDITORS

Gretchen Bethurum, *BA*, Amor Caro Del Castillo, *MAT*, Lori Giddings

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Rachelle Offenback, *BFA*

OPERATIONAL DIRECTOR

Lynn Delinger, *BFA*

MINISTRY DIRECTOR

Mark Ricalde, *BA*

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Andre Dos Santos

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SECC YOUTH DIRECTOR

Aren Rennacker, *MTS*

SECC PRESIDENT

Jonathan Park, *DMin*

Copyright © 2023 Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (SECC), 11330 Riverwalk Pkwy, Riverside, CA. All Rights Reserved. Published quarterly by SECC and AdventSource. We grant duplication rights ONLY to purchasing church to be used within its own small groups or classes. Reproducing, copying, distributing, or sharing this study beyond the use of the purchasing church is a breach of ethics and illegal.

Notice: By submitting letters, testimonies, and other materials to SECC, you agree all submissions are the property of SECC, and you agree that SECC has been granted the non-exclusive right to use and/or reproduce any submission in any manner and for any purpose.

To order products, visit
www.GrowingTogetherChurch.org



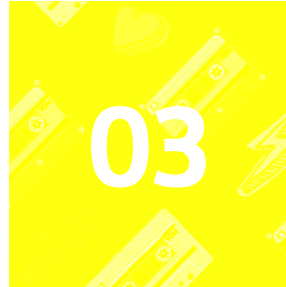
GROWING TOGETHER
Sabbath School Curriculum

Contents

FEATURES

04 Calves, Baby Squirrels, and Friends: Why Choosing Good Friends Really Matters

Friends rub off on us and eventually change us for better or for worse. Warren encourages us to choose our companions wisely and stand together like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.



HIGHLIGHTS

- 02** In This Issue
- 03** POP Goes the Culture
- 18** Man to Man
- 19** Girl Talk
- 28** Around the World

IN THIS ISSUE

JULY

In the World, Not Of the World

Do you have fashion sense? Do you take pride in matching your clothes and looking like a million dollars when you walk out the door? Unfortunately, I have no sense of style. This was on display when I wore a plaid shirt with plaid shorts and thought it looked okay. Spoiler: it did not, and people let me know it.

Christians are called to stand up and stand out. This does not mean your clothes should be so ugly or flashy that they can be seen for miles and miles. However, it does mean your behavior should be so different from the world that others see a difference in you. In this study of Daniel, you will learn what it means to stand for God over the ways of culture.

PAGE

THEME

08

COUNTERCULTURAL LIVING

10

TRIAL BY FIRE

12

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

14

WHEN THE ENEMY ROARS

16

NOT YOUR AVERAGE DREAM

AUGUST

Hanging On for the Ride

Following Jesus is a decision that most of us make pretty easily. We choose Jesus, He saves us through the gift of His life, and salvation is a sure thing. After we choose Jesus, now we get to the longer process of walking in His love and growing to be mature Christians. This month we talk about living out the gospel, the good news that Jesus saves us! We talk about how we should live, how we should grow, and how we can have confidence in a life rooted in Jesus! We just have to hang on for the ride!

20

LIVE IT OUT

22

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

24

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

26

CERTAINLY SURE

SEPTEMBER

Called to Ministry

What's the hardest thing you've ever had to say to another person? Have you ever had to admit to your coach or music teacher that you didn't practice? Have you ever had to tell someone that you broke something that belonged to them? Have you ever had to pass along a piece of sad news or reveal to your parents that you lied to them about something?

The truth can be hard to hear AND to share. Take it from Jeremiah. As a young man, he had to tell an entire nation of people that God was not pleased with them. Yikes!

This month you will follow Jeremiah's journey and discover the highs and lows he experienced as he carried out God's mission. Through it all, you will discover the very truth that kept Jeremiah going: God's truth is more satisfying and full of hope than anything else; it is worth standing for.

30

BORN FOR THE JOB

32

TRUTH TO BE SHARED

34

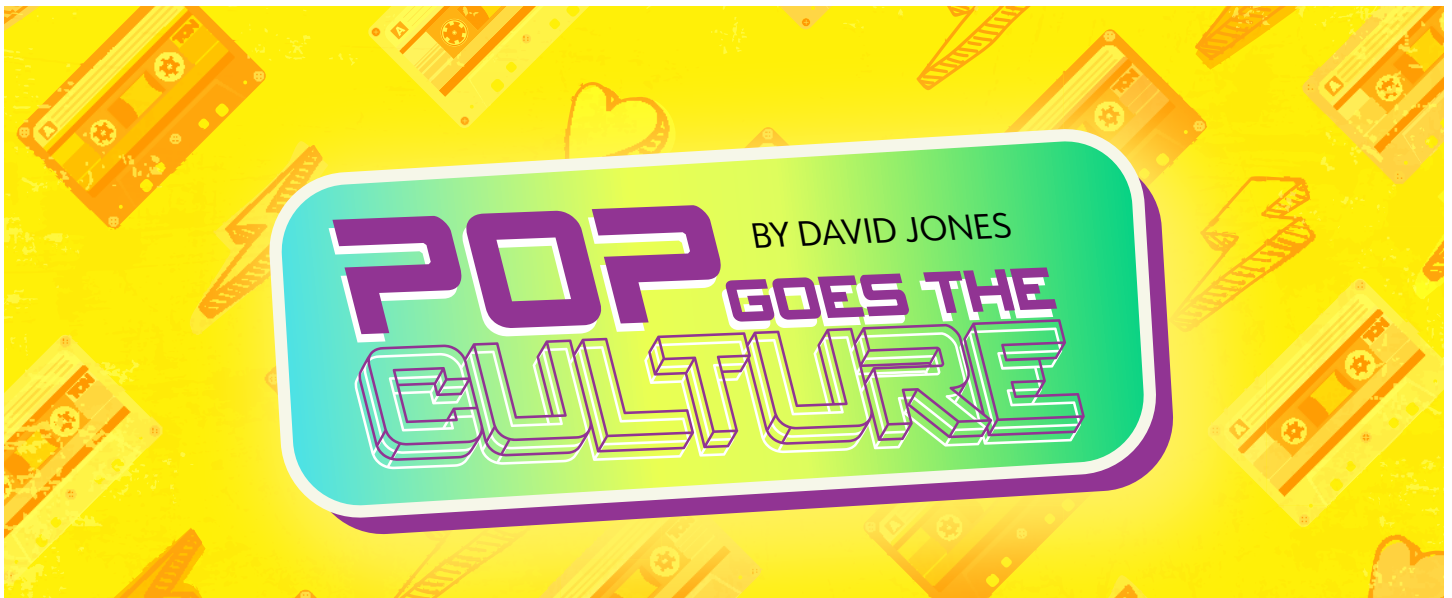
GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF IT ALL

36

HAPPY AND RESTORED

38

THE ETERNAL WORD OF GOD



A JUUL OF GREAT PRICE

A puff of smoke hit me in the face.

It felt like someone had turned on a fog machine only inches away from me. As I squinted and fanned away the smoke, another puff clouded my vision. I tried to make sense of what was happening. Once the fog finally cleared I was able to see the origin of this smoke monster.

It wasn't a fog machine. It wasn't the smoky haze of a campfire. It was a teenager vaping and blowing smoke into my face. I was not happy with what he was doing to me, but I realized what he was doing to himself was much more dangerous.

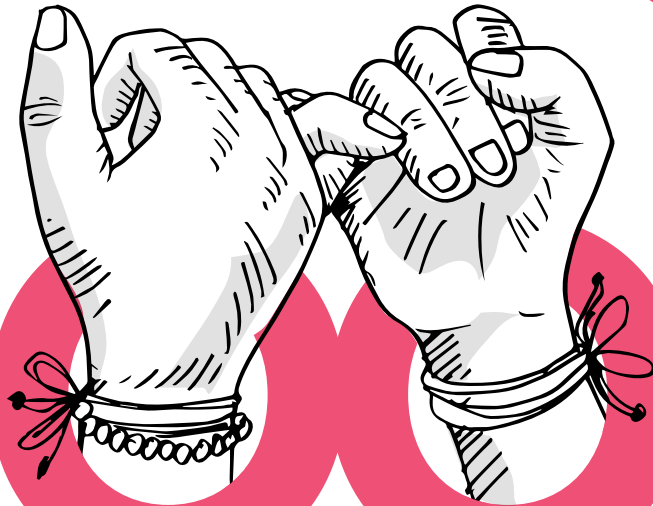
Vaping, Juuling, or using e-cigarettes has become extremely popular in recent years. Some of this is due to the lies of the companies producing these items. In order to sell their product, they tout their e-cigarettes as a healthier alternative to regular cigarettes. The problem with that idea: it's completely false. In fact, in recent months people across the United States have died from vaping-related lung illnesses, and many teenagers have found themselves near death and hospitalized because of vaping.

The fact is vaping is not a cool, safe alternative to smoking because there's nothing cool or safe about it. A single JUUL pod contains as much nicotine as a pack of 20 regular cigarettes. That nicotine not only destroys your lungs but also harms your brain development.

But of course, the people selling the products won't tell you that. They would rather you die using their products than live without them. Think about that for a minute. These companies are so greedy for money, they will lie to you and destroy your health so they can get rich off of you. How messed up is that?

There always have been and always will be teenagers who try to be cool by doing what's illegal or rebellious. Unfortunately, many of them sacrifice their health (and sometimes their lives) in the process. There is nothing—and I mean nothing—about vaping, Juuling, or e-cigarettes that makes you any cooler. Having the ability to blow smoke isn't worth messing up your brain development, having less energy, not being able to perform well in sports, or sacrificing your long-term health.

Calves, Baby Squirrels, and Friends:
Why Choosing



GOOD FRIENDS REALLY MATTERS

BY WARREN MARKINS

When a family adopted the calf, she quickly became comfortable with her new owners, but her best friend was the family dog. Wherever the dog went, the young calf followed. As the months passed, the two animals became inseparable, and the cow began to imitate many of the dog's behaviors to the point that she began to believe she was a dog. She would eat dog food and even hop up on the couch to cuddle with her owners, not realizing her ever-growing size. Yes, I recently discovered a series on YouTube with animals behaving in unusual ways. Another video showed a family that rescued several abandoned baby squirrels. The family cat had just given birth to several babies of her own. So the momma cat began to raise and groom the infant squirrels along with her kittens.

These videos are great for laughs. However, they reveal something interesting about the nature of God's creations: when His creations spend time together, they become more like one another. This does not just include cows, squirrels, and cats, but rather it includes all of His creations. Yes, this includes you too! Don't believe me? Consider this: As you grow and experience life, you change. Your personality expands, your tastes change, and your understanding of the world grows. This new you is no longer the same person as the five-year-old you.

Friends Change Us

Think about the time you spend with your best friend. Has this friend ever introduced you to something new? Have they ever taken you to a restaurant you have never been to or shown you a movie you have never seen? Has this friend ever introduced you to one of their friends? Odds are the answer to at least one of these questions is yes! Sometimes, you may not end up liking the restaurant or movie, and you may never hang out with your friend's friend again, but on the occasions when you do like those things, you become more like your best friend!

While you have not changed who you are at your core, you are still a slightly different person than you were before. When you add up enough of these changes over a long period of time, you will eventually find that the new "you" is far different from the person you once were.

We, as humans, never stop changing. We are constantly in a state of becoming something or, perhaps more aptly, someone new. But what does any of this have to do with our friends? As I am sure you are aware, your friends have a much larger impact on your life than just your interests. Their influence on you extends beyond movies and restaurants. The friends we choose affect our world view—how we view one another, our parents, our teachers, God, and everything else. The people we allow to influence us can and will affect us greatly. This brings about great potential for good but also great potential for danger.





Friends Can Drag Us Down

Think about the people you hang out with at school. Has anyone at school ever made a joke you knew was wrong, mean, or inappropriate, but you laughed anyway? Do people at school talk down about their parents or teachers? Have others shown you something inappropriate or degrading on their phones, and you chose to look? I faced these scenarios in middle school and academy, and I would not be surprised if they have affected you too. You may have the temptation to think these are one-time events that will not impact you as you get older, but this is not the case. Every one of these encounters will add up one by one and change you into someone else.

That sounds really scary. But take a moment to yourself. Look to Heaven. Breathe. There is still hope. While it is true that friends who are bad influences in your life negatively impact you, the inverse is also true: friends who are good influences in your life positively impact you.

Daniel and Friends

Scripture gives us wonderful examples of this concept. In the book of Daniel, the Babylonian empire besieged Jerusalem and took its inhabitants captive. Among the captives were four young men: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The Babylonians and the Israelites lived drastically different lifestyles. One way in which their lifestyles differed involved their eating practices. The Babylonians prepared for Daniel and his friends food that God forbade them from eating. Instead of ignoring God's instruction, the young Israelites refused to eat the food and drink the wine their captors offered. The Babylonian overseers feared the young men would be weaker and less able-bodied by eating what God wanted them to eat. The steward agreed to a test proposed by Daniel to limit their food to plain vegetables and water. The king found Daniel and his friends to be wiser and more physically fit than any of the advisors in his kingdom. Because of their loyalty to God's instruction, God blessed the four young men even in captivity.



Friends who share our beliefs will encourage us to live like Jesus.

Daniel's situation put him in a very tough spot. While under the control of other people, he potentially risked his life by refusing to do what he was told to do. However, even in the midst of adversity, God gave Daniel friends to stand up beside him for what was right.

Though most of us will never experience life-threatening situations while imprisoned, we do live in a type of modern Babylon. In a majority post-Christian world, the people we live alongside do not share our beliefs but instead mock them. This is why it is important to have like-minded peers. Friends who share our beliefs will encourage us to live like Jesus. Alone, we could fall time and time again until we are indistinguishable from the society that seeks to crush Christian beliefs and convictions. But together, we can withstand the blows of culture. Even so, this will be difficult—but not impossible.

Choosing Friends

So how do we choose friends that will help us grow? First, pray. We severely underestimate prayer's capability, but it is one of the most powerful gifts God gives us. Pray for friends that will make you more like Jesus. Pray for friends that will stand up with you against the worldly ideals and negative social norms. Do this and God will answer you. It may not be for a month or even a year, but it will happen in God's timing. Second, keep your eyes open. Look for these friend. They may already be in your life, but you just haven't given this person a chance yet.

In 2 Samuel 12, Nathan confronted King David. He called him out for his sins, not because he wanted to shame him, but because he loved him and did not want David to live sinfully. When you think of your future, what kind of friends do you want around you? What kind of friend do you want to be? Why not start working toward that today? Let's do this together following the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Warren Markins is in his junior year studying business at Welch College. His part-time work at Randall House Publications is divided between marketing, shipping, and printing. He is passionate about his family, reading, and practicing the way of Jesus.

SUN

READ DANIEL 1:1-21

There's no doubt about it: Daniel and the three Hebrew men with him were exceptional and above average (note the description in verse 4). But they were still captives, exiled to a foreign land, and forced to live in subjection to an ungodly king. Their education and lifestyle, even their diet, was changed to pressure them into becoming servants of the foreign government, Babylon.

Notice two things. First, Daniel and his friends made deliberate decisions to continue their obedience to God. They refused to eat the king's food. But also, they were polite and diplomatic as they approached those in authority over them. They made appropriate requests (not demands) and offered workable solutions for the dilemma. What did God do? God gave them favor with the officials and rewarded their choices to remain faithful. God will do that for you too!



Food For Thought:

Is going against the crowd intimidating for me? How can standing up for what is right bring respect?



What Now?

Gain and maintain respect from authority figures and leaders in your life by living a life of integrity.

MON

READ GENESIS 6:5-9

Have you ever felt alone or isolated as a follower of Christ? Are you the only one on your team who believes in Jesus? Maybe you are the only one in your family who goes to church. It might seem like you are the only one in your school who will stand up for what is right.

Noah was the only one on earth who followed God. How extremely alone he must have felt! There was so much evil in the world that God wanted to wipe the slate clean of the wickedness and wicked people. Yet, Noah's life of integrity stood out to God, and he was spared from the Flood, along with his entire family because of his faithfulness!



Food For Thought:

How do my feelings of isolation affect my relationship with Christ? How can I move forward in faith like Noah this week?



What Now?

First, trust in God's promise to never leave you. Next, pray for and seek out Christian friends and mentors who will support you.

TUE

READ ECCLESIASTES 12:9-14

Our sons' elementary school focuses on three rules. The students are to be respectful, responsible, and safe. These narrowed-down expectations are simple and easy to remember. However, they encompass many guidelines that are enforced to maintain a healthy school atmosphere.

In Ecclesiastes, the Preacher searched for meaning in numerous aspects of life. He found no eternal value in pleasure, food, knowledge, work, and more. His conclusion narrowed down the whole duty of mankind to two guidelines: We are to have an awe of God, and keep His commandment to love one another.



Food For Thought:

Why do we look to other things for value and contentment? Why will they never truly satisfy me?



What Now?

This week focus on praising God. Work hard to follow God's commands to put Him first and love others as yourself.

WED

READ MATTHEW 6:31-34

Everyone knows a worrier. A crisis-oriented person goes through life with a “what if” mentality, fretting about every possible scenario. That person can’t enjoy today for thinking about what might happen tomorrow. There might be trouble hiding behind even the things the person should appreciate. Maybe that describes you.

When you worry about school bills, or grades, about a sick family member, or the friend who’s not speaking to you... turn to God in trust. We know God is in control and has the best plan, even when we do not understand. Our commitment should be to put God first and trust that everything will work out for the good of those who believe in Him.



Food For Thought:

In my life, what do I worry about most? How can I give my anxiety to the Lord each day?



What Now?

When you find yourself worrying this week, as all humans do, stop and pray to the Lord. Ask for peace in your heart, faith in God’s plan, and guidance for your circumstances.

THU

READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:14-19

Women’s hair salons are historically and stereotypically known as places to get the latest gossip. Men sitting around drinking coffee probably dish just as much. Wherever it happens, spreading rumors is always harmful babble.

Paul reminded Timothy about the power of our words. Arguing about words with he said/she said scenarios does more harm than good. Since we know how quickly talk can spread and how impactful words can be, let us be extra careful with what we say, in person and online.



Food For Thought:

How do others’ words and posts affect me? Would my speech and social media accounts change if I thought before I spoke or posted?



What Now?

As you share on social media, take time to think about how it could affect others, remembering that you represent Christ.

FRI

READ HEBREWS 11:13

Our lives are filled with work towards our goals. You prepare and practice for the try-outs. If you make it, you strive even harder for the performances, meets, or games. We focus on achieving our goals and seeing the fulfillment of all our hard work.

Some people in the Old Testament worked hard and remained faithful, even if they never saw God’s promise fulfilled. They heard of God’s deliverance for the faithful people, but did not truly experience it before they died. The Lord promised redemption, yet God’s plan would be executed centuries later. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and others were true to the Lord and trusted in God’s promises even though they never got to see the promise of Jesus fulfilled.



Food For Thought:

Why is it easier to believe when we can see? Why can trusting be difficult for me?



What Now?

Begin a list of promises from God in the Bible. Check Isaiah 41:10 and James 4:8. Then, continue to add to your list and thank the Lord for being faithful to keep His promises.

SUN

READ DANIEL 3:1-30

Are you the type of person who is up for a challenge? If you attempt something and fail, are you motivated to try again? Most competitive people will practice and train hard to be successful. They strive to conquer the challenge.

King Nebuchadnezzar challenged the one true God. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the idol, the king questioned whether their God could deliver them from a fiery furnace (verse 15). The Hebrew men told the king that they would not bow to the idol, whether God delivered them or not. But God accepted the challenge and proved His power by saving the brave men. God even walked with them in the furnace. The result of the challenge: King Nebuchadnezzar glorified God and declared Him as a Rescuer for His people (verse 28).

 **Food For Thought:**

Why is God always up for a challenge? How has God proved His power in my life?

 **What Now?**

This week look for ways God shows His power, from the daily rising and setting of the sun to a modern-day miracle with no explanation except the Lord.

MON

READ PSALM 56:1-13

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. We all know from experience that is not true. Of course, weapons cause physical harm. Words cause harm as well, emotionally, mentally, and psychologically.

David asked what flesh could do to him in verses 4 and 11. We know others can do plenty to our earthly bodies and minds. However, whenever we are afraid, we can trust God. Christ is for us, in our corner (verse 9). Though these bodies will eventually fail us, the Lord will deliver His followers' souls from eternal death into eternal life.

 **Food For Thought:**

Why do the thoughts and opinions of others affect me? How can I live my life for an audience of One?

 **What Now?**

Check out Matthew 10:28-31 to see another reminder from Jesus that our Heavenly Father is for us.

TUE

READ EZEKIEL 34:11-16

Today's passage declared God is our shepherd. God gathers us as His flock and feeds and protects us. When we are injured, God provides us with strength and healing and rest. Note the Shepherd's special care for those who are weak and in trouble. God is their rescuer. Our Heavenly Father cares for His sheep.

Jesus used this word picture to describe Himself in John 10. He said that the Good Shepherd is willing to give His life for His sheep. And then He proved it.

 **Food For Thought:**

In what areas do I feel I need rescuing? When I am struggling, what steps do I take to try to fix the situation?

 **What Now?**

Go to God first with any struggle, rather than trying to do it alone and praying as a last resort. God has promised to care for you.

WED

READ LUKE 17:11-19

Have you heard the children’s song about this miracle of Jesus? It starts by counting to ten three times before singing of Jesus’ healing the lepers. The chorus reminds us that only one returned to thank the Lord. The song definitely focuses on numbers.

Jesus seemed to focus on the faith of those He healed. First, He directed the lepers to go to the priests. All ten turned to follow His directive. Then, only one returned with gratitude. He was healed by his faith in Jesus; he was outstanding because he gave thanks.

Food For Thought:

How strong is my faith in Jesus? How do my actions and attitudes show that I believe in God’s promises?

What Now?

Live out your faith in Christ by giving Him praise for all He has done and by showing love to others, as He did.

THU

READ JOHN 8:1-12

When the Pharisees and scribes wanted justice, Christ showed grace and mercy. Of course, Jesus knew their actual intention was to gain a charge against Him. Jesus confronted the religious leaders with their own sin, revealing they needed a Savior, just like the woman did.

Our God is a gracious and merciful God. Christ loves us unconditionally and forgives us when we ask. Although grace is the focus of this encounter, Christ’s last words to the woman were, “Sin no more.” Like Christ’s example, let’s lead with grace while standing for the truth.

Food For Thought:

How can I find the balance between grace and truth? How can I “love the sinner while hating the sin?”

What Now?

This week, show love to others who do not share your beliefs. Instead of arguing or debating, show compassion as Christ did, and pray for God to soften their hearts for the gospel.

FRI

READ ACTS 4:13-22

My boys are still excited to tell me about their days at school. I am treasuring all their stories, because I know these days will come to an end. Too soon I will have to drag more than one word out of them. (As a reminder, your parents like for you to talk to them about what is important to you—even school and friends!)

Peter and John could not contain all they had experienced with Jesus. When the rulers told them to keep quiet, the men stood up for the truth they had witnessed. The people were praising God for His miracles, as well. Such good news cannot be kept silent!

Food For Thought:

Why do I want to share exciting news with others? How can I share the best news ever?

What Now?

Be ready to tell others about the reason for the hope and joy you have: Christ. Give our Savior credit for all God has done for you.

Week 2
July 8-14, 2023

FAMILY THEME:
STAYING FAITHFUL WHEN IT COSTS

SUN

READ DANIEL 5:1-31

Our toddler is a climber. She will get on any stool she can find to reach up and climb even higher. If and when she falls, she may cry for a while. But next thing we know, she is right back to her goal, to get into as many unsafe places as possible. If only she would learn from her tumbles.

King Belshazzar had seen the consequences King Nebuchadnezzar had received when he dishonored the true God. Instead of learning the lesson from someone else, the new ruler mocked God's treasury and worshiped false idols. The true God showed His power by fulfilling the writing on the wall that very night.

 **Food For Thought:**

How have I repeated the same actions hoping for a different result? When have I learned valuable lessons from others' experiences?

 **What Now?**

Ask a family member or a spiritual mentor to tell you about a mistake they once made. What would they want you to learn from their mistake?

MON

READ GENESIS 41:25-32

Pharaoh was perplexed and in anguish, wanting his dreams interpreted. His cupbearer remembered when he had the same problem while imprisoned. He recalled when Joseph helped him through God's wisdom and direction. Once Joseph was called, he gave all glory and praise to God for interpreting the dreams.

What will we be remembered for? Do we let God use us to help others and give Him the glory and recognition? Do we seek out opportunities to show God's love and share Christ's message of salvation to those around us?

 **Food For Thought:**

What kind of impression do I make on people who are in my circle and others whom I meet?

 **What Now?**

Be intentional to show God's love to those around you. Smile, give genuine compliments, be a friend to someone new, and be kind.

TUE

READ NUMBERS 22:22-35

My alarm clock has various ways of waking me. The first setting is a gentle buzz to alert me. If the buzz is ineffective, the alarm plays calm music that is louder. Finally, if I have pressed the snooze button one too many times, a jarring blare sounds to make sure I listen and get out of bed.

God tried to get Balaam's attention gently. The Angel of the Lord blocked the path and caused his donkey to veer and stop. When Balaam still had no clue, drastic measures were taken; the donkey spoke to Balaam. We should learn from Balaam to listen for God's still small voice rather than make Him have to take extreme measures.

 **Food For Thought:**

How has God used the Bible and other believers to show me His plan and purpose?

 **What Now?**

Before reading Scripture, ask God to reveal Himself to you. Read the passage carefully, and take time for God to guide and direct you.

WED

READ JEREMIAH 13:15-17

Those who cheat, steal, and lie rarely think they will get caught. They foolishly believe they have figured out the system and can hide their sins. Their pride often leads to carelessness and being discovered.

God warned the people through Jeremiah's prophecy. The Bible continues to caution us today. Pride brings difficulty and sorrow. We should give God the glory only Christ deserves. When we humbly accept our need and ask for salvation, our Lord will provide our eternal home.

Food For Thought:

How have I experienced the negative effects of pride? How can I give God praise throughout my life?

What Now?

Start a gratitude journal or list. Begin each morning writing something new for which you are thankful, and praise the Lord for it.

THU

READ MATTHEW 19:23-30

In school, my teachers used their class rosters for everything: seating charts, assigning student groups, the order for giving presentations, and more. Often, they started at the beginning of the alphabet. Sometimes to mix it up or try to be fair, they started at Z. My last name started with L, so I was in the middle regardless.

Today's passage speaks of being first and last, but it does not mean alphabetically. Being last means putting others before yourself. Our attitudes and actions should allow God's compassion to shine through to others. If we sacrifice on earth, we will be rewarded in eternal life.

Food For Thought:

How does my outlook change when I put others before me?

What Now?

This week, sacrifice time, money, or resources for someone else, without looking for recognition.

FRI

READ LUKE 18:9-14

The Bible speaks to us in different ways, no matter how many times we read it. The writer of Hebrews said the Word of God is alive and pierces to our hearts and souls (Hebrews 4:12). Each time I open the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit reveals new insights to me about God and convicts me in new ways.

You may be familiar with today's parable to teach the importance of humility. The first verse struck me in a new way, a way I didn't like. Jesus was speaking to those who trusted in themselves. Yikes! I can be guilty of thinking I have it all together. Instead, I must be mindful that God is in complete control and not take for granted all God does for me.

Food For Thought:

How do things go when I am trying to do everything myself? How do I feel when I give control to the Lord?

What Now?

Write out Isaiah 25:1 as a prayer to trust God and His perfect plans.

SUN

READ DANIEL 6:1-28

My grandparents were married for over 60 years. When my granddad's health was failing, my grandmamma gave him constant care right by his side. They remained faithful to their vows in sickness and health, until his death parted them. Their faithfulness impacted many people.

Daniel was known for his faithfulness to God. When the jealous leaders searched for a complaint against him, it could only come from his connection to God. Daniel continued to pray, even though he knew he would be thrown into the den of lions. Once God had rescued Daniel, King Darius gave glory and honor to the true, living God. Daniel's faithfulness impacted the king and the entire kingdom.

 **Food For Thought:**

How can I impact my world by being faithful to God?

 **What Now?**

Write out a prayer of commitment to the Lord. Display it somewhere to remind you to remain faithful to our faithful God.

MON

READ JAMES 5:10-11

Marathon runners are known for their endurance, but their steadfastness must come long before race day. They must be committed to training even through sore muscles and days they lack motivation. Crossing the finish line is the reward for their patience and dedication.

Prophets in the Old Testament suffered, yet endured as well. Many spoke to a rebellious people who would not listen. They had to patiently wait on God to fulfill His Word; some never experienced the fulfillment before their deaths. However, they were committed to following God's purpose and plan.

 **Food For Thought:**

How long does my patience last through difficult waiting?

 **What Now?**

Read Hebrews 12:1-2 as encouragement to endure in your Christian life, looking to the example of Christ and anticipating eternal life.

TUE

READ MATTHEW 5:10-12

Our culture feeds our impatience. Any question we have can be answered by a quick Internet search. We can order an item and have it delivered in one or two days. Whatever we want to share can be put on social media for all to see instantly. We have grown accustomed to not having to wait.

In these verses, Jesus encouraged those who are persecuted for the gospel. When we struggle while living for the Lord, we can hope in His promise. We can be joyful, but we also must be patient for our reward in Heaven.

 **Food For Thought:**

How can struggles in my life allow me to grow in my relationship with Christ?

 **What Now?**

List reasons you are looking forward to eternity. Then list ways God can use you on earth for His purpose.

WED

READ ACTS 6:8-15

Jealously and envy are common among people of all ages. We compare ourselves to others and wish we had their body size or clear skin. We envy people's likeable personalities or set of skills. The amount of money someone has or the way it seems they have it all figured out can make us jealous as well.

Those who opposed Stephen were jealous of several attributes. He spoke with wisdom, which drew a crowd. The power of the Holy Spirit in Stephen allowed him to perform miracles. Since they could not find an actual fault, they presented false accusations. Even then, Stephen honored Christ.

Food For Thought:

How does comparing myself to others affect my view of God, my Creator?

What Now?

Thank the Lord for creating you and providing all you have. Ask God to transform you into who Christ has called you to be and use you for the Lord's purpose.

THU

READ ACTS 7:54-60

Daredevils are always seeking an adrenaline rush. No climb is too high, no jump is too far, and no sport is too extreme. They want the next thrill, especially if it means laughing in the face of danger.

Stephen's boldness presented itself in a much different way. He spoke a harsh reality to those who opposed Christ and prepared to be killed for his testimony. Instead of running away or denying his faith, Stephen boldly remained faithful to the Lord.

Food For Thought:

How can I be bold and stand up for God's truth while showing love and compassion?

What Now?

Take a stand against peers who ridicule others just for the fun of it. Show compassion to those being teased by being a friend.

FRI

READ ROMANS 8:18-25

What do your hopes for the future look like? Do you have college or career aspirations? Do your dreams include a spouse and a family one day? Maybe you simply hope to pass your math class this semester.

Believers in Christ hope for what we do not see. Paul wrote that nothing we see or experience on earth can compare to the glory to be revealed to us (verse 18). In eternity, we will be in God's presence. We will have new bodies free from pain and sorrow. The promises of Heaven make our vision boards seem trivial.

Food For Thought:

How do my dreams and goals align with God's purpose? How can I look forward to eternity while fulfilling the Lord's plan?

What Now?

Set a goal for the week to have three conversations about your faith. Tell others about what God has done in your life and what God has prepared for believers for eternity.

SUN

READ DANIEL 7:1-28

One of my favorite segments on College Game Day is "You Had One Job." The analysts give commentary while they show clips of athletes and sports professionals making hilarious mistakes. Maybe it is harsh to laugh, but it makes me feel better about my mishaps.

Daniel's vision revealed some leaders who believed they had it all together. They ruled their kingdoms with power, until the Lord took it away. Even the most vicious ruler, if against God, will see his nation and people fall to the Lord's judgment. Only Christ, the King of Kings, will reign forever.

 **Food For Thought:**

How has God shown His power and authority in the world? How has God shown He is in control in my life?

 **What Now?**

Trust God's plan and purpose for your life by surrendering control every day.

MON

READ EXODUS 15:11-18

The race for student government can often seem like a popularity contest. Those running will share great ideas they promise to make happen. They will claim they want to make a difference and do what is best for all the students, but the goal may simply be another extracurricular for a college application.

Moses' song asks a rhetorical question, "Who is like You, Lord?" We all know the answer is no one. Our God is holy and powerful. Yet, God leads with steadfast love. The Lord always does what is best for His people. We can rely on our trustworthy leader.

 **Food For Thought:**

How has God worked things out in my life, even when they seemed hopeless to me?

 **What Now?**

Begin a list of all of God's attributes—the character qualities that describe God. As you add to the list, thank the Lord for who He is.

TUE

READ PSALM 146:1-10

Think of people in your life whom you hold in high esteem. Maybe you appreciate celebrities who give time and money to worthy causes. Do you look up to entrepreneurs who are making a living doing the same hobby you love? Spiritual mentors will make an impact in your life, but be sure only one gets your highest admiration.

Praise the Lord! God's list of achievements includes creating the world and reigning forever. God's compassion provides, protects, lifts up, and frees. The highest honor and glory are due to Christ alone.

 **Food For Thought:**

How does my view of God affect my perspective? How has God provided for me and protected me?

 **What Now?**

Sing your favorite worship song to the Lord, focusing on the lyrics and giving glory to God.

WED

READ MARK 14:60-62

Anticipation is addictive. I try to treasure the present and live for today. However, there is always something to look toward: a birthday, a break from school, a holiday, a vacation... Those who believe in God have always lived in longing.

In the Old Testament, God's people looked for the Messiah to come to redeem. After Jesus' victory over sin and death, believers now anticipate Christ's return. As Jesus told the council, He came to earth as the humble Christ and will come back with glory and power.

Food For Thought:

In my faith life, what do I look forward to? How can my life reflect a longing for Christ's return?

What Now?

Since we do not know when Christ will return, take every opportunity to share about God's love and salvation.

THU

READ JOHN 8:53-59

Isn't it annoying when someone toots their own horn? All they can talk about is how easy that test was for them, without even studying. Or they constantly brag about all their wins, even though teammates and coaches were essential for their success. No one wants to acknowledge someone who already brags too much about themselves.

Jesus Christ has plenty to toot His horn about. Along with the Father, He created the world. Christ left His throne in Heaven to live a sin-free life on earth. Yet, He said in verse 54 that He will not glorify Himself. Instead, God honors His Son for all He has done.

Food For Thought:

Why do we place value in recognition? How can I live a life of humility, imitating Jesus?

What Now?

Take steps to practice humility by completing tasks at home or at your church that others may not even see.

FRI

READ REVELATION 5:1-12

"Mom, will there be football in Heaven?" My five-year-old has a lot of questions about Heaven. For most of them, my honest answer has to be, "I don't know." I just make sure to remind him of what we do know.

First, the eternal home for believers in Jesus Christ is and will be perfect, more than we ever imagined. People from every people group and language will be there. Sickness, pain, and sorrow will not be experienced anymore. We will be with God and, with the angels, we will worship Christ.

Food For Thought:

How can I play a part in fulfilling the promise that people from every tribe and tongue will be in Heaven?

What Now?

Support an international missionary or Christian ministry through prayer. If possible, send a message of encouragement and give a financial gift.

Week 5
July 29-Aug 4, 2023

FAMILY THEME:
GOD'S KINGDOM ENDURES FOREVER

MAN TO MY W

Pray. Listen. Obey.

I have a dog. Her name is Codie and she is unique. She is part Golden Retriever and part Chow. My wife and I rescued her from the pound. She isn't the coolest looking dog on the block, but I am convinced she is the most obedient. I taught her to shake hands, stay in our yard, and even open the fridge and pour me a Coke. Okay, two out of three isn't bad. She is almost 12 years old, which is like three thousand and something in human years. But after all of these years, she still remembers the tricks I have taught her, and she still obeys me.

An important part of life with God is learning to live in obedience. It isn't always easy doing what you know is right, is it? Sometimes it might even be easier to just live for the feel right. But you can never fully become the person God created you to be until you are willing to obey Him in every area of your life. Deuteronomy 28 tells us that if we faithfully obey the voice of God then He will set us high above all the nations of the earth and blessings will overtake us. This is an amazing passage! God will lavish you and bless your work! How do you get this kind of treatment from God? Obedience!

When God says it, God means it! God promises the very best to those who are obedient to the Spirit. Are you living a life of obedience? Don't rush past this question. It is one that deserves your complete honesty and consideration. Does your true loyalty lie with God, or are you just rolling over and playing dead? God knows the truth. Jesus knows if your commitment is to Him or something else.

There have been times in my life when I've had to let go of things important to me and embrace things important to God. In these times, I didn't always understand why God was doing what He was. And, honestly, I didn't always like what the results were. But I discovered that when God takes away something, it is replaced with something better. I now realize that even though I was letting

go of something important to me, I was simultaneously grabbing hold of something much better from God. Today I am experiencing God's very best because of my choice to obey Jesus, even when it didn't make sense to me.

It's also important to note that before Codie could ever learn to obediently follow my lead, she first had to learn to hear my voice. Relationships are a two-way street: talking and listening. Many Christians are good at talking to God but stink at patiently waiting to listen for the Spirit's voice. John 10:27 says Jesus' sheep listen to His voice and follow Him.

There are many voices and noises competing for your listening ear. It is imperative that you filter the noise in your life and learn to hear God's voice. How can you do this?

- Make an effort to silence your devices and spend time with Jesus for 5 minutes today. Just 5. Try it!
- After praying, sit quietly and listen.
- Slow down and give the Spirit a chance to get your attention.

As you begin to train your ear to hear, God will speak His will and plan for your life into your heart. You will begin to see things you have never seen. You will be lead in ways you may have never gone before. God will challenge you to think in ways you have never thought.

God might choose to speak to you in your thoughts, through a song, in the stillness of the moment, through the Bible, through a friend, or maybe even through your canine (though I've never experienced that one myself).

Take a few moments to communicate with God. Pray. Listen. Obey.

Jeffrey Dean is a pastor, international evangelist, and author.

GIRL TALK

By Shannon Primicerio



Just Do Something

Learning to Walk With Friends Through Hard Times

This week I sat at lunch taking nervous sips of my iced tea. My friend across the table was someone I have known for years. So our time together shouldn't have been awkward. But it was. My friend is going through a really hard time, and her situation isn't something I have experience with so I didn't know how to help.

Have you ever been there? Maybe one of your friends is navigating her parent's divorce or she recently lost a grandparent. It can be tough to know what to do when a friend is going through something painful.

I remember being in high school when a girl in one of my classes was diagnosed with cancer. She was out of school for months. We all felt awful and didn't know how to handle it. One day, I finally picked up my phone and called her. When she answered there was a long and awful silence. Finally, when she spoke, there was hurt and anger in her voice.

"My surgeries and chemo are going well and I am in the process of healing. But you're the first person who has called me. Why? Does anybody at school even realize I'm gone?"

I was stunned. I don't remember exactly what I said, but I stammered through something. In that moment I learned a lesson I will never forget: When you don't know what to do, always err on the side of doing something.

Sometimes we are so afraid to say the wrong thing that we don't say anything. That hurts people worse than any well-intentioned but misplaced words ever will. I also think it's easy to assume that because you are young you can't do anything that would make a big enough difference anyway, so why try?

But that's just not true. I once volunteered to baby-sit for a family we knew from church so the parents could get some much needed marriage counseling. I also walked to a friend's house

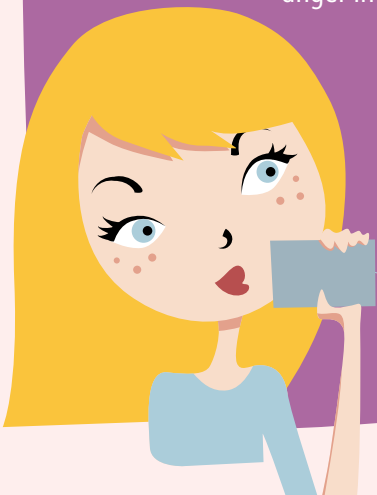
in the sweltering heat of summer so I could sit with her as she cried when her grandpa died. When I was in college, a friend of mine was killed in the Iraq War and I was unable to make it to his funeral, so I took time to write his parents a letter telling them about some of my favorite memories with him.

Everything I just mentioned was free. These actions didn't cost me anything but my time. But every single one of those gestures mattered. And the things you do matter too.

Romans 12:15 reminds us we are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. When those around you are celebrating, throw a party with them. Just make sure to stay by their side when the seasons of weeping come.

And when you don't know what to do, say a quick prayer. Then, just do something.

Shannon Primicerio is the author of ten books for teenage girls. Her most popular book, *The Divine Dance*, uses the analogy of life as a performance and shows readers that they were never meant to dance for the crowd but instead were made to live for the Audience of One. You can learn more about Shannon and her books at www.beingagirlbooks.com.



SUN

READ 1 PETER 1:3-25

Have you heard the phrase "holier than thou?" We often hear this said in a negative tone towards someone who is a "try hard" or "goody two-shoes". We will even say it to people who think they have it all together and judge others.

When us Christians use the word "holy," we should have a very different tone. Peter quotes Leviticus in 1 Peter 1:16 where it says "Be holy, because I am holy." Holiness is a high calling to aim to live as Jesus lived, and to try to grow the traits of God in our own character and hearts.

So take a look at your life. What parts of your actions and words are in line with the way Jesus lived and taught? What parts are not? Let's choose to be holy as we live each day!

Food For Thought:

Peter saw "Conforming to the world" as the opposite of holiness. Does that apply today? How so?

What Now?

Pray and ask God to give you the desire to live a holy life.

MON

READ ROMANS 8:15-17

Are you the heir of anything? Most of us are probably not royalty, so we don't own castles, land, or crowns, but some of us probably will receive all the belongings that our parents own one day. We are in their will, so that what is theirs becomes ours when they are gone.

God wants us to be his heirs, and this is possible because of Jesus! But for God, it's only natural that we receive an inheritance. God is more concerned with the fact that being an heir means we are God's children, and we can call him "Father."

At the core of inheritance is relationship. You are your parents' heir because you are their child, and you are God's heir because you are God's child.

Food For Thought:

Do you truly view yourself as a child of God? Why or why not? If it is hard for you to imagine that, then ask God to strengthen your bond!

What Now?

Spend some time with your parents today. Spend some time with God today. Invest in them and show them you love them, because they have given to you freely!

TUE

READ EPHESIANS 1:3-14

Paul tells us in our passage of Ephesians that we are blessed beyond understanding. But his focus isn't on riches, heaven, or eternal life. The gift of focus for Paul is redemption and forgiveness.

The most amazing thing we inherit from God is the covering of Jesus. A life of sin and selfishness now receives the prize (or inheritance) of one who is good and right. The blessing we inherit is a chosen and clean life, because we have been forgiven!

To share our inheritance with others means to be forgiving and gracious to those around us who make mistakes and hurt people. When people are stuck in sin, we can share our inheritance and be a source of grace to them through the Holy Spirit working in us.

Food For Thought:

When is the last time you forgave someone? Is that a natural thing for you to do? Why or why not?

What Now?

Think about your own actions and words this week, and ask God to forgive you for what you have done/said wrong. Ask God for a heart that can forgive others.

WED

READ ISAIAH 43:1-4

Most of us live pretty safe lives. Our parents would never let us do something that would put us in danger.

God also protects us and keeps us safe. However, because of the consequences of human actions and the sin problem of the world, there will be many times when we will go through hard and dangerous situations. There will even be times where Christians will be targeted by people who live against the gospel.

In those cases, God doesn't promise to remove us from danger, but God promises the next best thing: to be with us through it all. The promise in Isaiah 43 is one that is famous, for good reason, and one you should hold dear!

Food For Thought:

What's the hardest thing you ever faced? God was with you then! How does that make you feel?

What Now?

Thank God that through any hardship and difficult times you won't be alone. Thank God for the way you are loved.

THU

READ JOHN 8:31-36

The people in our passage today questioned Jesus claim that following God's teachings would "set them free." They told Jesus that they were Abraham's descendants and have always been free.

First of all, this is totally wrong. The Israelites had been slaves multiple times in their history as a nation. So why did they say that to Jesus?

It is often the case that those who are trapped in sin and bad life habits are the ones that say, "I am okay" and "I am in control." When this is not true, these people act delusional!

If we don't accept that for us it's either slaves to sin or freedom in Jesus, we are delusional too.

Food For Thought:

Jesus is very clear that when we choose Him and become sons of God, we are "free indeed." Let that sink in. Freedom is a sure thing!

What Now?

Take some time to sit on a bench outside in nature. Watch some birds flying freely through the trees and bushes, taking off into the sky! Celebrate that symbol of freedom!

FRI

READ 1 JOHN 3:16-18

Has anyone ever given up something so you can have it? Has someone ever taken less food so you can have more? Or maybe someone has changed their schedule to make time to help you?

All of the above questions should make you think of people who love "with actions and in truth." The core of being faithful to God is that we do less talking about God and more serving with God's spirit of love.

Maybe you don't naturally help people in the ways we have mentioned. Don't get down. It doesn't mean God doesn't love you, or that God's love is not in you. It only means that you have room to grow to make God's love overflow into your actions. Don't get discouraged, get committed to live better!

Food For Thought:

When we give our time, effort, belongings, and more to others, do we receive something in the process?

What Now?

Think about someone in your life who could use some help. Pray for them! Then keep an eye out for them this weekend and how you could show love for them by action.

SUN

READ 1 PETER 2:1-12

The analogy of a spiritual baby is commonly used in sermons and illustrations. And it is easy to understand, but it gets a little more complex in our spiritual lives.

Maybe you are a junior high student who just gave your heart to God. Then you can be called a spiritual baby.

But what about the junior high student who has been following Jesus since they were born because they are in a Jesus following home? Are they spiritual babies?

Because it's not cut and dry, our job is never to determine who is or isn't a spiritual child or who is mature. Our job is to find traits in our lives that are spiritually immature, and ask the Holy Spirit to work in us and make us more mature everyday.

Food For Thought:

Do you have any habits in your life that are immature (for spiritual babies)? Give those up to God, and ask for spiritual growth.

What Now?

Ask your parents to take you to the grocery store this week. Buy a few jars of baby food. Try eating it for dinner, and remember that your physical body has grown, and so should your spiritual body.

MON

READ HEBREWS 5:11-14

Today we have another text that is talking about spiritual babies. Although real people can't age backwards (unless your Benjamin Button!), we can spiritually age backwards. This means we had strong faith in both belief and action, and then we stopped caring and started to live in our old selfish ways.

One way to avoid this is to become a teacher (verse 12). When you are on your own it is easy to get tired of the careful work of building our character, but when we start to teach others as we grow, we see faith from other perspectives, and we are also inspired by how others around us are growing in Christ. Not only that, the Holy Spirit can also use those experiences to build us up spiritually!

Food For Thought:

Last week we talked about inheritance. Today the same idea applies, we grow and learn in Christ, and we should pass that on to others.

What Now?

Think about someone who has taught you in life. Send them a thank you text!

TUE

READ JAMES 1:21-25

Moving forward as Christians is something we choose to do everyday. We can wake up and decide to forget about the new way of life that brings freedom, or we can choose to follow it.

In verse 21, the key word in this passage that shows us how to approach this daily work of following Jesus is "humbly." Even if doing the right thing is a little bit harder than following our own way, we choose to do it, knowing that God's way leads to freedom and growth in our character.

At the end of the day being humble toward God is saying "I'll follow your word that you have planted in me, not my own selfish ways."

Food For Thought:

What does it mean to look away from the mirror and forget what you look like? While a confusing analogy, it points us to the importance of self-reflection!

What Now?

Take out a piece of paper and write down who you are today. Write whatever comes to mind. Then write down some things you want to add or remove to start living more in God's love.

WED

READ PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

What is the best criteria for making decisions? Is it what makes us the most money? Is it what makes people think the best of us? Is it what results in the least conflict? Do we make choices to protect ourselves or our family?

When there are so many ways to decide what to do whenever we are faced with a decision, we should lean on the wisdom given in this passage. Our insight and knowledge should be based on love.

When we try to determine what is the most loving way to act, we can find ourselves making choices that bring glory and praise to God!

Food For Thought:

Our fruit (the results of our faith) is truly seen when love is behind all we do. So here's a nugget of advice: think about why you do things more than what you do.

What Now?

Read 1 Corinthians 13. This is the love chapter. In it is a description of what love is like.

THU

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15

Have you ever built anything? Maybe you build legos, or have tried to build a tower out of a deck of cards. Whether it is a real house or just a playhouse, having a strong foundation is the most important part.

For people, it is especially important to build a strong foundation because life is filled with hardships and difficult decisions. If we have not built a strong character it is easy to fall under pressure. When the pressure is on, we can crumble by cheating, lying, being dishonest, and pointing at others to take the blame away from ourselves. The list is endless, but if you are reading this, you have been in a situation where you have made a bad decision because the pressure was strong.

The more time we spend with Jesus, the stronger we will be when the pressure hits!

Food For Thought:

We can build foundational character by doing the right thing when there is only a bit of pressure. Many good little choices lead to big good character.

What Now?

Drive around downtown with your family and look at the tall buildings. There is a lot of unseen foundation below the ground! Pray that God builds a foundation of love in your heart.

FRI

READ MATTHEW 5:14-16

What's the kindest thing you have done this week? I bet that if you walked around all day telling people about the great thing you did, they would get pretty annoyed at you. People might think you are full of yourself or are trying to make yourself look good.

When we do good things for selfish reasons, this is often the result. We feel great, but people around us see us for what we truly are.

Jesus envisions a different kind of scenario, one where we humbly live following God, and when we do good, people are amazed at how God is working through us.

Again, we see that in order for God to keep working in us, we must keep a humble heart!

Food For Thought:

When we live as lights pointing to Jesus, our families and communities become places of service and love.

What Now?

Try to spend half the day doing all your daily activities with no lights on. What a challenge! Ask God to help you be a light to others when they are living challenging lives.

SUN

READ 1 PETER 3:8-4:19

Peter calls us to a level of love that sounds very difficult. Not only must we be humble (we talked a lot about this last week), kind, and compassionate, we must repay insult and evil with blessing. In other words, when someone hurts us or mistreats us, we are called to respond with kindness.

This is difficult! If you have a sibling, you know that if they do something mean to you, it may be your instinct to snap back. God asks us to respond differently.

One way to start doing this is by taking a breath every time we feel like we are in a situation where we might respond in a bad way. Taking a breath helps us to slow down and think before we do something rash.

 **Food For Thought:**

Jesus never fought back, even when He was beat and hurt as an innocent man. Jesus prayed for those who hurt Him. What an example of today's principle.

 **What Now?**

The best place to start practicing this is with our family. It is way more common for families to have little fights. What does it mean to respond with love?

MON

READ ACTS 5:17-42

If you live in North America or another similar place, there is a slim chance that anyone is trying to kill you because you follow Jesus. Some of us may even live in places where the only people we know are Christians.

Do the principles of this story apply to us? What does it mean to live as "witnesses" of Jesus in our current location? When we are living according to love, and are talking to others about Jesus, we should feel blessed when people listen to us kindly.

If there are times when you are made fun of or judged because you are a follower of Jesus, remember, we are to have courage and continue being a witness of love, treating those who hurt us with kindness.

 **Food For Thought:**

You can't be judged for something you don't say. Some of us might be too timid in the way we love others and talk about Jesus. Let's live proud of the gospel message we have.

 **What Now?**

Think about Christians in places of the world that don't have freedom of religion. They are persecuted and have to be careful not to get caught worshipping Jesus. Pray for them.

TUE

READ PROVERBS 4:14-19

Proverbs has a poetic way of teaching us very important principles. In our passage today, it talks about the restlessness and lack of sleep of those who do evil.

There is an interesting phenomenon involved with our brain's response to guilt. Have you ever done something that you know is bad (even if it was a mistake), and you spend hours just thinking about the worst case scenario of how you get caught? Or maybe you have caused a friend pain and you just feel a pit in your stomach for the way you treat them?

This phenomenon is something Proverbs tells us to avoid. When we walk down the good path, our heart is filled with life and light, not worry, stress, or guilt.

 **Food For Thought:**

Maybe we are walking in a path of bad decisions right now. It's not too late to let God's way be our guide!

 **What Now?**

Wake up early tomorrow and watch the sunrise. God wants to bring new light and life in your heart today!

WED

**READ HEBREWS 13:3;
EPHESIANS 6:18-20**

It's easy to focus on our own pain when we are mistreated or persecuted. What is more difficult is to look at others who are mistreated and have empathy for them. Today, there are homeless people, people in prison, people who are hungry, and people who are alone. How much time do we spend thinking about, praying for, and helping these people?

The principle of living in difficult times is one that always applies, not because we are always facing difficult times, but because there will always be people who are facing difficult times. It is our calling to seek out these people, pray for them, and find ways that we can be a helping hand.

Food For Thought:

Make a list of people in your community who could be lonely, hungry, hurting, or in need. Ask your parents if there is a way you can serve anyone on the list.

What Now?

Take some time to pray for the people on your list. When you pray for them, you are thinking about them more and are building your own empathy.

THU

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-22

The very people that we prayed about yesterday are the very people we need in our community to build up our faith. If our church is made up of people who all think the same, act the same, and look the same, it means we are a body of all one part (see our passage for today: imagine a body with 8 right hands! Weird!).

The church is a beautiful place because people who have strengths can teach those things to people who are weak in that area. We teach each other, support each other, and keep each other humble.

Maybe you feel that you don't have anything unique to share with your family or community. You are wrong! To God, you are indispensable to the community. (see verse 22)

Food For Thought:

Think about the gifts and talents God has given you. How can you use these skills to help other people?

What Now?

Do you know a lot of people who are different than you? If not, ask your parents how your family can become more multicultural and intergenerational.

FRI

READ MATTHEW 5:10-12

Our verses for today ask us to rejoice when people insult us and persecute us because we are followers of Jesus. Even though this doesn't happen to us a lot (see Monday), it is true that we should be happy that we have given our lives to Jesus. We definitely have a great reward to look forward to in heaven.

While prizes and treasure in heaven are great, it is important to remember that the biggest prize of all is our relationship with Jesus. We can rejoice knowing that whatever happens in life, we are walking side by side with Jesus.

Walk daily with Jesus, react with love no matter how people treat you, and rejoice that you are walking the right way.

Food For Thought:

God is a good God, and He is with us through whatever persecution we face. Rejoice in that as well!

What Now?

Pray for the courage to follow Jesus with your whole heart, no matter what happens.

SUN

READ 2 PETER 1:1-21

Following God is not a magic trick. Once we let Jesus into our heart, we don't start glowing, life doesn't become all rainbows, and we don't start making automatic good decisions. A life committed to God is a daily journey of growth, pitfalls, lessons learned, and maturity.

In spite of this, Peter reminds us in our text that though we can't see direct results sometimes, we can love and receive love, and though we can't see God, we can be filled with joy and hope.

We may not have a face to face relationship with God, but it is a sure thing that we are building a strong relationship as we walk with Jesus every day!

Food For Thought:

Have you ever felt unexplained joy? Is God the source of that?

What Now?

Pray for God to strengthen your faith to be sure and believe every single day.

MON

READ JOSHUA 23:5-15

Believers and unbelievers in Jesus live in the same world. We face similar challenges and have to overcome similar life situations. One thing that is very different is our belief and trust that God is moving before us.

As Christians, we know that Jesus has gone before us through all good and bad situations. Whether life is feeling easy or hard, we can know that God is on our side and God won't leave us alone as we face life.

In our passage today, God reminds the Israelites that He has walked before them as they entered the promised land, and God asks them to "be very careful to love the Lord your God." Because God has gone before us, we can know Christ is with us, and all that is left for us to do is love God and love the people around us.

Food For Thought:

Think about situations in your life when you knew God was with you. How does thinking about a faithful God make you feel?

What Now?

The future is sure. God will be with you. God goes before you in the good and the bad. Thank God for His unfailing love!

TUE

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 10:12-14

Many Christians share a similar testimony: that their life got more difficult after they let Jesus into their life. While this is not true for everyone, it definitely shows us that following Jesus is not a safety bubble of blessings. Life in a sinful world is difficult for everyone.

Paul gives us hope that in this world, God gives us the strength to face our troubles and temptations. God is faithful to walk with us through all our troubles.

When people question what the point of following Jesus is, (they might say, "I have a lot of Christian friends" and life doesn't get any better for them), remember God doesn't rescue us from temptation, God gives us the strength to navigate through it the right way.

Food For Thought:

Even though God gives us the strength to fight temptation, the best option is to try to totally avoid the situations that might tempt us (verse 14).

What Now?

Is there anything tempting you lately? Ask God for strength to do the right thing. Thank God for being with you through it all.

WED

READ 2 PETER 1:5-7

The traits found in this passage are ones we should make a priority to grow in our lives:

Faith—Believe that Jesus saves you, and that God will do what He promises.

Goodness—Live to do good, not evil.

Knowledge—Learn from the Bible what is right and what is wrong.

Self-control—Learn to say no to your selfish desires.

Perseverance—When the going gets tough, ask God for the courage to keep trusting.

Godliness—Follow Jesus' way and teaching first!

Mutual Affection—Listen and care for those around you.

Love—Learn about how Jesus lived and follow His example.

Food For Thought:

The traits above are the goals for all Christians. If we fail, that is okay! Let's persevere, and ask the Holy Spirit to keep transforming our character into one that reflects love.

What Now?

Your parents might know your strengths and weaknesses better than you know your own. Ask them how you can be a better Jesus follower.

THU

READ JOHN 15:1-8

We have talked a lot about living the right way, believing the right things, and acting properly this month. Today's verse might be the most important in giving us perspective on how we can do this well.

In order to follow Jesus well, we must be connected to God.

To be connected to Jesus means to "remain" in Him. We need to spend time praying, sitting and reflecting on God's love, talking to Christ through song and word, and asking Jesus to speak into our lives through the Bible and other Christian mentors.

If we are not connected to Jesus, all the right things we do won't mean a thing!

Food For Thought:

Take some time to look at trees, flowers, or any green plants around your house. They all need to be connected to the roots to be fed. Christians should be connected to Jesus, too.

What Now?

Sit alone in a quiet place and read John 15 again. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be better connected to Jesus.

FRI

READ HEBREWS 11:1-10

Today's passage is often called the 'faith hall of fame.' It mentions a bunch of Bible characters who exemplified what it means to live with faith. We can go to the Old Testament and read their stories and learn from them.

Similarly, it would be a good idea to find people in our lives who have strong faith. This could be parents, grandparents, church leaders, teachers, or anyone we have seen be good followers of Jesus.

When we watch their lives and the lives of the Bible characters, we learn lessons and principles that we can apply to our lives. This is a great example of a community of faith teaching each other and growing into spiritual maturity.

Food For Thought:

In the same way that we learn faith from Bible characters and good Christian mentors, we can be a source of faith to others who want to learn from us.

What Now?

Choose one of the Bible characters from our text today and find their story in the Old Testament. Read the story and listen for what the Holy Spirit is trying to teach you.

On the scene from mission fields...

Around the World

In Haiti by Ryan Akers

If you have heard of the country of Haiti, it's probably not for great reasons. Though it is only 700 miles from Florida, it is known as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. It has suffered from numerous natural disasters such as a major earthquake in 2010, which killed an estimated 300,000 people, and multiple hurricanes that have struck the island in the Caribbean Sea.

On top of that, decades of political instability seem to keep Haiti in the public eye. In 2021, the president of Haiti was assassinated in his own home by a group of Colombian mercenaries. In 2018 and 2019, a series of protests rocked the nation and shut down streets with curfews. Today, Haiti is facing even more instability with an unstable economy and many gang-controlled areas in its capital of Port-au-Prince, which has a population of almost three million people. A lack of food, fuel, jobs, and education currently summarize the dire situation in Haiti.

And yet, while there is much that makes the news because of all the injustice and disaster, Christ is working in Haiti. Many Christian organizations do amazing work in Haiti to feed, educate, and provide medical needs. There is also a thriving church that seeks to reach the nation with the gospel. Approximately 55% of Haitians claim to be Catholics. Almost 30% of people say they are Protestant Christians. There are still those who practice voodoo, about 2% of the population.

In a country that has faced much upheaval and instability, the church remains thriving and growing. The ministry I have the privilege to work with is Mountain Faith Mission



of Haiti, located in Saut d'Eau, around 45 miles north of Port-au-Prince. It began in 1948 and has grown to have around 20 churches, a children's home, a bakery, agriculture and feeding programs, multiple schools, and many other ministries. Each year, many people hear the gospel and give their lives to follow Jesus Christ because of the ministry of Mountain Faith Mission and many of the thousands of other Bible-teaching churches across Haiti.



While the media may summarize Haiti, correctly in many instances, as a country that is having many problems, behind the scenes there are faithful Haitian Christians who are loving their communities by serving them and meeting their needs. They are boldly preaching the gospel so all people may hear the truth of Christ. The next time you hear of Haiti, be reminded that God has chosen those in poverty to be rich in faith (James 2:5).

Haiti Facts:

- Won its independence from the country of France in 1804 through a slave rebellion that is celebrated and commemorated each January 1.
- Was once the largest producer of coffee and sugar in the world.
- Haitians speak Haitian Creole, the common language of the people, with influence from French, Spanish, and African dialects.

Prayer Requests:

- Stability within the government is essential. Due to the instability, there is much corruption from those who are in the government, as well as many gang-controlled areas around the country.
- Lack of being able to meet physical needs is a growing concern. Gas prices have reached upwards of \$20 (U.S.) per gallon in some areas. Food is scarce outside of what is personally grown, leaving orphanages and children's homes struggling.
- Families sometimes send their children to orphanages and children's homes simply because they cannot afford to meet their needs. The greatest need is not adoption and children's homes, but job opportunities for families to be able to raise their own children.

Ryan Akers is the pastor to students and families at Calvary Fellowship Church in Fenton, Missouri.



SUN

**READ JEREMIAH 1:1-19;
ISAIAH 6:1-8**

Excuses, excuses. Whenever someone is late or unprepared, the person always wants to give a reason. Even if the excuse is valid, however, the leader rarely wants to hear it.

When the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, God was prepared for all of Jeremiah's excuses. Although Jeremiah was young, God would use him. Although Jeremiah was afraid, God promised to be with him and deliver him. Although God's task for Jeremiah was a big one, the Lord would give the prophet the words to say. We can trust that God has a purpose for our lives and that God will guide and equip us as we carry it out.



Food For Thought:

What excuses do I give to God when Christ has given me a responsibility?



What Now?

Be willing to be used by God. Trust in God's plan and God's provision.

MON

READ JEREMIAH 2:12-13

God's chosen people had rejected the Lord, despite God's faithfulness and the miracles Christ had performed for them. They had turned from the true God and followed the false gods of the people around them. Appalling, right?

Then again, maybe we should not be too quick to judge. It is easy for us, too, to go along with the crowd and be affected by negative peer pressure. Instead of listening to the truth, sometimes we disregard God's teaching. Our culture can have a strong influence on us and lead us into situations where we never wanted to be. We must stand firm in our Christian values.



Food For Thought:

How do the people around me influence my choices?



What Now?

Before making decisions this week, major or minor, stop. Look to the Lord's teaching and listen for God's guidance.

TUE

READ JEREMIAH 2:32

You wake up, stretch, and take a deep breath to begin your day. The sun shines, the wind blows, the rain falls, the plants grow, and the animals call. All of this is evidence of a Creator God. With all of these signs staring us in the face every day, how could God be forgotten?

Maybe in the busyness of our days we do not make time for the Lord. Maybe our focus pulls us away from appreciating all that God has given us. However, when our priority is the Lord and God's desire for our lives, that's when we feel the most purpose and satisfaction.



Food For Thought:

How does spending time with the Lord affect my day? How is my outlook different when I do not set aside time with God?



What Now?

Create or continue a routine of spending time with the Lord each day. Read the Bible, worship, pray, and make time to listen.

WED

READ JEREMIAH 3:12-15

"Would you like one more chance?" Just last night I asked my boys that question. They had not obeyed the first time, but I was willing to give them a warning. Of course, they chose another chance rather than punishment.

How merciful is our God! Rather than respond with anger, God gives us a clean slate when we come to Him (verse 12). Despite our shortcomings, God is ready with open arms to forgive us and welcome us back to His fold (verse 14). As followers of Christ, we should show the same grace to others.



Food For Thought:

When have I experienced God's grace and mercy? Do I respond graciously to others?



What Now?

Show others God's mercy and forgiveness this week. When you encounter a difficult situation or person, act with grace and compassion.

THU

READ JEREMIAH 5:23-25

Stubborn. It's a word I know all too well. My daughter can be stubborn, and she gets the personality trait directly from me. No matter how minor the confrontation, neither one of us likes to budge. My husband merely chuckles at us, holding his tongue about us being so much alike.

The Israelites had become stubborn. Though the Lord had called repeatedly for the people to turn from their disobedience, they continued to rebel and reject God. May we, instead, be stubborn in our allegiance to God, standing firm and trusting in God's guidance.



Food For Thought:

How can I stand firm in my faith in a world that openly rejects God's truth?



What Now?

Find strong Christian friends who will encourage you and with whom you can stand together.

FRI

READ JEREMIAH 6:19-20

Sometimes flattery is helpful in a situation where you are trying to right a wrong. Oftentimes, however, the other person is skeptical. They see right through the flattery and question your intentions.

In the verses you read today, God knew the people's sacrifices were not coming from sincere hearts. They had rejected God's laws and disregarded God's words. Their offerings were given for selfish reasons; the people were merely going through the motions, and God saw through it. Let us learn from the Israelites. When we serve and give to the Lord, may our hearts and intentions be sincere.



Food For Thought:

How am I serving the Lord and being generous? Is my attitude toward serving and generosity sincere?



What Now?

Check out the devotion of the early Christians in Acts 2:46-47. Strive to live with praise, joy, sincerity, fellowship, and commitment to seeing others accept Christ.

SUN

READ JEREMIAH 7:1-34

Jeremiah was called by the Lord to be God’s prophet, to declare His truth to the people. How disheartening and disappointing for Jeremiah to learn from God that the people would not listen (verse 27)! Still, Jeremiah was faithful to fulfill God’s purpose.

Do you ever feel as though your stories about Christ and all God has done for you fall on deaf ears? We are called to spread the gospel, whether people listen or not. Look to Jeremiah’s example and remain faithful. God’s message is being planted; God will work everything out in His timing.



Food For Thought:

Why does God choose to use us to spread His message? How am I sharing God’s love and truth with those around me?



What Now?

Be intentional to share the gospel this week. Plan questions or conversation starters to open doors for you to tell about all God has done for you and God’s desire to see all people come to Him.

MON

READ JEREMIAH 8:19-22

Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet,” showed the reason for his title in these verses. He mourned over the people’s rejection of God. He declared his heart sick and wounded in his grief. The eternal lives of the people were his concern.

When was the last time you truly grieved over people who do not know Jesus? To be honest, it is easy to get caught up in our own lives and not think about others and their spiritual needs. With an eternal perspective, we will be concerned to the point of grieving over people’s eternity.



Food For Thought:

How does my mindset affect how I see people’s needs?



What Now?

Make a list of at least five people you know who have not accepted Christ. Each day this week, pray intensely for their hearts to be open to God’s good news and for them to make the decision to follow Christ.

TUE

READ JEREMIAH 9:13-16

Stubbornness, tuning out God’s voice to follow my own desires, placing other things ahead of the Lord—these words and statements hit close to home for me.

Like the people of Jeremiah’s time, we deserve God’s judgment. We do not live up to God’s standard, falling short time and time again. Thankfully, our gracious and merciful Lord forgives whenever we come to Him.



Food For Thought:

How often do I recognize God’s grace and mercy? Do I show grace and mercy to others?



What Now?

Encourage a friend who is struggling with guilt or shame. Point them to examples in the Bible where God forgave many times over and promised to remove our sins as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

WED

READ JEREMIAH 10:6-7

Studying other religions in social studies was always interesting to me. However, it was heartbreaking to learn how devoted people were and are to worshipping false gods. Those who have heard about the true and living God are blessed.

Through the teaching of the Bible, through our own experiences, and by observing our created world, we can understand that no one is like our God. God is great and mighty and to be feared. The one, true God deserves all our praise and devotion.

Food For Thought:

When do I find it easiest to worship the Lord? When is praising the Lord more challenging?

What Now?

Each day this week, spend a few minutes praising God by writing down or sharing aloud different aspects of God or blessings from Christ.

THU

READ JEREMIAH 10:12-16

Breathe in. Now, breathe out. Make a fist. Release your fingers. Run in place for one minute. Then, feel your heart beating faster. Our Creator God designed every amazing aspect of the human body.

God also created all the wonders in the natural world. God made the earth by His power and stretched out the heavens (verse 12). The Lord controls the weather: waters, wind, storms, and calm. Nothing can compare with the greatness of our God!

Food For Thought:

How often do I think about God creating the world with His power? Do I fully appreciate all the amazing aspects of nature and of myself?

What Now?

Sing or read the lyrics to the children's song "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." Let the simple truths remind you of God's authority and might as Creator.

FRI

READ JEREMIAH 11:6-8

In my elementary school cafeteria, we had a traffic light to monitor our volume. Green meant an appropriate level, of course. If it got to red, we had to be silent until lunchtime was over. The yellow light was to warn us. Yet, even when we were given a clear warning, we often got too loud.

The Israelites seemed to ignore all the warnings as well. God had told them through Moses, Joshua, and a multitude of leaders to follow God's ways. Yet, they rebelled and went beyond the limitations they were given. May we heed the warnings we are given and turn back to the right way.

Food For Thought:

When have I ignored warnings from God or people I trust? How has that worked out for me?

What Now?

Ask your parents, a youth leader, or another adult believer whom you trust to help keep you accountable. Keep open lines of communication for you to share and for them to be honest with you.

SUN

READ JEREMIAH 12:1-17

Our world is full of evil. We hear about it in the news. We might even experience it. Often, our questions are the same as Jeremiah's: Why does it seem God allows the wicked to have success? When will judgment come?

God's response is reassuring. First, God knows all that is going on and will judge in His timing. Second, we can take comfort in God's undeserved, yet, unending forgiveness, just like all who turn to God.

 **Food For Thought:**

How can I see people through God's eyes: broken and in need of a Savior? How will this change my outlook on judgment and forgiveness?

 **What Now?**

To understand God's desire for our evil world, check out 2 Peter 3:9. God wants all to come to Him.

MON

READ JEREMIAH 14:7-9

The Lord sees us, hears us, protects us, and gives us hope. God is willing to do whatever it takes to rescue us.

Jeremiah declared these truths as he cried out to God. God is our hope. In times of trouble, God is our Savior. The Lord calls us His own and is always with us.

 **Food For Thought:**

How has God rescued me in my past? Why is God worthy of my complete trust?

 **What Now?**

Trust the Lord to always be with you. When life is going well, praise God for being there. When you are struggling, rely on God's promise that Jesus will never abandon you.

TUE

READ JEREMIAH 14:20-22

Honesty can be so refreshing, can't it? Frequently, people only post what makes their lives seem picture perfect. Filters and Photoshop can make anyone look blemish-free. Even conversations can be shallow, never diving into our true thoughts.

Our God desires a real, honest, and authentic relationship with us. Our Father wants us to come to Him with our doubts, fears, failures, and pleas. Just as Jeremiah did, we can pour out our hearts to God, knowing Jesus hears us.

 **Food For Thought:**

Why should I be honest with God? Why does God desire me to have open dialogue with Him?

 **What Now?**

When you pray, share everything with the Lord. Pour out your struggles, desires, and praises. God sees into your heart and mind and wants a close relationship with you, His child.

WED

READ JEREMIAH 15:19-20

Have you ever said something you immediately regretted? The words slipped out of your mouth before you could stop them, and you instantly wished you could take them back? Our words matter. They affect the receiver as well as us.

In these verses, God called His people to be His mouth. As followers of Christ, what we say reflects on God. The Lord wants us to utter what is precious, not what is worthless (verse 19).

Food For Thought:

How does my speech directly affect those around me? How am I affected by what I say?

What Now?

Make a habit to speak kind words. Each day this week, give sincere compliments to someone in your family, a teacher, a classmate, and another person with whom you come in contact.

THU

READ JEREMIAH 18:5-11

Cranium, one of my favorite board games, combines trivia, word knowledge, creativity, music, and acting ability. I always try to avoid the clay-molding turn and leave the artistry to another teammate. Instead of the object I imagine in my head, each of my clay molds ends up looking like a blob.

As our Creator, God compares Himself to the potter. We are the clay in God's powerful control. The Lord is constantly molding us to fulfill His purpose. God knows if we need to be broken and restored or simply reshaped to become like Christ.

Food For Thought:

When has weakness or brokenness made me stronger in my relationship with Christ?

What Now?

Ask the Lord to break down any barriers in your life and shape you into the person God created you to be.

FRI

READ JEREMIAH 23:5-6

Have you ever read the *Amelia Bedelia* books? The poor character did not understand figures of speech or any type of figurative language. Since she took everything literally, she was frequently confused and completed tasks incorrectly all the time.

The Israelites had heard prophecies of the Messiah throughout the generations, yet many misunderstood. These verses talk about a King reigning and bringing salvation and security to His people. While the Jews were looking for Christ to bring physical protection and authority, the promise was for our spiritual lives and for eternity.

Food For Thought:

How does my view of Christ impact my spiritual life and my testimony?

What Now?

Make a list of character traits Jesus displayed during His time on earth. Thank the Lord for all God is and the example Jesus modeled for us to follow.

SUN

READ JEREMIAH 31:1-40

I have trouble remembering what I wore yesterday. Yet, I remember something hurtful a friend said to me over ten years ago. I can't remember anything about the show I watched last week, but I can clearly describe my own rude actions toward someone I disliked in junior high.

I am so thankful our merciful God promises to forgive our sins and remember them no more (verse 34). When we repent and turn to God, the Lord renews our relationship through Christ's sacrifice. The Bible provides truth for us to follow, and the Holy Spirit guides our hearts and lives.



Food For Thought:

How does God's forgiveness change my outlook about my past sins?



What Now?

Whenever you feel shame or guilt about failing in the past, put away those thoughts and find comfort and peace in God's unending forgiveness. His mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23).

MON

READ JEREMIAH 30:10-11

Fear is a trait we all have in common, though it looks different for each of us. Arachnophobia is the fear of spiders. You have acrophobia if you fear heights or claustrophobia if you fear confined spaces. A fairly new fear is nomophobia, the extreme fear of being without a phone or device. There is even a name for the fear of fears: phobophobia.

Over and over the Bible tells us to fear not. In today's passage, the Lord promised to save His people. God will be with us and provide comfort and peace. When it comes to following Christ, we can trust in God's promises and live fearlessly.



Food For Thought:

Why do I sometimes allow fear to overwhelm me? How can I be bold and live without fear?



What Now?

Check out the encouraging truth in 1 John 4:18. God's love casts out fear!

TUE

READ JEREMIAH 32:26-27

An optimistic outlook says, "Of course I can do it!" Pessimism states with a defeated attitude, "I definitely cannot do that!" The realistic perspective says, "Maybe I can do it. Let's find out."

God's question in verse 27 would sound overly optimistic and ridiculous for us to say. From Him, however, it is entirely realistic. Christ is Almighty God, maker of Heaven and earth. Nothing is beyond God's ability. The Lord deserves our sincere praise and devotion.



Food For Thought:

How has God's almighty power changed my life? Right now, why do I need God's strength?



What Now?

Ask God to strengthen you in order to make an impact. During difficulty, rely on the Lord and point to God when others ask about the strength you have.

WED

READ JEREMIAH 32:38-41

Tragedies are devastating. Nevertheless, the way people come together to help is encouraging. People donate supplies and provide physical labor after a destructive storm. After a senseless crime with fatalities, communities unite for support, comfort, and prayer.

God created us to be social beings. God's people are to live in community, being there for each other. In verse 39, the Lord promised to unify His children with one heart and one purpose. May we live out this promise with other believers and members of God's family.

Food For Thought:

Do I feel a part of my church family? How can I be connected and involved in my church?

What Now?

Do not just attend worship services. Be in community with fellow believers by playing an active part in your youth group, a small group, or a ministry team.

THU

READ JEREMIAH 33:6-9

In our world, it is easy to become skeptical. We hear politicians make empty promises to change our government for the better. We see advertisements that claim their products will make all our dreams come true (unless you read the fine print). Thankfully, we can place our faith in God.

Our Heavenly Father always fulfills His promises. God provides us with restoration and cleansing. Christ forgives our sin when we come to Him. Jesus provides joy, peace, and unending reasons to praise God's name.

Food For Thought:

How has God fulfilled His promises in my life?

What Now?

Create or continue a prayer journal. Along with writing out prayers to God, record when God answers a prayer or fulfills a promise. From time to time, look back at all God has done.

FRI

READ JEREMIAH 33:14-18

Our God declared many promises through His prophets. Today's passage is full of phrases about when vows will be fulfilled: "the days are coming," "in those days," "at that time" (verse 15). God's commitment to His people has and will come to pass through Jesus Christ.

Even though we have seen God answer prayers time and again, we are still impatient people. We do not want to wait on God's timing. We want to know when everything will be better, when God will take away our pain, and when God will rescue us from the evil in our world. Let us trust in God's perfect timing and have faith God will fulfill His promise.

Food For Thought:

How can I know God's timing is perfect?

What Now?

Ask older Christians about their experiences with waiting on God's timing. Trust God knows what and when is best.

Week 13
September 23-29, 2023

FAMILY THEME:
JOYFULLY HOPE IN GOD'S PROMISE

SUN

READ JEREMIAH 36:1-32

Rejection is a feeling we all dread. Whether it is getting picked last, getting stood up by a date, or not getting permission from our parents to do something we want to do. We all have experienced rejection in one form or another. According to today's Scripture, we should probably get used to it.

Followers of Christ should anticipate some rejection when we share about Christ. The king not only rejected God's Word sent by Jeremiah; he burned it. Whether people ignore or even attempt to destroy the Bible, God's promises will be fulfilled. The Word of the Lord stands firm against any obstacle.



Food For Thought:

How can I find the boldness to share my faith even if people might reject the truth?



What Now?

Be open about what God has done in your life. Admit we are all in need of a forgiving God who loves us unconditionally.

MON

READ JEREMIAH 42:5-6

I always dreaded pre-season conditioning in volleyball. Our coach did not allow us to touch a ball until we completed two weeks of strength training and intense cardio workouts. To us, it seemed too much for a sport without running. In the end, though, we appreciated the endurance we gained, especially as the season continued.

The people in today's passage seemed to understand. Obey God's voice no matter the circumstances. Life, though not perfect, will go more smoothly. May our hearts echo their commitment.



Food For Thought:

If I trust that God knows and wants what is best for me, how will that affect my obedience?



What Now?

Read Jeremiah 29:11, which states that God wants His people to prosper. Make sure to read verses 12-13 to see our involvement in the fulfillment of God's plan.

TUE

READ JEREMIAH 50:17-20

Criminal procedural shows have some of the most consistent audience ratings. People are intrigued by the twisted minds of criminals, and they want to root for the officers of law who bring the offenders to justice and provide closure for the victims and families. Our hope lies in good conquering evil.

The Israelites had been hunted and destroyed by kings who opposed the Lord. Our powerful God defeated these enemies and brought punishment upon them (verse 18). Christ also redeemed and restored His people. The Almighty will send His Son again to complete victory over evil.



Food For Thought:

How does thinking about eternity affect my thoughts about this world and my purpose?



What Now?

Recognize that God could send Jesus back at any moment. First, make the decision to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. Next, make the most of every opportunity to share God's love and truth with those around you.

WED

READ JEREMIAH 50:34

How often do you take one last look in a mirror before heading out? We want people to see our best. When we are struggling, we try to seem like all is okay. Deep down we know we are all broken. But there is hope!

We can trust in the strength of our Lord! God will stand up for those who have accepted His redemption. Comfort, peace, and rest will be provided for God's children.

Food For Thought:

Why does God promise to give us strength as well as rest? How does God's comfort impact my perspective?

What Now?

In the busyness of life, set aside time to rest. Physically catch up on sleep. Spiritually find refreshment through a worship service or by personally reflecting on all God has done.

THU

READ LAMENTATIONS 1:14

Whether you are strength training or simply carrying a full backpack, lifting something heavy is challenging. The struggles become more and more difficult the longer we have to carry the load. Our arms and legs get tired, our muscles ache, and we feel like we cannot continue.

Our sins can feel like heavy weights we carry with us. We can let the guilt and shame bring us down and cause us to feel defeated. Instead of wallowing in our sin, let us repent and ask for the forgiveness that God so freely gives. God will take away our burden and restore us to a right relationship with Christ.

Food For Thought:

When has my sin seemed overwhelming? How do I feel when I have confessed my sin to God and received Christ's forgiveness?

What Now?

Find comfort in 1 Peter 5:7. We can give all our cares and worries to the Lord. God loves and forgives us unconditionally.

FRI

READ LAMENTATIONS 3:58-60

Kindness is power. I know, I know; knowledge is power, too. But everyone has the opportunity to be kind and empower others. When we stand up for someone who is being harassed, we show compassion as well as strength.

The greatest example of compassion is the Lord. God knows every wrong that has ever been done to us. With God's almighty power and unending compassion, God is in our corner fighting our battles. Since we know Christ has already defeated the ultimate enemy, we can trust God to overcome our struggles.

Food For Thought:

How can I show compassion to those around me? How does helping others reveal God's strength in me?

What Now?

Use kindness this week to help someone who is struggling. Encourage them with God's promise to always be with us.



With a
GOOD
ALL
THINGS
ARE
POSSIBLE

Matthew 19:26