

# KNOW D

30 DAY BIBLE CHALLENGE

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Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church + Weddington, North Carolina

# INTRO

It was 10:30 at night and the kids were crying when we finally pulled off the interstate and into the hotel.

My wife did all the feeding and bathing as I carted every suitcase, diaper bag, baby toy, food bag, pack 'n play, pillow, blanket, and teddy bear up three flights of stairs.

It had to be at least 11:30 by the time we laid the last one down and turned out the lights.

You'd think I would have fallen fast asleep because I was exhausted. But what I was really doing was listening for the sounds of sleep.

As my family slept, I crept into the bathroom to feed a growing addiction.

I sat on the cold bathroom floor as I pulled out all the necessary paraphernalia.

I rolled up my sleeves, and started to ... read the scriptures.

The Bible-in-a-Year!

Four-chapters-a-day.

I was addicted.

Never had life made so much sense as when I was in the Word every day. Seemingly “random passages” seemed to speak to every situation.

That's my goal for you.

Maybe not addiction, but certainly life making more and more sense.

The Bible is a guide book. But it is so much more. As Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, where else would we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

God yearns to speak to us. Indeed, he yearns to pour life into us — eternal and abundant. Therefore, in these next thirty days, we're going to listen for God's voice. We're going to survey the entire Old Testament (and on day thirty-one tell you how to get even more from the New Testament when you're ready to make that part of your plan)!

But all this begs an important question: *How will*

*we know when it's God's voice* and not just our own opinions?

In putting together this study guide, I followed a specific method: *I looked throughout the Old Testament for wherever it tells us that “God says ...”* That's what we'll study for the next 30 days! God spoke directly to Abraham, Moses, Elijah (and even to Balaam's ass)! And if he spoke to a donkey, don't you know he yearns to speak to you too? As we begin to listen to what God said to them, we will begin to hear what God is saying to us too!

The method of this study is simple: Read three chapters a day (and trust me, these are some of the very best chapters in the entire Bible). Then read a page of the *Know God* commentary — to help it make sense. That adds up to about twenty short minutes a day. Actually, it adds up to a whole lot more than that! Hearing God more clearly in your life is one of the best gifts you can ever give yourself.

Let's listen in?!

## DAY 1

### READ GENESIS 1 - 3

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

I don't know about you, but I like to do things my way.

I like to be in charge.

The three musketeers used to cheer, “All for one and one for all.” Me, myself, and I were once the three musketeers, and “All for me and all for me” used to be the cheer.

Pondering creation, though, was the first step in silencing a little bit of self. When I finally contemplated the complexity and enormity of creation ... when I finally realized my tiny, temporary, fragile stature ... when I finally said “wow” to God and “whoa” to my pride ... I finally began to hear the magical sounds of God's cre-

ation. I finally began to KNOW GOD.

In Genesis 1 -- over and over -- what two things does God say?

1. To create, God simply says,  
“Let there \_ \_ . . . .”
2. And when God surveys his creation, God says,  
“And it was \_ \_ .”

Did God need to rub two sticks together to create? No. He simply needed to speak a word, “and it was so” ... *and* “it was good!”

Then after making humans the crown and culmination of his creation, what does God say? “<sup>31</sup>It was \_\_\_\_\_ good.”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

If God calls humans “very good,” then you are “very good.”

Wait ... write that in big, BIG letters:

V G

God’s view of me is:

Some people suffer from low self-esteem. What keeps you from seeing yourself as *very* good?

On the other hand, others of us suffer from the opposite problem -- too much pride. How might the enormity of creation help keep your pride in check?

Why do we often believe in our assessment of ourselves rather than God’s assessment of us?

The invitation is to not believe in ourselves but to believe in God!

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In Genesis 2, God mentions the first thing that is *not good*, “<sup>18</sup>it is not good for the man to be alone.”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

If it is not good for people to be alone, who do you know who is lonely and in need of your friendship? (List them ... then befriend them!)

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In Genesis 3, we have a picture of “the way it’s supposed to be.”

God wanders through the beauty of his garden and expects to encounter friendship and intimacy with Adam and Eve. He obviously doesn’t. They have broken a rule. And what happens when they break a rule? They break something even more valuable. They shatter their relationship with God.

That’s what sin does. It puts a wall between us and God. That’s what that fig leaf was -- a literal barrier, a shame-filled divide.

Therefore, when God cries, “<sup>9</sup>Where are you?,” do you hear his heart? He longs for intimacy, but with that relationship shattered, his heart is broken.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

“Where are you?” That’s been God’s cry to you for years and years! He loves you. He wants nothing more than deep friendship with you and with me.

As you begin this 60-day journey, begin by answering two questions:

1. “Where have you been?” ... lately? ... in your relationship with God?
2. “Where would you like to be?” ... at the end of these 60 days?

## DAY 2

### READ GENESIS 6, 8, 9

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Yesterday we ended with a picture of God's desire for fellowship, relationship, and intimacy with us. Adam and Eve broke that relationship and by doing so, broke God's heart.

Genesis 6 begins with God's heart again. What breaks it this time?

Sin ... again: "The Lord saw that the \_\_\_\_\_ of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their \_\_\_\_\_ was only evil continually." God's Word goes on to say that "the Lord was \_\_\_\_\_ that he had made humankind on the earth, and it \_\_\_\_\_ him to his heart."

What does God say about sin?

God reveals his hurt and his heart when he says, "I will blot out ... human beings."

That's a word of judgment, isn't it?

I don't know about you, but I'd often like to pretend that God doesn't judge. Therefore, you and I have two choices for how we can respond to passages like this: 1) we can ignore it, saying, "I can't believe in a God like that," or 2) we can embrace it.

Embrace it? Are you serious?!

Yes, we can choose to say, "God wants a relationship with me so passionately that he hates anything that puts a divide between us."

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Scripture notes that "every inclination of [those olden] hearts was only evil continually."

Now, I sincerely doubt that *every* inclination of *your* heart is evil. Nevertheless, if we're honest, we may need to admit that our hearts struggle more than occasionally with sin. And we would certainly do well to remember that every sin hurts the heart of the Lord who simply wants a close relationship with us.

Therefore, *now* might be a good time to spend a few moments confessing your sins ...

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Often one of the most hopeful words in all scripture is "but." In this case, we hear that all of humankind was wicked, "but Noah found favor with God."

Over the next few chapters, God will ask the improbable (perhaps impossible) of Noah. For example, God says, "Make for yourself a three hundred cubit long ark [and] bring two of every kind [of animal] into the ark."

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Occasionally throughout our life, it may sound like God is asking us some strange, improbable, hard, and unsavory things.

The question is: Will you respond like Noah? Scripture doesn't waste words on Noah's obedience: "Noah did this."

What big and improbable thing do you *know* that God is calling you to do, and how are you responding?

What's keeping you from just "d[oin]g this"?

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

"I will establish a \_\_\_\_\_ with you."

We are back to God's desire for a relationship with us again. A covenant is a promise, a contract, an oath, that seeks to formalize a relationship or bond. God promises to protect Noah through the midst of the biggest gullywasher of a trial that humanity has ever known.

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

God wants to forge a bond and relationship with you!

What is the greatest trial you are currently facing in your life right now?

How might trusting in the God of the covenant who is with you through the storm, give you more confidence to face this trial?

Let's end today by giving thanks to the God of covenants and relationships for providing us with everything we truly need in the midst of the storm. (Note: That, in fact, is a powerful way to pray. Praying "God be with me" is good, but an even better prayer may be: "Thank you that you are *already* with me ... already building a life raft ... already fashioning an escape route ... already setting my feet back on dry ground.")

### P.S.

Did you notice how the story of Noah ended? The most faithful man in all the world planted a vineyard, got drunk, and shamed his sons.

No matter how perfect you try to be, you will fail. Let me say that again ... You will fail ... You will fail ... You will fail.

So where's the good news? It's in confession. Confession removes the divide between you and the God of relationship who stands ready to throw the life line!

## DAY 3

### READ THE FIRST VERSES OF SEVERAL CHAPTERS

**GENESIS 12 : 1 - 4**

**GENESIS 15 : 1 - 6**

**GENESIS 16 : 1 - 4**

**GENESIS 17 : 1 - 8**

**GENESIS 19 : 1 - 5 (15 - 26)**

**GENESIS 21 : 1 - 4**

**GENESIS 22 : 1 - 18**

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

The story of Abraham and his family is long and important. We like to think of our Bible heroes as heroic. But several great characters in a row have let us (and God) down -- Adam ate the apple, Noah got humiliatingly drunk, and Abraham had a child with the maid.

What does God have to say about that?

"<sup>17:16</sup>I will bless [you]."

What a strange and wonderful God we have! He blesses broken people! (And I don't know about you, but that's definitely a blessing for me!)

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Many of us live paralyzed lives. We've done something shameful in our past. We can't forgive ourselves for that transgression; therefore, deep down, we fail to believe that God can forgive us for it.

But do you know what God said to Abraham and Sarah? It's the same thing he says to you: "<sup>18:14</sup>Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?"

Spend a moment or two confessing the big sins you cannot seem to forgive yourself for ...

Now spend more time thanking God for the power of his forgiveness!

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

"<sup>19:17</sup>Flee for your life [and] do not look back."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

"When you flee from your sins, do not look back."

Wait ... God didn't actually say that! Is using this verse in this way stretching it's original intent? Probably! And yet, when we flee our past -- as Lot and his wife fled the depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah -- I don't think it's stretching the truth to say that God wants us to leave it behind ... to not look back ... and to finally be set free.

What do you need to be set free from and leave completely behind?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

“17:12 I will make you ... 14[the father of many nations]\*.”

\*“*Abraham*” means “*Father of many nations.*”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

In spite of your past, God wants to *make something* of you!

After having put your past behind you, start asking God what he desires to make of you!

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

“22:2 Take your son, your only son Isaac, ... and offer him ... as a burnt offering.”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

For most of my life, I tried to ignore this story.

It sounded absolutely barbaric.

Therefore, this story quickly became one of those passages I wrote off as silly, old, out-dated literature that had nothing to do with the soft and squishy God of Niceness. (If you're like me, as soon as you start labeling your non-favorite stories as silly and old, you soon have few hundred passages in that file. In fact, if you're like me, as soon as you start taming God, your soft and squishy God of Niceness seems more like a marshmallow than the “consuming fire” that it talks about in Hebrews 12:29. Wait ... a consuming God of fire seems scary, let me put that in the old and irrelevant file too ... or should we not?!)

As barbaric as this story sounds, what is it really all about? Is God really asking Abraham to sacrifice his son?

No!

By the end of the story we see that God has been planning to provide a substitute all along.

So why bother asking such a terrible thing?

First, it's a test. God wants to know if Abraham will really obey him or not.

Second, God wanted to show that he is different than all the other “gods.” In Abraham's day, the other gods frequently required child sacrifice. Thus, Abraham was saddened by God's call, but he was not surprised. Fortunately, God had a magnificent surprise in store! He is wonderfully different than all the other gods we can turn to (or create in our own imagination). Not only does God NOT ask us to give our sons, but God, instead, gives *his* only begotten Son!

That's a long introduction to finally ask, “Therefore, what does God say to us?”

Well, I hear God saying, “All of life is a test and a trust.” Indeed, God says, “Like Abraham, I will ask you to do many things in this life. Some will make sense. Some may not. The question is, will you follow my calls and commands -- and my Word -- even when it doesn't make sense *to you?*”

What hard thing is God asking you to do?

And do you trust him -- if you truly step out in faith -- to provide a ram, a solution, a hope, and a way?”

### P.S.

At the beginning of today's lesson, we talked about Bible “heroes” who let us (and God) down. In spite of all the failures along the way, our story today ends with Abraham's faith and trust.

Has your life known failure? How can you begin writing a new ending today?

# DAY 4

## READ

**GENESIS 33 : 1 - 12**

**THEN BACK TO 28 : 10 - 19**

**32 : 22 - 30**

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Yesterday, we heard that Abraham had a son named Isaac. A generation later, Isaac too had a son named Jacob. Actually, Isaac had twins -- Esau the elder, and Jacob who came out clinging to his heel. In fact, Jacob would spend the rest of his formative years trying to grab hold of all the blessings intended for his older brother.

Our story picks up today after Jacob had stolen his brother's birthrite (Gen 27).

Now, based on today's readings, I've obviously told this story with the end first -- reconciliation between two brothers. The question is why did I tell it backwards?

Why? Because as powerful and instructive as any glimpse of reconciliation can be, we're not looking (in this Bible study) to discover what humans do. We're seeking to discover what God himself teaches and says.

Therefore, I wanted you to see the end of the story (reconciliation) and then go back and consider what might have moved the conniving Jacob to get to that point!

What moved Jacob?

A vision and a wrestling match.

God spoke to Jacob first through a vision. We call what he saw "Jacob's Ladder." What it really depicted was God's greatest desire. God desires to create a bridge between heaven and earth!

*Some commentators go on to say that this ladder was really a prefiguring of the cross of Christ. The cross, after all, is the great connector between heaven and earth. God's prophetic hands must not*

*be ignored! Nevertheless, let's stick with what Jacob knew for the moment: God desires there to be a living connection between heaven and earth.*

Jacob's second glimpse was a wrestling match with God himself!

*Again, is this a prefiguring of Christ -- God in human form? But again, let's stick to what Jacob knew ...*

On the morning side of this wrestling match, what was God's message? <sup>32:28</sup>You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, [which means] you have striven with God ... and prevailed."

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

God's message to us is, "strive and struggle *with* me."

Wrestle *with* God!

Too often when we face trials, we seem to struggle either:

1. *with* ourselves and *within* our own mind, or
2. *against* God and heaven.

Many of us lack sufficient boldness to struggle *with* God ... to lay at his feet our anger ... to refuse to release him without an answer to our doubts.

Why do we hesitate?! Piety ... and pride. We're either afraid to admit our vulnerability or unable to accept God's love. But trust me -- a guy named after Doubting Thomas -- God is big enough to handle our questions and frustrations. All he wants is for you to wrestle with him until you <sup>32:30</sup>see[] God face to face."

Right now in your life, do you feel like you're seeing God face to face?

What do you need to wrestle with God about? Ask him about? Cry to him about? Shout at him about?

## P.S.

If you have difficulty being brutally honest with God, remember Jacob's ladder.

In the midst of Jacob's self-induced exile, God set up a symbol (a ladder, a cross) as a bridge. Through it, our Lord was saying, "Friend, you are broken and on the run, but I still desire to forge a living connection between heaven and *you*."

Wrestle some more ... and when it's time, thank God through Jesus Christ for the living connection that he has forged between heaven and you!

## DAY 5

### READ GENESIS 37, 41, 50

<sup>37:5</sup>Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more."

<sup>50:20</sup>Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today."

Those two verses are a perfect introduction to the story of Joseph. It tells us two important things today:

1. How does God speak? Sometimes God speaks through dreams.
2. How does God act? Sometimes God redeems human actions.

You probably know the story of Joseph. His jealous brothers wanted to kill him, he was sold into Egyptian slavery, and he was thrown into prison.

God redeemed, however, what others intended for harm: By speaking to Joseph through dreams, God enabled Joseph to rise to power in Egypt. Joseph's position as governor allowed Joseph to save his brothers -- and indeed, the fledgling nation of Israel!

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Sometimes God speaks through dreams.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

First and foremost, I am not about to suggest that every dream is from God!!!

Generally my dreams are too weird and selfish and generally irrelevant to be godly! Nevertheless, my dreams often draw up what's pressing on my heart -- anxiety, insecurity, anger, greed, lust, or guilt.

One of the most helpful devotional practices I ever tried was to write down my dreams in the morning. Then I would write a prayer that addressed the concern that was subconsciously weighing on me.

I offer this as an idea that you might wish to try ... or you might not.

Two tips if you do:

1. Don't pretend you're Joseph! If I thought most of my dreams were instructions from God, I'd probably be in jail before the end of the month! Use the dreams simply to spark your morning prayer.
2. Write them down before your feet ever hit the floor! If you do *anything else* first, the dream (and the emotions) are gone.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In Genesis 37, when Joseph dreamed of eleven sheaves of wheat bowing down to the one, God gave Joseph and his brothers a glimpse of their future.

In order to eat in the midst of a famine, the eleven would need to do the unthinkable -- bow down humbly to the one.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

For the people of Israel, salvation came by bowing down. In what ways do you need to humble yourself and bow down?

(Hint: If you didn't say, "Bow to God," now would be a very good time to say, "Oh, yeah, and humble myself before my Lord most of all!!!")

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In Genesis 41, Joseph correctly interpreted the dream of Pharaoh. Seven fat cows meant seven years of plenty, and seven slender cows meant seven years of famine.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

God says there will be times of plenty in your life and there will be times that are lean. Using the wisdom from above, what should we do in times of plenty? What should we do in seasons of lean?

Please note that the principles from this dream are not just about rich seasons, lean seasons, and economic wisdom.

God tells us through his Word that there is "a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace" (Ecclesiastes 3:2-7).

Which of these principles do you need in your life most today? Why?

### P.S.

<sup>50:20</sup>Even though you intended to harm me, God intended it for good." God didn't say that. Joseph did. That's why I put this as a "P.S." instead of a "What does God say?" Nevertheless, this is one of the most impor-

tant principles in life, spurring an important question ...

What harmful, painful, tragic, sinful thing has the world tried to work in your life that God has nevertheless redeemed and enriched you through?!

Thank God for his goodness!

## DAY 6

### READ EXODUS 1, 2, 3

Normally our starting point in this study is on God's voice. Today, however, we'll start by focusing on the voice of the people.

We hear in chapter 2 that <sup>23</sup>"After a long time ... the Israelites \_\_\_\_\_ under their slavery... Out of the slavery their \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ rose up to God."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Technically, God hasn't spoken in this passage, and yet as the next verses unfold, we can hear his heart clearly.

For decades the people of Israel have suffered. God surely wanted to relieve the suffering of his people, but like a good father of adult children, he waited for them to ask for help before he butted in!

Finally ... finally ... finally ... God's people cried out to the Lord for help, and *immediately*, we are told -- next verse, in fact -- that <sup>2:24</sup>"God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant ..." Immediately -- indeed, just three verses later -- our Lord is speaking from a bush and his rescue plan for the Israelites is underway.

What, therefore, is God saying to us?!

The point of this part of the story is: Children, when you finally, truly, desperately cry out to God, God's help, hope, and deliverance immediately begin.

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

What do you finally, truly, desperately need to talk to God about?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Now God finally speaks. His voice actually pours from a fiery bush. What does he say first? He calls out a name: “<sup>3:4</sup>Moses, Moses.”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I always find it more personal when people know my name. It's like they want to care. What difference does it make that God knows and calls you by name?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

“<sup>3:5</sup>You are standing [on] holy ground.”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

At moments of frustration, I've often wondered if I'm just an insignificant person with an insignificant job in an insignificant town. But at the beginning of this story, Moses was even less significant than me! He didn't even live in the suburbs of the wilderness. He lived “<sup>3:1</sup>beyond the wilderness.” It makes me feel better that Moses was more insignificant than me.

But there's a deeper point here: Nothing -- and no one -- is beyond God's concern. And when God shows up, the ordinary becomes extraordinary, and the insignificant becomes holy.

Wherever you are, God desires to turn it into holy ground. Therefore, if you haven't seen it lately, ask God to show you the plans -- and significance -- he has for you ...

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

“<sup>3:8</sup>I have come to deliver ...”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I don't know about you, but I'm always hooked on and in bondage to something. What's the most pressing thing that you need to be delivered from?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

“<sup>3:10</sup>I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people ... out of [bondage].”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

God created everyone of us with passions. Besides my passion for cookies and sports, I -- like you -- am supposed to be passionate about at least one or two of the injustices in our world.

For some of us, our passion is for poverty.

For others it's kids -- abused, handicapped, or sick.

For me, I want people to be free from Satan's lies - - and teaching the Word is the best way I know to do that.

The question is: How is God calling you to bring even one person out of bondage?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

“<sup>3:14</sup>I AM WHO I AM.”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

“Life is busy.”

“I want to do it myself.”

Those are the false priorities that keep *me* from making God my all-in-all. What are the false priorities that keep *you* from making the “I am” your all?

## P.S.

My favorite line in today's reading is: "1:17 the midwives feared God; [therefore] they did not do as the king ... commanded."

Pray that you might have the courage to stand up against the pressures in your corner of the world ...

## DAY 7

### READ

**EXODUS 12**

**EXODUS 13 : 17 - 22**

**EXODUS 14**

**EXODUS 15 : 20 - 27**

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

"12:1 The Lord said to Moses ... 12 I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land ... on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. 13 [But] the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I don't know about you, but I don't like judgment. Therefore, for many years I've struggled for years with the plague of death.

Actually, if I'm truly honest, I only agree with certain forms of judgment -- like calling down a plague of frogs on my worst enemies. But not death!

How could God do this?!

The more I've thought and read and prayed about this topic, I've come to four conclusions:

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US? - PART ONE

My first conclusion is that the plagues were really judgments on "all the gods of Egypt." In fact, each plague pierced the perceived power of different spirits:

- + *Locusts and hail*: an insult to the gods of fields and fertility.
- + *Boils and diseases*: an insult to the gods of healing.
- + *Darkness*: an insult to the sun god.
- + *Fleas and lice*: an insult to the priests who prided themselves on cleanliness.
- + *Frogs*: an insult to Mrs.-Creator-of-the-Universe, the goddess Hekt, whose symbol was the frog.
- + *Bloody water*: an insult to Osiris himself whose bloodstream was the Nile
- + *Death*: a final insult to all the gods who were ultimately and totally useless in protecting their people.

What does God say to us based on this? I'm always relying on something for help and protection. What are you relying on besides God-with-a-capital-G?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US? - PART TWO

My second conclusion is that the people of Egypt were as dense as me. Sign after sign was given — most notably Pharaoh -- and they completely missed God!

The question this inspires is: When have you and I missed God's obvious presence?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US? - PART THREE

My third conclusion is that the only sign that would finally and fully register with Pharaoh was *a taste of his own medicine*.

Remember what the Pharaohs did? They killed Israel's boy babies — and not just the first-born.

Sometimes the harshest judgment that you and I might ever receive is to have done unto us what we've done to others.

Have you ever received a taste of your own medicine? My tastes of my own medicine tasted like bitter medicine. How about yours?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US? - PART FOUR

My fourth conclusion when I read about the passover is that God is not tame!

Now, it's always human to want to tame God. I'm always tempted to bring God down to my own size. Others do too. I've frequently heard people say, "Well, I can't believe in a God who ...," and then, like the Egyptians, we fill in our own priorities and our own version of God (whose first initial suddenly begins to start with a lower case "g.")

One of the wonderfully uncomfortable blessings of the Passover is that it reminds me that God is not tame.

It also tells me that God is good.

Now, if you're a fan of literature, you might have noticed that this is C. S. Lewis' conclusion about Aslan (the Christ figure) in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. Speaking about Aslan, the mighty lion, Mr. Tumnus says something like, "He is not tame." To which young Lucy responds, "Yes ... but he is good."

We make a terrible mistake whenever we try to domesticate God — turning the mighty lion into a tame tabby. God is holy, perfect, powerful, pure ... and good.

The question that this portion of the story inspires is: In what ways and with what subjects have you tried to tame God by saying, "Well, the God I believe in could never \_\_\_\_\_"?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

After our first verse for today -- "I will strike down ..." - do you remember the very next thing God says? <sup>14</sup>This

day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance."

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

God is powerful, not tame, and is Israel's deliverer ... and the more I read the Bible, the more I realize that he doesn't want me to forget it!

Therefore, what God says to us is: "If you want to remember something, throw a party and establish a tradition!"

I like traditions; how about you? What traditions do you have (or have seen others have) that have nurtured faith?

What's one big wonderful truth (or story) worth remembering in your faith and family? And what's a tradition that might help you recall it more readily?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

One last quick line that I absolutely love because it is so true! <sup>17</sup>God thought, 'If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt.' <sup>18</sup>So God led the people by the roundabout way ..."

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Are you ever like me, wishing God would give you straight answer and a quick solution? "God, give me easy and direct. No challenges."

But in what ways might you (and I) need to be more patient and trusting? In what ways might we need to look for God in the detours -- as well as the highways and quick answers?

# DAY 8

## READ EXODUS 16, 17, 20

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

QUIT COMPLAINING!

Isn't that the message of the wilderness?!

God has sent ten plagues, rescued Israel, delivered them magnificently through the Red Sea, and finally the people set out. But in just three days (Ex 15:22-24) they forget God's power and start complaining!

If I was the White House spokesman for the real commander in chief, I would have said, "People, God's message to you is ... quit complaining!"

Who's with me on that?

But do you know what? That's NOT the message that today's lesson reveals. Therefore, we'd better start with what God really does say (instead of what you or I would say!).

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Scripture tells us that <sup>16:2</sup>the whole congregation of the Israelites complained." As a result, <sup>16:4</sup>the Lord said to Moses, 'I [will] rain bread from heaven for [all of] you.'

Scripture continues, <sup>17:1</sup>[And when] there was no water ... <sup>2</sup>the people quarreled ... <sup>3</sup>and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children ... with thirst?' and <sup>5</sup>the Lord said to Moses, 'take ... the staff ... <sup>6</sup>strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that people may drink.'

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I would have yelled at the ungrateful Israelites. But God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Therefore, like a patient parent, God desires to provide for his children.

Read that again ... even when we're most irritating, God desires to provide for us.

Wow! Take a moment and thank God for his patience and grace (and while you're at it, ask him to help

you -- and me -- to be less irritating and ungrateful!).

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

God the Son tells us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

That's an echo, of course, of what God the Father told the Israelites in the wilderness: <sup>16:4</sup>Gather enough for [just] that day. In that way I will test them ..."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I don't know about you, but I am prone to two opposite and equal problems in my life.

First, I have the tendency on one side to be very nostalgic. It's always tempting to romanticize "the good old days" (and forget the trials and imperfections -- including *my* imperfections).

Second it's equally tempting to spend too much time looking to the future.

In some ways, I fear the future. "Oh, I'm going to hate it when the kids leave home. I wish I could just freeze time right here and now." And I have other fearful thoughts like, "Oh, how can there possibly be enough money?"

On the other hand, I can also romanticize the future. Are you like me, ever saying, "If I can just get past today's hurdles, things will be better"?

Focusing too much on past or future does what? Well, let me speak for me ... I'm generally least happy when I'm focusing backward or forward. I trap my heart in a time warp and fail to see God and his blessings in the present. God is saying, "Test me in this! Look for me in the daily bread." God the Son says something wonderful like, "Tomorrow [has enough] worries of its own. [Enjoy today!]" (Matthew 6:34).

Which direction do you tend to look -- past, present, or future?

Ask God to show you the blessings of today!

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

“Thou shalt not ... commit adultery ... kill ... covet ... or bear false witness.”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

The Ten Commandments!

What does God say to us through them?

1. *Sin and obedience matter.* If we say they don't, we've just said it was stupid for Jesus to die on the cross to save us from ... well, things that don't really matter.
2. *God matters.* The first commandment says essentially that God matters more than anything else in life.
3. *Other people matter.* Don't steal from them or harm them (or their reputations).

In Leviticus, God the Father expands the ten commandments to 600-plus-rules. In the Gospels, God the Son simplifies them to two: Love God and love neighbor.

How would simply loving God and neighbor fulfill all the other commandments and enrich your life? Indeed, who is it that you need to love more -- some irritating person or the God you put on the back burner?

# DAY 9

## A STUDY OF LEVITICUS

Today is a different kind of day in our study of the Bible. (In fact, we'll have a couple of these as we work our way through scripture!)

Yesterday, we concluded with the ten commandments.

Today, I want us to look *quickly* at a whole book

of laws, rules, and commandments -- Leviticus.

To get a quick glimpse of this book, I want you to read two random verses in each and every chapter of Leviticus (one verse in the first half of each chapter, one verse in the last half.)

Go ...

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In terms of rules, laws, and commandments, God talks about several things in Leviticus:

1. Offerings -- offerings for sin, well-being, and restitution: offerings of grain and animals (which come with many instructions): votive offerings: and acceptable offerings
2. The Priesthood
3. Clean and Unclean Foods -- the Kosher laws
4. Clean and Unclean People -- including warnings not to touch leprosy, bodily fluids, or death
5. Religious Holidays and Festivals -- and the worship of God
6. Sexual Relations -- what's approved and with whom
7. Holiness Codes -- and penalties for violations
8. First Fruits -- and stewardship
9. Sacred Items for the Tabernacle -- including lamps, oil, and bread
10. Blasphemy -- what causes it and what is its punishment
11. The Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee -- and the way rest and restitution are woven into God's plan
12. Obedience -- and the rewards and punishments for obeying or not

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

The ultimate theme of Leviticus is holiness. Moses speaks of holiness at least 87 times in this book, and the key verse is Leviticus 19:2 - "You shall be holy, For I the Lord your God am holy."

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Isn't it all too easily get caught up in the particulars of any law? If we're passionate about some rule or set of rights and wrong, isn't it easy to get all too legalistic about it -- whether we mean to or not?

The Pharisees in the time of Jesus wound up like that. They were actually almost worshiping the law more than they were worshiping God.

Jesus and the New Testament, therefore, often had to soften, fulfill, reexplain, or redefine many of these laws. For example ...

- + Instead of the Sabbath being a day of freedom and rest, it had become, by the time of Jesus, a day of legalism and burden. Therefore, Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."
- + Instead of some foods being viewed as unclean because they were a danger to us, God told Peter (Acts 10) that what was more dangerous was using kosher and cleanliness laws to divide us from people who needed to hear the Gospel. Or in other words, Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all nations was a greater command than don't eat pork.
- + Instead of leprosy and blood becoming an excuse for making people outcasts, Jesus in his love touched the lepers and made care for the hurting an imperative through the story of the good Samaritan.
- + Instead of needing animal blood and those sacrifices to atone for our sins, Jesus Christ became the once and for all sacrifice for our sin.

Therefore, because Jesus redefined parts of these laws, what's our temptation to do with the rest of Leviticus? Reject it, right?

So can we take the scissors and just scrap this book of the Bible, calling it hopelessly outdated?

No!

What we are still called to do is strive for holiness!

That's what Leviticus is all about -- especially the section known as the Holiness Code in chapters 17-26. The New Testament does not match law for law, sin for sin, nor penalty for penalty with the commands in Leviticus, but in general both talk with consistency regarding

1. our need to love our neighbors (Lev 19:17-18),
2. our need to care for the poor (Lev 19:9-10)
3. God's regard for human life (Lev 24:17)
4. our spiritual need to do good stewardship and give first fruits (Lev 23:9)
5. the holiness and responsibility of religious leaders (Lev. 21)
6. acceptable and unacceptable sexual practices (Lev 18)
7. blessings for obedience and consequences for personal moral failure (Lev 26)

In what areas of your life do you struggle most with holiness?

## DAY 10

### READ

#### EXODUS 25 : 10 - 22

*this is in the context of "The Lord said to Moses"*

#### EXODUS 26 : 1 - 14

#### EXODUS 32

#### EXODUS 33

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Frequently, books and movies about aliens begin 1) with skeptics and 2) a big space ship hovering over the city and proving the skeptics wrong.

In SciFi, why don't people believe? Because they can't see the aliens. In life, why don't many people believe? Because we can't see God either.

God knows this. God the Son actually says, in fact, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29). Therefore, in today's readings, God the Father gives the people of Israel two tangible places to meet him: the Ark and the Tabernacle.

On the Ark is a mercy seat, and God says, <sup>25:22</sup>"There I will meet you." Over the generations, flashes of power and God's presence will come from the Ark (i.e. from God himself). My favorite story about this is in 1 Samuel 5. The Philistines capture the Ark and carry it to the temple of Dagon (pronounced like "daggone it!"). Each morning the Philistines would awake to find the statue of Dagon having fallen face down on the ground before the Ark of the real God. As Dagon fell, day after day, he chipped and broke and fell apart -- daggone it!

So what do you think the frightened Philistines did? They gave the Ark back to the Israelites!

The details surrounding the building of the Tabernacle is really a much longer story than what you just read today. In it, there are details for constructing lampstands, curtains, and altars for burnt offerings. God specifies the vestments for the priest and establishes a table for the bread of his presence. As the Israelites advance through the wilderness, God specifies the order and pattern in which tribes will surround his living presence in their midst. He will also specify who and how and when people may come in and meet with him.

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

There are two critical pictures of God that scripture presents -- and we dare not forget either.

The first picture is God as our companion and

friend. That was the point of the intimacy in the Adam and Eve story and of the coming of God the Son in human form.

The second picture of God is very, very different! God is holy, awesome, and fearful (see Isaiah 6:1-8). He is a "consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). It is said that when a priest would enter the holy of holies, the other priests would tie a rope around his ankle. Why? In case the priest dropped dead in the presence of God. This way they could pull him out without having to go in and encounter God themselves!

A day or two ago, we cited C. S. Lewis, saying, "[God] is not tame ... but he is good."

Which of these two pictures of God is your favorite?

Pray that God will grow in you the opposite picture!!!

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Moses was up on Mt. Sinai for many days. But in spite of God descending on that mountain in power and speaking in thunder (see Exodus 19:16-19), the people somehow concluded that Moses was dead and they needed something tamer to worship. Therefore, they asked Aaron to make a new god out of their earrings.

Aaron, obviously in tune with all things spiritual, decided that they must have wanted to worship a cow, so he made a golden calf.

What did God think about that? <sup>32:7</sup>"The Lord said to Moses, 'Your people have acted perversely ... <sup>10</sup>[leave] me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.'"

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

The tendency in our world today is to minimize sin. I, for example, like to minimize certain of my sins to bolster any fragile corners of my self-esteem.

The problem when I do that is that I occasionally get burned by the consequences.

God gets burned by sin too. It hurts his heart. And if we doubt that, we need to remember that those sins that we'd like to excuse were serious enough to necessitate the suffering and death of God's Son.

With that in mind, do you see why we need to hold the two pictures of God -- awesome yet friendly, good but not tame -- in close juxtaposition?!

Imagine it like this. I commit a sin (yet again I might add). It burns God. I deserve to be toast. But as soon as that thought flashes through our Holy Father's mind, God also "32:14 change[s] his mind." As Jonah says, "4:2[God is] gracious ... and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing." The cross assures us of that readiness to relent.

I encourage you to use this Bible story and this moment as a call to repentance. Indeed, as it says in Hebrews 4:16, "Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

<sup>33:1</sup>The Lord said to Moses, 'Go ... to the land I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... <sup>2</sup>I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out [your enemies] ... <sup>3</sup>but I will not go with you.'

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

What is God saying here? What is God saying to us? God is saying, "When you sin -- as the Israelites did in worshipping a golden calf instead of me -- I won't burn you up and extinguish you where you stand." (That's why, as it says in Matthew 5:45, the sun rises on the evil and the good, and equal rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous.)

God is saying, "When you sin, I won't extinguish you where you stand ... but don't expect me to journey with you when you refuse to journey with (and worship) me."

But I love what Moses said to God in response, <sup>33:15</sup>"If your presence will not go [with us], do not carry us up from here."

Make that your prayer today! "God, I desperately want you in my life. I have often gone my own way -- not always journeying with you. Therefore, I confess my sins. I want to worship you first again. And I ask (and here's the hard part) that you leave me in my wilderness, if that's what it takes to have you with me, rather than letting me go where I want to go (if you won't be coming along)."

Are you willing to stay in your wilderness and look for God there? Talk to him about this!

## DAY 11

### READ NUMBERS 21, 22, THEN BACK TO 13

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In John 3, Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night asking what he must do to receive eternal life. Jesus gives him two answers. The first is "be born again." Nicodemus doesn't readily understand this, pondering how he can enter his mother's womb again. So Jesus gives a second answer. He refers to our reading for today and says, <sup>14</sup>"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

In the wilderness, the complaints of the Israelites, led to a plague of snakes and the curse of death, and the lifting up of a bronze serpent became a strange path back to life. Indeed, salvation in the Exodus story be-

gan with human confession -- “<sup>21:7</sup>We have sinned by speaking against the Lord” -- and ended with God’s mercy, saying, “Look and live.”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

It sounds silly to look at a snake on a pole and live, but if you think about it, looking lovingly on a criminal on a first century electric chair (Christ on the cross) is an equally strange path to life!

The Apostle Paul calls the “cross of Christ foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Cor 1:18); nevertheless, like the people in the wilderness, our rebellion and complaint leads just as assuredly to the curse of death. Fortunately, Jesus promises that those who gaze lovingly upon the cross which is lifted up will be saved too.

Ask Jesus to turn you into a thankful, rejoicing, fully alive, and forgiven “fool for Christ.”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In Numbers 22, God speaks through a donkey.

Actually, God spoke first to Balaam directly, telling him not to go with Balak and his men nor curse the Israelites.

But Balaam went anyway.

When God sent an angel to turn aside Balaam’s donkey, Balaam whipped the mule.

Then God spoke to Balaam through the creature - - “<sup>28</sup>[Why] have you struck me these three times?”

Balaam replied, “<sup>29</sup>Because you made a fool of me.”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Balaam blamed the mule for making a fool of him. But -- unaware -- who was he really blaming for his foolishness? God!

In our last question, we asked God to turn us into fools. Do we really mean it?

Where have you drawn the line in the past in regards to stepping out in faith?

How ridiculously far are you willing to go to serve God?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Numbers 21 and 22 tell a couple of the stories that happened during the years in the wilderness, but we go back to chapter 14 because that’s the beginning of the transition into the Promised Land. “1 The Lord said to Moses, 2 ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites.’”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Three points from this verse and this story ...

1. God keeps his promises.
2. God wants to bless us with a bountiful land (and if we don’t get it now, we’ll definitely get it in heaven).
3. You know the story ... Ten out of the twelve went in and saw obstacles to receiving the blessings that God was promising; two out of the twelve saw the same situation and saw opportunity rather than obstacles.

God promises us so much (Google “promises of God” if you doubt it!). Pray that you may put on the glasses of God and opportunity rather than the goggles of World and oppression!

## DAY 12

### READ

**NUMBERS 20 : 1 - 13**

**DEUTERONOMY 31 : 14 - 29**

**JOSHUA 1 : 1 - 9**

**JOSHUA 6**

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In Numbers 20:12 “the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites ... you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.’”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Are you ever like me? You work hard, try to do what is right, and therefore, think you *deserve* x, y, and z. I call it “my entitlement mentality”!

Whenever I feel entitled though, all I really need to do is think about Moses. If any human “deserved” a reward at the end of a big job, it was Moses! After bearing with all those stiff-necked people, he deserved to enter the Promised Land, right? This lesson shows us that we don’t always get what *we think* we deserve.

What prideful sense of entitlement might you need to relinquish today?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Near the end of Deuteronomy, the transition from Moses to Joshua -- and wilderness to Promised Land -- begins to unfold. <sup>31:14</sup>The Lord said to Moses, “Your time to die is near; call Joshua and present yourselves in the tent of meeting, so that I may commission him.”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

“I have important responsibilities,” I like to say to myself, “therefore, I am obviously an important man.” However, no matter how influential we think we are, our time on this earth will inevitably wax and wane.

Our lives are little more than a vapor in the wind ... *and yet*, our souls are so valuable that the Son of God gave his life to save you and me.

Whenever I think about this, I’m reminded that I need to focus more on heaven than on this fleeting world.

How about you?

What’s one eternal thing you can choose to focus on today?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

<sup>31:16</sup>The Lord said to Moses, ‘Soon you will [die]. Then this people will begin to prostitute themselves to the foreign gods in their midst ...; they will forsake me, breaking my covenant ... <sup>17</sup>My anger will be kindled against them ... I will ... hide my face from them; they will become easy prey, and many terrible troubles will come upon them.’”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

When my family lived in the desert, no one around us dared to leave their cat outside at night. If they did, it was coyote food and easy prey.

I don’t know about you, but I don’t like being reminded that I am about as vulnerable as a kitten before a hungry coyote. Through this passage, God reminds us about the “foreign gods [and false priorities] in [our] midst” and tells us that we are “easy prey.”

What worldly temptations are you most vulnerable to?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In Joshua 1 we are told that <sup>1</sup>“the Lord spoke to Joshua ... saying ... <sup>2</sup>Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them ... <sup>3</sup>Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you ... <sup>7</sup>Be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you ... <sup>9</sup>[and] do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

1. God has a plan for you. You have a destiny. Therefore, “11 Go ... and take possession” of it.
2. Act boldly – strong and courageous – because God is on your side.
3. Follow the commands. They’re from Moses. They’re from God. They’re accurate guides along the path of life.

Acting with more boldness is always the step I need to take. How about you? Which of these three principles do you most need to act on today?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In Joshua 6 we are told that “<sup>2</sup>the Lord said to Joshua, ‘See, I have handed Jericho over to you, ... <sup>3</sup>You shall march around the city ... for six days ... <sup>4</sup>On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets. <sup>5</sup>When they make a long blast ... all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat ...”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Have you ever circled around some dilemma seven times in your mind, worrying about it again and again, hoping it would fall as readily as the walls of Jericho?

I sure have!

But if I can’t topple simple problems in seven quick passes, how could Israel have possibly toppled the walls of Jericho after passing by a half dozen times?

When I encounter stories like this, my human temptation is to rationalize them away as silly, old myths -- and in the process I lose the truths.

Fortunately, I’ve learned an alternative. I’ve learned that I can trust that God is on my side, and as I’ve learned to trust I’ve seen greater glimpses of power and wonder!

I invite you to pray this prayer with me as we end today: “*God, I want to see your glory. Open my heart to trust and my eyes to see your wonder. Amen.*”

## DAY 13

### READ

**JUDGES 2 11 24**

**JUDGES 6 11 14 36 40**

**JUDGES 7**

**JUDGES 16**

Yesterday, we read about Israel’s journey into the Promised Land. As triumphant as moments of that journey were, the heading in my Bible at the beginning of Judges is “Israel’s Failure to Complete the Conquest of Canaan.”

The Israelites did not conquer *all* their enemies – as God asked them to do. They left, therefore, a divided country with foreigners in the land. These foreigners worshiped foreign gods, and God’s prophecy came true: the Hebrew children eventually married the foreign children and inevitably brought foreign gods into their homes.

A divided country left divided hearts.

And God’s heart was eventually broken.

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

As the book of Judges unfolds, God’s Word reveals Israel’s repeated pattern of disobedience and rescue ...

1. *People’s Evil* – “<sup>11</sup>the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and worshiped the [pagan gods known as the] Baals; <sup>12</sup>and they abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt ...”
2. *God’s Anger* – “<sup>44</sup>So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers ... <sup>15</sup>and they were in great distress.”

3. *People's Cry* – <sup>48</sup>[But] the Lord would be moved to pity by their groaning because of those who persecuted and oppressed them.
4. *God's Rescue* – <sup>46</sup>[So] the Lord raised up judges ...”
5. *Peace* – <sup>48</sup>Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies ...”
6. *Repeat ...*
  1. *People's Evil* – <sup>19</sup>But whenever the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than their ancestors, following other gods, worshipping them and bowing down to them. They would not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.
  2. *God's Anger* – <sup>20</sup>So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel ...”
  3. *Etc...*

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I hope you're not like me. I'm fairly capable and competent and when faced with a trial, my first temptation is to always work harder. So I work and I work and I get exhausted and I make a dent in the problem ... and after all that effort, *all I get are human results.*

God has a better alternative that I'm often too slow and stubborn and forgetful to try. The repeated pattern of Judges is: “Call out to me and I will rescue you.” Help and salvation! That's the good news in this section!

But there's a more pointed issue here too. God also calls us to avoid evil before the problems start. It's an old logic – we get into less trouble when we don't go down dark alleys in the first place!

What dark alley and dark temptation do you need to turn over to God today?

Why not cry out to God about this!

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

I don't know if I ever noticed before the wonderful exchange between the very patient God and the very human Gideon in chapter 6: <sup>12</sup>The angel of the Lord appeared to [Gideon] and said to him, “The Lord is with you...” <sup>13</sup>Gideon answered ... “But sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this [bad stuff] happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us ...”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Isn't that priceless? How many countless thousands of people haven't asked that very same thing -- including you and me?!

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

God says to Gideon, <sup>16</sup>I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites ...”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

The problems Gideon needed to strike down were foreign soldiers. What are the biggest problems you need to strike down?

How is God with you when you contend with these problems?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Gideon's human.

Skeptical.

He says to God, <sup>17</sup>Then show me a sign ... <sup>37</sup>I am going to lay a fleece ... on the threshing floor; if there is

dew on the fleece ..., and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand ...” The Bible says, “<sup>38</sup>And it was so.” But all too human Gideon has to test the Lord again! He tells God to do the reverse: dry fleece, wet floor.

What does God say? He answered Gideon’s request in forward and reverse.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

If we’re honest, we know that we can’t test God like Gideon did. (I tried it this morning ... but there was no Ferrari outside with dew on the rag top and the driveway dry.) Nevertheless, I absolutely believe that God is telling us to look each morning for evidence of his presence.

This morning -- or this evening -- where did you see a glimpse of God in the last 24 hours?

Try asking that each new day!

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

<sup>7:4</sup>“The troops are still too many.”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Someone told me once that their daughter in another state had a new pastor. Every Sunday he stood up and said, “God keeps telling me to pray for something big to happen here in this church. I don’t know what it is! But will you join me in praying for something *so big* that when it happens we’ll know it was *not* from us but had to be from God?!”

As God whittled down the size of Gideon’s army, he was planning to do something so big that the world would know that it was not human hands that accomplished it, but God’s.

Try adding that to your daily prayers: “God, make something so big happen in my life that all – including me – will know that it has to be from you!”

## DAY 14

### READ

1 SAMUEL 2 : 12 - 14

1 SAMUEL 5

1 SAMUEL 8

1 SAMUEL 9 : 1 - 2

1 SAMUEL 13 : 8 - 14

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

<sup>4</sup>“The Lord called, ‘Samuel, Samuel.’”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I love this story!

It’s like an old, screwball comedy. In the dark of night, Samuel is running back and forth between bedrooms in his night cap and long pajamas. “It wasn’t me. Go back to bed!”

I’d love to leave this section with the comedy and with this question: *What difference does it make that God knows and calls you by name?* But that’s not where this story ends -- God’s going to pronounce judgment on Eli’s wicked sons.

I try to put myself in that situation. If I knew God was going to give me a hard thankless job -- “tell Eli his sons are wicked” -- would I say, <sup>8</sup>“Here I am ... <sup>10</sup>Speak for your servant is listening” ... or would I pretend that I had wax build up in my ears?”

What do you do when you knew God was about to give you a hard and thankless job?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

<sup>4</sup>“All the elders of Israel ... came to Samuel ... <sup>5</sup>and said to him, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like [all the] other nations.” <sup>6</sup>... Samuel prayed to the Lord, <sup>7</sup>and the Lord said ... “[Samuel, do not be sad;] for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

The people wanted a king so that they could be “like [all the] other nations.” Have you ever wanted to be like someone else? I remember wearing bright athletic wrist bands to school in ninth grade so I could be like a much cooler kid in the neighborhood. He was athletic and pulled the look off quite naturally. My look had an unintended consequence – the pretty girl in home room rolled her eyes and said, “What are those?”

What do you want most right now so you can be like other people?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

“<sup>11</sup>[The Lord] said, ‘These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen ... <sup>12</sup>and he will appoint ... some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest ... <sup>13</sup>He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. <sup>14</sup>He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. <sup>15</sup>He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards ... <sup>17</sup>He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.’”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

God says to Israel that any king – besides the true King – will oppress you.

Now, some people look at the government as their provider, protector, and savior. Government, therefore, has the potential to oppress us (and that happened in Israel a couple of generations later when Solomon’s taxes did lay a staggering burden at Israel’s feet). I don’t think, however, that this was the only false king that God was talking to Israel (and us) about.

As I write this, it’s football season. During the fall, the earthly king and false priority that vies for my time and attention is pro football. During the winter, it will be college basketball. During the spring ...

Wait!

What price do my false priorities exact? More wasted time than I can really afford! And sadly what it takes me most away from is quiet time with God.

What earthly priorities and false kings do you bow down to?

What is the tax – the price – your false priorities levy?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Although God warned Israel about the burdens that an earthly king would place on them, Israel continued to press for a king. Saul – the tallest, handsomest man in all the land (see 1 Sam 9:2) – was faithful for a while, but eventually turned his back on God’s commands. Therefore, God sent Samuel to anoint the next king.

Samuel looked for another tall and handsome man, but God told Samuel (and us) that heaven has a different standard for quality: “<sup>16:7</sup>Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature ...; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

If God looks at your heart, what’s really and truly at the core of your existence?

## DAY 15

### READ

**1 SAMUEL 17**

**? SAMUEL 5**

**? SAMUEL 7**

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In Acts 13:22, David is described as a man “after [God’s] own heart.”

Knowing that powerful description of David's faith, I was surprised how few times in the stories of David that scripture actually says, "God said" to David.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

What ways — other than a megaphone blaring from heaven — has God spoken to you?!

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In reading the story of David and Goliath, the question is: How was David so firm in his faith that he faced a murderous giant without the king's (the world's) armor?

Here's a hint of an explanation: David was a good Jew. He was a shepherd boy. As a good Jew, he would have known the teachings of God by heart. As a shepherd, he would have spent countless hours studying creation — the cycles of rain, the majesty of a sunrise, the mysteries of the stars, and the wonder of childbirth (at least among the sheep he cared for).

Many people look at creation. Billions have been inspired. Some — like David — see the wonder of creation, and see God more clearly. Some look for logical, earthly explanations. David knew the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob first through the stories he'd heard when he was a boy. But then, I'm sure he heard God speak to him every time he saw a sunset, a rainbow, or a newborn lamb stand. Then, I suspect he started speaking back to God in prayer. Indeed, we know David was a praying man because of all the Psalms attributed to him. And because of the passion of the Psalms, we gain a powerful sense that this was a wonderful, ongoing, two-way conversation!

Anyway, that's a long way to say that David *personally knew* a power that far exceeded Goliath! Therefore, he was not afraid to stand without earthly armor.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

In Romans 1, Paul says, "19For what can be known about God is plain ..., because God has shown it to [us]. 20Ever

since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse."

What does this mean to you?

What giant is God calling you to stand up against today?

What worldly "armor" do you need to shed in order to stand up to these giants and responsibilities?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

If we've jumped from young David and Goliath to King David entering Jerusalem, we've skipped some critical stories! Here's the quick history ...

- + David defeated Goliath.
- + The people of Israel praised David more than they praised Saul.
- + Saul got jealous.
- + Saul chased David all over the Middle East trying to kill him.
- + In spite of mighty efforts and mighty armies, Saul never really had a good chance to kill David. David, however, had two great chances to kill Saul ... but chose not to!

In one example, David was hiding in a cave, and out of all the caves in Israel, Saul "coincidentally" came alone and unprotected into the cave that David was hiding in. (Saul, by the way, came in to the cave to "relieve himself." -- the Bible is very honest.) David could have killed Saul, but David honored the one who was still officially king of God's people.

- + Saul eventually died in a battle with the Philistines — actually, he committed suicide when his doom was apparent.

- + David — even after being hunted for years — mourned Saul’s passing.
- + There was a brief struggle for succession — as there always is — but David, God’s chosen, was finally anointed king over all Israel.
- + David makes Jerusalem his capital city (which was our reading for today in 2 Samuel 6).
- + Then, finally, we hear God’s voice ...

God eventually told David two things:

First, God was fine with continuing to live in a tent — i.e. David, don’t bother building me a temple!

Second, God had shepherded David. He brought him from being a lowly shepherd to king over all Israel.

But it was more than that!

God said to David, “<sup>7:16</sup>Your house and your kingdom [and] your throne shall be established forever.” (As Christians, we know that prophecy was fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ.)

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

You and I are not kings. Our ancestors aren’t likely to have fancy thrones. And yet we have one thing in common with David ... No matter how lowly we think we are (shepherds or lower), God treasures you and me as a masterpiece of his creation.

Do you know how I know that?

He sent his Son to die for you!

God loves you ... forgives you ... and wants your destiny to be “established forever.”

Let’s let David’s question to God be our question to close today too: “<sup>18</sup>Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, ... that you have brought me to this place in life?”

## DAY 16

### TYPES OF PSALMS

As we study King David, we must pause and study the Psalms. Psalms are prayers, and many are attributed this

“man after [God’s] own heart” (Acts 13:22).

As prayers, the Psalms cover the whole range of human emotion from soaring praise to crumpled lament. Some have a purpose that may or may not be readily apparent.

The words that are guiding this 60-day Bible study are “God said.” We don’t hear those words very often in the Psalms. Why? Because the Psalms flow generally in the other direction! Instead of God’s voice coming down, the Psalms are our voice lifted up.

Nevertheless, as it says in 2 Timothy 3:16, “all scripture is God-breathed.” Therefore, God speaks to us through these prayers. Through the Psalms ...

- + God is teaching us how to pray.
- + God is giving voice to our greatest joys and deep.
- + God is giving us a vocabulary to talk about him and creation and theology rightly.

Please think of these prayers as your worthy words spoken to God. Please also think of these verses as God’s worthy truths spoken to you.

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY

### READ A PSALM OF WISDOM – PSALM 1

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I lived in the desert for about 10 years. The closest thing we had to trees in the valley were the scrubs and shrubs of pinon and juniper.

You could always tell, therefore, where the rivers were. Towering cottonwoods rose majestically in the only moisture of the desert – the riverbeds. Golden leaves would accentuate their presence further in the fall!

When I think about Psalm 1, I know it best through a liturgical song ...

Like trees by streams of water ...

*Happy are those who delight in the law of the Lord.*

Their roots grow deep.

Their fruit grows ripe.

Their leaves never wither.

*Happy are those who delight in the law of the Lord.*

This is wisdom literature. It's advice for a wise, "happy," and more productive life.

Now, I have to admit that I'd like to blossom and thrive, but I must also admit that I haven't always "delighted" in God's laws. I've strayed and chafed – especially when I was younger.

In recent years, I've taken more delight in God's laws.

Why?

Perhaps it has something to do with more gray hair -- I'm either more mature or too tired for more trouble.

On the other hand, maybe it's from doing a decade or two of pastoral counseling. I've know too many who haven't delighted in God's laws; I've had to watch them, instead, try to climb back out of holes they've dug for themselves. Seeing so many consequences first-hand makes God's wisdom increasingly attractive!

Rate yourself on how thoroughly do you delight in God's laws?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY

### READ A PSALM OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING – PSALM 95: 1 - 7

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I love this Psalm! Every time I hear it, these words draw me back to the first real, true, consistent devotion I ever did in my life!

"<sup>1</sup>Come ... sing ... joyful ... <sup>2</sup>thanksgiving ... praise!" I want all of those words in my life!

This Psalm reminds me who God truly is, and I

need that because in my busyness I sometimes forget! Therefore, when I pray this Psalm, I am joyfully reminded that ...

- + God is my "rock" ... and I need a firm foundation because I am often unsteady.
- + God is my creator who holds "in his hand ... the depths of the earth [and] the heights of the mountains" ... and I need a creator who is strong and capable because I can't handle all the responsibilities I have on my own.

What attributes of God do you most need (and need to praise) in your life?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY

### READ A PSALM OF LAMENT – PSALM 42

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I used to say these verses in my first devotional experience too! But ... I usually stopped at verse one-and-a-half. I used these words as a call to worship, but I never thought much about why the Psalmist was so thirsty. He is thirsty, like many of us, because his soul is parched and hurting.

"My tears have been my food," cries the Psalm.

Have you ever been so low that it seemed like you lived off your tears?

The Psalms are very honest – joy and sorrow, thanksgiving and anger, hope and despair. The Psalms invite you to "pour out your soul." What sad, doubting, pondering parts of your soul might you need to pour out to God today?

## DAY 17

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY

### READ SOME PSALMS OF PURPOSE – PSALM 122 THEN 121

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

On a few occasions, the Psalms were used a certain times and for specific purposes. Psalms 120-134, for example, were used by the pilgrims on their religious journeys to Jerusalem. As they were literally and figuratively ascending to the higher elevations of God's holy city, they recited these "Psalms of Ascent."

Psalms 122 captures this sense of journey well. After the people cry, "1 Let us go to the house of the Lord," it talks about "4 the tribes going up 3 [to] Jerusalem." They pray for "6 peace" in the holy city as they travel along.

Psalms 121 reflects this sense of journey less than Psalms 122; nevertheless, it does talk about "1 lift[ing our eyes] to the hills" as we travel. Yes the mountains are beautiful, but they're also full of danger. Wild animals and conniving thieves prowl the ascending trails. Therefore, as people traveled along, they asked, "1 Where [does] my help come [from]?"

This is a Psalm of Assurance, reminding us that "5 The Lord is your keeper ... your shade at your right hand. 3 He will not let your foot be moved. 7 He will [guard] your life."

What line in these two Psalms grabbed your heart and captured your imagination as you were praying them today?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY

### READ A PSALM OF TRUST – PSALM 23

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

This is the most famous of all Psalms! Each line is so evocative that entire chapters have been written on each half-sentence – adding up to many long and wonderful books. It tells us who God is (gentle shepherd), recommends a condition for our heart (not wanting and satisfied), acknowledges the trials of life (valley of the shadow of death), and assures us that there is abundant

hope in the end (I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever!).

What's your favorite line in this Psalm *today*? What does it say to you?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY

### READ A PSALM OF PROPHECY – PSALM 22

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Technically this is a Psalm of Lament. It is a plea for deliverance from hostility and pain.

God, however, used it in another powerful way too. Nearly a thousand years before crucifixion was invented, listen to how God – through David – foreshadowed the final hours of his Son:

- + "1My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
- + "6I am ... scorned by others, and despised by the people."
- + "7All who see me mock at me."
- + "8let ... the Lord ... deliver him" ... if he is able, said the scoffers at the cross.
- + "14I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint"
- + "15my mouth is dried up like a potsherd."
- + "16a company of evildoers encircles me."
- + "18They divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots."

When your heart realizes that God holds past, present, and future in his hands, how does it make you feel?

# DAY 18

## READ

2 SAMUEL 11

2 SAMUEL 12

PSALM 51 *Make sure you read the small print -- the heading -- at the beginning of this Psalm.*

The first half of David's life is filled with faith and triumph. Yes, David did have to spend a generation running from the murderous Saul, but he did it with character and integrity -- and therefore, faith and triumph.

The second half of David's life was much bumpier, and it could be said that his trials started when he saw a woman taking a bath.

- + David had an affair with Bathsheba (ch 11)
- + David has her husband killed (ch 11)
- + David's child dies (ch 12)
- + a rape occurs in David's family (ch 13)
- + David's son, Absalom, usurps David's throne (ch 14)

As the rest of the story unfolds, there are battles, curses, more deaths, and judgments.

Then, when David finally dies, there's also a struggle for succession.

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Scripture says, "It happened, late one afternoon, when David ... was walking about on the roof ... that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman."

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I don't know about you, but I've spent time walking on my roof ... and walking by the images on the TV ... and walking by the three dimensional images at the beach ... and admittedly, my head has occasionally turned.

The first glance, it should be noted, is often accidental and reflex. It's the second glance that's lust. But

David takes it to a third and more intentional step: he "sends someone to inquire."

Any wrong desire follows this pattern. The first glance may be accidental, but what in your life -- lust and otherwise -- do you turn back to intentionally?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

By the beginning of chapter 12, David has had an affair with Bathsheba and had her killed ... *and he thinks he's gotten away with it!*

That's when God begins speaking.

God speaks to David through the prophet Nathan. Nathan tells the story of a rich man killing "a family member" of a poor man. When David is outraged, Nathan (God) says, "You are th[at] man."

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Have you ever done something and thought you got away with it? I don't know about you, but I often act as if God isn't watching, active, or even alive.

This story tells us that God *is* watching and aware. In fact, he wants you to be caught! Wait ... not actually caught, embarrassed, arrested, or baring your dirty laundry in public. What God really wants is for you to have some sense of accountability.

Sin lives and breeds in the darkness.

Accountability draws our vulnerability into the light, and God's light is healing.

Therefore, who might you trust enough to confidentially share your struggles with?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Did you notice the notation at the beginning of Psalm 51? "A psalm of David, regarding the time Nathan the prophet came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba."

This Psalm is David's prayer; therefore, in one sense, God does not speak directly in this passage. Nevertheless, this Psalm gives us a powerful glimpse of God's character (and therefore, provides us with a wonderful whisper of his voice): "6[God] desire[s] truth in the inward being ... 16[and he] take[s] no delight in burnt offerings ... 17The sacrifice acceptable to God is ... a broken and contrite heart."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

God doesn't want fancy religious rites like flaming sacrifices on bloody altars; God simply wants our hearts.

He desires truth in our inmost being.

What's the true truth in your life. Begin unfolding that to God – bring it into the light – and watch your relationship with him begin to grow.

## DAY 19

### READ 1 KINGS 3, 6, 11

By the end of 2 Samuel, King David is dying; therefore, 1 Kings begins with a new king.

Wait.

Not really. 1 Kings actually begins with a struggle for succession.

*Note: Struggle is probably deserved because struggle is exactly what happens when we fail to follow God's original design.*

*In Genesis 2, we hear about the one flesh union between husband and wife, but David – like Jacob before him and Solomon after him – complicates family and history with multiple wives ... and, therefore, multiple people claiming rites to the throne.*

Son Solomon eventually emerges as king, and that's where our story begins for today ...

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In 1 Kings 3, we are told that "3Solomon loved the Lord."

Thus God said to him, "4Ask what I should give you."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

It's not often that God says, "Treat me like your personal genie. Ask for whatever you want!"

I don't know about you, but my first temptation would have been to ask for several million dollars! (But then when I watch the lives of most lottery winners and celebrities, I think, "No ... I don't want that.")

My second temptation is to ask to live a very, very long life. (Then I look at many of the truly elderly I've visited – failing bodies and fragile minds – and I think, "No ... I don't want that either.")

Nowadays, I know exactly what I'd ask for – I'm not telling you, though, because that will be *your* question in a minute – but Solomon's choice wouldn't be a half-bad second wish if the genie granted me three.

Solomon obviously chose wisdom.

What would you "wish for" if God invited you to "ask"?!

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In 1 Kings 6, Solomon builds God a beautiful temple.

What does God say about it?

Actually, go back to chapter 5.

*God said nothing about it!*

Solomon drew his own conclusions.

Solomon said, "3[M]y father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him ... 4But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side ... 5So I intend to build ..."

It wasn't because of warfare that David didn't build; it was because of God's specific command (2

Samuel 7). Solomon misread history and determined his own path – “This is what *I intend* to do.”

The consequence? Solomon, following his own path, fulfilled God’s prophecy in 1 Samuel 8 about the oppressiveness that a king would bring to Israel. It says here that “<sup>13</sup>King Solomon conscripted forced labor out of all Israel.” Solomon essentially turned his own people into slaves. Soon he would begin taxing them heavily too. He’d also begin selling off parts of the God’s earthly kingdom to afford the building project.

The temple was indeed nice, but the cost on Israel was very, very high.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Can you think of a time when you didn’t listen for God ... said, “I intend” ... and either you or others paid the price?

What is a situation right now in your life in which you’re tempted to follow your own wisdom rather than God’s specific call?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

<sup>6:11</sup>Now the Word of the Lord came to Solomon, <sup>12</sup>Concerning this [temple] that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes, obey my ordinances, and keep all my commandments by walking in them, then I will establish my promises with you ... <sup>13</sup>I will dwell among the children of Israel ...”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Oops!

Did this contradict what I just said about God not telling Solomon not to build a house?!

No!

Let me answer this with a story ... I have a friend – a pastor – who was wrestling with a tough decision:

should he accept the call to a new church or stay with his old church. He prayed and he prayed. But a clear answer would not come. He was paralyzed, distraught, so he turned to a friend for advice. His friend said, “You may make the ‘wrong’ decision. *But* if you do, do you think God will abandon you forever? No, he’ll rush ahead to the next intersection and meet you there again.”

Life is full of crossroads and decisions. Solomon went his own way, but God rushed to the next intersection and said, “Choose me, this time. Walk in my ways, and I will bless you.”

Take a moment to pray two things: 1) Thank the Lord for never leaving you to stand alone in the crossroads of life, and 2) pray that he will help you obey his ordinances and be blessed.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In 1 Kings 11 we hear that “<sup>2</sup>The Lord had said to the Israelites, ‘You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you; for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods’; Solomon clung to these in love. <sup>3</sup>Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines ...”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

If you would have asked Solomon why he had so many wives, his answer would have been very cultural and very well-reasoned.

Many of his wives were, of course, daughters of foreign kings. These marriages were less a contract between man and woman as a covenant between two nations. The purpose was to insure peace. After all, which foreign king would ever attack Israel with their daughters in the Solomon’s palace? Yes, the decision was very cultural and very well-reasoned.

It doesn’t take too much thinking on my part to realize that my name is Solomon too. I can easily remember too many well-reasoned, human decisions that went

directly against the words and wisdom of God.

Solomon's consequence – the next verse after the passage above – was, “<sup>4</sup>... when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the Lord his God.”

Can't you imagine the God of relationships continuing to rush to every intersection, hoping to meet with Solomon, but Solomon's heart being so far from God that he constantly went his own way?

I can definitely think of a few consequences I've suffered for going my own way. How about you? Can you think of a few consequences you've suffered for going your own well-reasoned way rather than God's clearly ordained way?

## DAY 20

### A STUDY OF PROVERBS

Today is another different kind of day. After studying Solomon we turn to three books attributed to him: Proverbs (today's topic), and Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon (tomorrow's topic).

Proverbs is wisdom literature. In a dangerous world, it's heavenly advice to help us stay on a godly path.

There is only one warning when reading Proverbs -- they're wisdom, not guarantees.

The most famous example of this comes from the line “<sup>22:6</sup>Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” That's wisdom and that's true, but it's not a guarantee. We all know fine families that have raised three model children, but the rebelliousness of the fourth has nearly torn the family apart. It's not the family's fault. It's not a Bible promise not coming true. It's just that wisdom worked three times out of four, or if you take a wider sample, ninety-nine times out of a hundred. But Proverbs are not

guarantees.

But enjoy the wisdom. In fact, this is one people's most favorite Biblical books. Almost every proverb is worth engraving on our walls -- holy graffiti. I've heard that one famous old preacher, I think it's Billy Graham, has Bibles all over his house, and they're all turned to Proverbs. Whenever he passes through a room, he snacks on some wisdom!

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Read Proverbs 1:17, then read one random verse from each of the next 31 chapters.

On each line below, write the theme for the proverb you read in each chapter. For example, I just turned randomly to chapter 6. The theme for the verse I pointed to was “6. Character and lying.”

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**WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?**

Which of the themes that you just wrote down do you most need help with in your life?

You may wish to go back and read that chapter more fully, writing down the Proverb that speaks most wonderfully to you ...

**DAY 21**

**READ SONG OF SOLOMON 4**

The Song of Solomon is a string of about 25 love poems. Some say these are literal love poems between two lovers. Others believe this a drama -- almost a song-filled opera. Others rejoice that one of God's inventions -- sex -- is celebrated instead of called evil.

Through the ages, though, the Song of Solomon has perhaps been read most commonly as an allegory. Both Jew and Christians have found in it a celebration of the love between God and his covenant people.

**WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?**

Let's use that last interpretation! In your heart, do you find God this passionate for you?

**READ**

**ECCLESIASTES 1**

**ECCLESIASTES 2**

**ECCLESIASTES 3 : 1 - 8**

**WHAT DOES GOD SAY?**

Nothing.

That's right. This is a very backwards book in which to hear God's voice. Why? Because these are purely human reflections. Ecclesiastes is simply the end result of a life spent chasing after wisdom. And what is the wisest man in history's conclusion? Essentially, he spent his life "chasing after wind."

Just as "the sun rises and the sun goes down," a person's life rises and then goes down. Death is inevitable. And where does all you've gained, earned, accumulated, and pleased yourself with go?

God's voice speaks loudly in the hollowness that Solomon expresses without him. God's whisper here is that all our earthly pursuits will rise and pass away. There's only one thing that lasts forever -- God! Let's chase after him!

**WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?**

In what ways are you chasing after wind?

What's one thing you need to do today to become a God-chaser?

**DAY 22**

Today, we won't be doing a lot of "God says." Why? Because we're talking about the kings over God's people ... and even when God was speaking loudly -- largely through the prophet -- most of these kings weren't about to listen to God at all!

**READ 1 KINGS 12**

After Solomon's death, the kingdom zips in half. Most of the tribes went north with Jeroboam, calling themselves Israel. The other tribes -- mainly Judah -- stayed south with Rehoboam. The south was called "JEW-duh" and included Jerusalem, the great city of David.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Other than "don't be as evil as Jeroboam," the best message I've heard from 1 Kings 12 is "don't be as unwise as Rehoboam."

Jeroboam and the northern tribes approached Rehoboam saying, "Your father (Solomon) made our yoke heavy ... [if] you lighten the hard service of your father ... we will serve you."

Rehoboam took this under advisement. In fact, he approached some advisors to find out what he should do. That was wise.

But ... when he didn't like the wise advice of his seasoned elders, he turned instead to the selfish advice of his peers. They advised harsh treatment of the north -- so he'd seem strong -- but the north rebelled and it split the kingdom.

What does God say to us. Seek wise advice and stick with it. Don't just listen for (and until) you hear what you want to hear.

When have you ever searched for the advice you wanted to hear? How did it work out?

### READ

*read as many of these as you want, but you can stop as soon as you notice a definite pattern*

#### 1 KINGS

14: 7 - 10

15: 26

15: 34

16: 13

16: 19

16: 25

16: 30

22 :52

#### 2 KINGS

3: 2

13 :2

13: 11

14: 24

15: 9

15: 18

15: 24

15: 28

17: 2

ALL of the Kings of Israel were evil. Period.

Now ... read the consequence ...

### READ

#### 2 KINGS 17: 5 - 9

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Sin, evil, and rebellion hurt God ... and often there are consequences.

Consequences here is God removing his hand of protection from us.

I don't know about you, but I want God's hand of protection on me. Therefore, I'm confessing my sins right about now ... how about you?!

Now let's look at the kings of Judah ...

### READ

*read as many of these as you want, but you can stop as soon as you notice a definite pattern*

#### 1 KINGS

14: 22

#### 2 KINGS

8: 18

8: 27

**21: 2**  
**21: 20**  
**23: 32**  
**23: 37**  
**24: 09**  
**24: 19**

The kings of Israel were only evil continually.

The majority of the kings of Judah were evil too.

Fortunately, there were a few kings -- too few kings  
-- who *did* return to the Lord ...

### **2 KINGS**

**18: 1 - 3**  
**22: 1 - 2**

Then Judah also had a few mediocre kings ...

### **READ**

*read as many of these as you want, but you can  
stop as soon as you notice a definite pattern*

### **1 KINGS**

**15: 11 14**  
**22: 43**

### **2 KINGS**

**12: 2 3**  
**14: 3 4**  
**15: 3 4**  
**15: 34 35**

Did you notice the pattern here? These were good kings  
... but ...

How many of us live “good ... but ...” lives?

Do you know what the high places were? Most of  
the foreign gods -- the Baals, for example -- were pagan  
fertility gods. In a desert region, people would pray to  
the male god of the sky to come and inseminate mother  
earth (and her goddess). They would set up pagan  
temples on the high places (mountains) because they  
were closer to the god of the sky there. These temples

would be filled with sacred prostitutes. If you wanted  
to entice the god of the sky to inseminate mother earth,  
the sacred prostitutes would take you outside to engage  
in an act that would ... Well, you get the picture. It was  
an interesting pagan rain dance. (By the way, mother  
earth and pagan religions still abound today.)

These kings personally followed God, but they al-  
lowed the high places to remain, they allowed others to  
worship pagan gods, they tolerated heresy in the land.

### **WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?**

In what ways do you live “good ... but ...” lives?

In what ways do you and/or our society officially wor-  
ship God, but allow the pagan places to remain?

Is it good or bad that tolerance seems to be the highest  
value in our society today?

This is totally an unofficial count of Judah’s kings. I just  
looked for the words “right” and “evil” and compiled a  
quick list. But I get 2 good kings, 15 kings that tolerated  
and embraced evil.

What was the final verdict on Judah?

### **READ**

**2 KINGS 24: 1 - 4**

### **WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?**

Let us pray: “O Lord, do not take your hand of protec-  
tion from me. Turn me from evil that I may live. Help my  
heart to be less divided so I may follow you.”

## DAY 23

Yesterday, we said, 'We won't be doing a lot of "God says today" Why? Because the kings of Israel and Judah didn't do a whole lot of listening to God.

Was God even speaking in these dark ages?

Absolutely.

This was one God's most vocal periods in history! God was speaking powerfully and passionately through the prophets.

The first two prophets we'll study are not the prophets who wrote books of the Bible. Elijah and Elisha's stories are woven into 1 and 2 Kings ...

### READ

**1 KINGS 18**

**1 KINGS 19**

**2 KINGS 2: 1 - 14**

**2 KINGS 4: 1 - 37**

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

<sup>18:36</sup>The prophet Elijah... said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel ... <sup>37</sup>... so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God..." <sup>38</sup>Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. <sup>39</sup>When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Let's draw nearer to God ... now ... and intentionally ... so that it doesn't take a fire from heaven -- or a trial in our life -- to draw us closer to God.

I'm praying that! Are you?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Elijah did what God asked ... and he got chased because of it. The queen was angry and Elijah ran until he was

so exhausted he wanted to die. But God spoke through the angel who told him, <sup>19:7</sup>"Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Being a Christian does not exempt us from trials. Fortunately, if we listen, God will speak to us a sustaining word in the midst of the trials.

Can you remember any times when God's done that for you?

Ask God to hold your remembrances of his faithfulness ever before you ... because you will need that memory (and his strength) again ...

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

<sup>19:11</sup>[The angel of the Lord] said [to Elijah], "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; <sup>12</sup>and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

God came to Elijah not in the spectacular, but in the simple, quiet moments.

My life is busy.

So is yours.

When and where is your simple quiet place and gentle holy moment of each day?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

<sup>2 Kings 2:11</sup>As [Elijah and Elisha] continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven."

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

One of my favorite old stories is of a man who dies and goes to heaven. Three people are there. To the first, St. Peter says, “You lived a wonderful life. I present to you a Rolls Royce for your journeys in heaven.” To the second man, Peter said, “You lived an exceptional life. I present to you a Mercedes Benz.” To the third man, Peter said, “Your life was ... well, adequate. I present to you an Old Volkswagon Beetle for your days in heaven.”

Three days later the man in the Rolls Royce spied the man in the Volkswagon pulled over to the side of the road, laughing hysterically. “What’s so funny,” said the man in the elegant car, “all you got was an old VW.”

The other man said, “Yes, but I just saw my pastor going by on roller skates!”

I think I’m more of VW or roller skate kind of guy than a chariot of fire saint like Elijah. But the point of this story is ... God wants his faithful servants with him for all eternity.

Join me in thanking, praising, and asking God for more faithfulness in your journey ...

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Through Elisha God essentially says to a poor widow, “I won’t let your lamp run dry,” and to a Shunammite mother, God essentially says, “Death does not have the final word when God’s around.”

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

We got a glimpse of God’s power through Elijah and Elisha. But that was only a small taste! The prophets prefigured something bigger and grander. As it says in Hebrews 1, “<sup>1</sup>In many and various ways God spoke to his people of old through the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but now in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son ...”

The miracles and resurrections that we glimpse in

the Old Testament are brought to fulfillment in Jesus.

When was the last time you had a taste of God’s power?

## DAY 24

As we turn to the writings of the prophets, I like to start with Ezekial. Why? Because Ezekial shows the three general phases of many prophetic writings ...

### A WARNING TO GOD’S PEOPLE

#### READ EZEKIAL 16

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

God chooses an image for himself and Israel. He says you are my bride and I am your bridegroom -- the one who loves you and enters into a covenant relationship with you.

That’s God’s part of the relationship.

But what about the bride? She prostitutes herself, chasing after other nations and their gods.

God, therefore, is calling Israel to turn away from her sins and return to him.

That’s the first role of most prophets. Not only are they calling God’s people to return, but they’re warning God’s people of the consequence if they don’t. (Getting conquered and cast into Exile will be the ultimate consequence of continued rebellion/prostitution.)

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

What kind of bride -- covenant partner -- are *you* in relationship with God?

### A WARNING TO OTHER NATIONS

#### READ EZEKIAL 25

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

God’s word tells us in Romans 1:19-20 that “what can be known about God is plain to [all people], because

God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse.”

The foreign nations should have known God, but they worshiped gods made with human hands rather than the creator of all things. Furthermore, they attacked, oppressed, and persecuted God’s chosen people. Therefore, chapters 25-32 are God-through-Ezekial’s pronouncement of warnings and judgments against Judah’s neighbors.

God was essentially saying in part, “My bride may be unfaithful, but she’s still my bride! So don’t mess with her.”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

I would suggest that this is a call to evangelism. Who do you know who stands angry or opposed to the gospel?

It’s obviously not up to you to judge them. Instead, love and pray for them, and begin to ponder what their stumbling block might be.

### A COMFORT TO THOSE IN EXILE

#### READ EZEKIAL 37

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

The start of this book was God’s warning to his people -- essentially, “If you don’t shape up, I’ll remove my hand of protection and foreign enemies will overrun you.”

Israel didn’t shape up.

King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians did overrun Judah.

And Israel was torn apart and scattered.

Now, the following proportions are not absolute nor accurate, but in over-simplified terms here’s what happened to the Jews in the exile:

- + A quarter of them died in Babylon’s conquest.
- + A quarter of them were carted back to Babylon as slaves.
- + A quarter were spread throughout the kingdom -- a handful in each town in the kingdom were not a threat for a rebellion, and ...
- + A quarter of them remained as a remnant in Jerusalem and Judah -- again not enough to feed a rebellion.

This was, needless to say, a very discouraging time for God’s people. In a time of pride and religious rebellion, God spoke judgment against the people of Judah. But now was a time of great despair. Therefore, God spoke again. And again it was exactly what the people needed to hear. This time it was a message of hope!

God was saying, you’re not much more than lifeless bones scattered throughout the Middle East ... *but I love you*, and I will draw these lifeless bones back together. I will stitch them together with muscle and sinews. I will breathe the breath of life, and you shall live.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Have you ever been in exile?

I love the image that God wants to speak to us exactly what we need to hear.

When I’m proud, I may not always like it, but I’m thankful that he’s willing to speak a message of judgment.

When I am afraid, I treasure every breath of hope that comes from God (and much of it is through wonderful scriptural verses).

What do you need to hear right now?

Pray that God will speak to you in your pride ... need ...  
or whatever lies between ...

## DAY 25

Today, let me introduce you -- inadequately and briefly -- to two more prophets: Isaiah and Daniel.

### READ ISAIAH 6

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

“8 Whom shall I send ... ?”

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Isaiah is probably the most read, most quoted, most famous of all the books of prophecy. Perhaps it's because of the way his ministry starts ...

Isaiah sees God!

For as big and important as I consider myself in my own imagination, the part of this story that overwhelms me is that just the hem of God's garment fills the temple.

God is great.

God is awesome.

God is holy.

I need to fall down before him as readily as Isaiah, worrying about what parts of me are unclean too.

What is the picture you carry of God in your head?

One of the best pieces of advice I've heard over the years is ... “If any presents an interpretation of God that makes God smaller, don't believe it!” How does this picture expand your picture of God?!

God said, to Isaiah, “Whom shall I send. Isaiah replied, “Here I am, send me.” What do you know in your heart that God is calling you to do, and what is your response to him?

### READ

#### DANIEL 5: 1-9, 17, 24-30

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

“<sup>25</sup>The writing [on the wall] was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN.”

#### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

By no means is “the handwriting on the wall” the main message of Daniel. Nevertheless, I couldn't pass up this message from God! Here is Daniel's interpretation of this passage and a question for each word ...

- + “<sup>26</sup>MENE means God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end.” When you hear that God has numbered your days, what's your reaction?

*Note: When I was a kid, the thought of God numbering my days was frightening. As I've grown in faith, turned a little grayer, and proclaimed the words of hope at more than a hundred funerals, I'm actually beginning to look forward to it. (I never would have guessed that I'd be this weird!)*

- + “<sup>27</sup>TEKEL means you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.” Now if I wanted a frightening word, this is it! And it's true. All of us have sinned and fall short of God's glory (see Romans 3:23-27). Therefore, before we ever jump to the promise of God's grace, let's spend a moment in confession. A holy God ought to have us bowing way down.

- + “<sup>28</sup>PERES means your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” Here's the good news ... I don't have a kingdom to divide! Nevertheless, we'd do well to remember that my life and possessions are momentary. How

might the hope and glory of eternity shape your days more fully?

## READ

**DANIEL 10: 5-14**

**DANIEL 12: 1-3**

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In Ephesians 6:12, just before advising us to take up the whole armor of God, Paul reminds us that “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

One of the most evocative images of scripture is the demonic presence in Daniel 10 that fights against all that is good and right and holy -- and heaven’s persistence in coming to us in spite of it.

Therefore, we could say that what God is saying to us here is “take up the whole armor of God” ... but we’ll save that for Ephesians.

Instead let’s focus on God’s voice through the prophecy in Daniel 12:1, “At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.”

“At that time ...” reveals God’s voice in Daniel. The book of Daniel is one of two apocalyptic books in scripture. These two books point to a cosmic battle in the last days. (Note: Other passages in scripture -- especially Jesus’ own words in Matthew 22-24 -- point to Christ’s second coming as well.)

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

All of the second coming / last-days / end-times prophecies invite us to ask the following questions:

1. Are you ready?

2. Will you stand firm in faith when a day of persecution comes?

Wait ... your day of persecution may not wait until the end times!

Throughout the ages, Christians have faced persecution. In fact -- almost unbelievably -- the persecution is actually worse today than its ever been.

Therefore, a point equal in Daniel and Revelation to end times itself is the call to stand firm in faith in times of trial.

Daniel did when he was thrown in the Lion’s Den (Dan 6).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did when they were thrown in the furnace of blazing fire (Dan 3).

How about you?

If persecution came to your life and your family what would you do?

(Did you notice that I asked “what would you do” instead of “what would you hope you’d do”? Pray with me now for a faith that’s bolder and more steadfast.)

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

## DAY 26

In a sixty-day Bible study, we don’t have near enough time to study all of the prophets. Therefore, today I want to give you a taste of some of the rest of the prophets.

Our pattern in this Bible study is to look for “God said.” Here are a handful of things “God said” to his chosen people ... including you and me.

Now ... since I will reference so many passages today, I have cut and paste them into this booklet for your ease.

For you, this is efficient. I would recommend, however, that you be inefficient! Why not find and underline them in your Bible?! (Seeing them in their original context, will certainly help you understand them better.)

To guide your thoughts as you are reading, let me tell you in advance the three questions I will ask you at the end:

- + Which passage was your favorite?
- + Which passage challenged you the most personally?
- + Which passage do you think sounds most like God? least like God?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

### **JEREMIAH 1: 7 - 9**

The Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. ... Now I have put my words in your mouth.”

### **JEREMIAH 1: 19**

They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you.

### **JEREMIAH 2: 2 - 5**

Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord: I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. [But] what wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?

### **JEREMIAH 2: 22**

Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, says the Lord God.

### **JEREMIAH 9: 25 - 26**

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will attend to all those who are circumcised only in the foreskin ... All the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart. This is what the LORD says: “Cursed are those who trust in mortals, who depend on flesh for their strength and whose hearts turn away from the LORD.”

### **JEREMIAH 31: 33**

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

### **HOSEA 1: 2**

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.”

### **JOEL 2: 19; 20**

In response to his people the Lord said: I am sending you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a mockery among the nations. I will remove the northern army far from you, and drive it into a parched and desolate land, its front into the eastern sea, and its rear into the western sea; its stench and foul smell will rise up. Surely he has done great things! 21 Do not fear ...

### **JONAH 4: 1 - 4**

Jonah ... became angry ... He prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? [I knew you would relent from punishing the people of Nineveh; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” And the Lord said, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

### **AMOS 8: 11**

The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.

### **MICAH 5: 10 - 14**

In that day, says the Lord, I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots; and I will cut off the cities of your land ... I will cut off sorceries from your hand ... and I will uproot your sacred poles from among you. And in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey.

### **NAHUM 3: 5**

I am against you, says the Lord of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame.

### **HAGGAI 1: 1 - 11**

In the second year of King Darius ... the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel ... governor of Judah and to Joshua ... the high priest: "These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house. [But] consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes. ... You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses. ... Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills ...

### **ZECHARIAH 1: 3**

Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.

### **ZECHARIAH 1: 16 2: 5**

Therefore, thus says the Lord, I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; my house shall be built in it, says the Lord of hosts ... I will be a wall of fire all around it, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within it.

### **ZECHARIAH 2: 6**

Up, up! Flee from the land of the north, says the Lord; for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven, says the Lord.

### **ZECHARIAH 3: 7 - 9**

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts ... and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day.

### **ZECHARIAH 8: 17**

Do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord.

### **MALACHI 1: 6**

A son honors his father, and servants their master. If then I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the Lord of hosts ... to you, O priests, who despise my name. ...

### **MALACHI 3: 10**

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

### **WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US? - FAVORITE**

Which passage was your favorite? Why?

### **WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US? - CHALLENGING**

In a personal, devotional sense, which passage challenged you the most personally?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US? - SOUNDS LIKE

Which passage do you think sounds the most like God?

Which passage do you think sounds the least like God?

When we say a passage sounds least like God, this presents us with challenge. We either need to say the Bible must be wrong ... or I must be wrong!

Which do you think is most likely?!!

I don't know about you, but I'd rather base my life on "what God says" than "what Ed says." Therefore, whenever something "doesn't sound like God," that means it's usually time for me to start *expanding my understanding of God*.

Now, it's not that all the things I want to believe about God are necessarily wrong, it's just that God is bigger than my finite mind is currently comprehending.

In what way, therefore, do you need to expand your picture of God based on these revelations from God through the prophets?

## DAY 27

Today is a lot like yesterday ... *except even more fun!*

Today I've cut and pasted again. This time, though, the passages are simply some of the most wonderful and evocative verses in all of scripture! In these passages, we may not actually see the words "God said"; nevertheless, God was clearly speaking through his prophets to Israel, Judah, and you and me.

And so you can be thinking about it ... the questions we'll ask at the end of these verses are about the same as we asked yesterday ...

+ Which passage was your favorite?

+ Which passage challenged you the most personally?

+ Which passage do you think sounds most like God? least like God?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

### JEREMIAH 29: 11

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

### ISAIAH 61: 1-2

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

### MICAH 6: 8

He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

### ISAIAH 40: 31

But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

### ISAIAH 64: 6

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

### ISAIAH 55: 8

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

### ZECCHARIAH 12: 10

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and

they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”

### **ISAIAH 41: 10**

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

### **ISAIAH 55: 1**

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

### **ISAIAH 11: 6**

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

Isaiah 55:6

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

### **ISAIAH 48: 17**

This is what the LORD says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.” (NIV)

### **JEREMIAH 1: 5**

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

### **EZEKIEL 36: 26**

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

### **DANIEL 12: 2**

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

### **JOEL 2: 28**

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”

### **JOEL 2: 12-13**

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. [HYPERLINK “?verse=22325”](#)Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

### **JONAH 3: 4, 5, 10**

Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. ... When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

### **MALACHI 3: 8**

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ “In tithes and offerings.”

### **NAHUM 1: 2, 7, 3**

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and vents his wrath against his enemies. The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him. The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet.

### **ZEPHANIAH 1: 2: 3: 17**

“I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. ... and ... “The LORD your God is

with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”

### **MALACHI 3: 6**

“I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.”

### **MALACHI 4: 5**

“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”

### **WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US? - FAVORITE**

Which passage was your favorite? Why?

### **WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US? - CHALLENGING**

In a personal, devotional sense, which passage challenged you the most personally?

### **WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US? - SOUNDS LIKE**

Which passage do you think sounds the most like God?

Which passage do you think sound the least like God?

As we said yesterday ... when we say a passage sounds least like God, this presents us with challenge. We either need to say the Bible must be wrong ... or I must be wrong! Since you and I are more likely the one who is wrong, in what ways, therefore, might you need to expand your picture of God based on these revelations from God through the prophets?

## **DAY 28**

What is prophecy?

If you ask most people -- including myself twenty

years ago -- the answer would clearly be “prediction.”

That’s why I intentionally didn’t start our look at the prophets with today’s topic -- Messianic Prophecy. What we’ve seen today is that the prophets primarily spoke to the people and situations of their own day. Some of their prophecies were indeed warnings about future trials, but the future they were talking about was expected in their own generation -- “If we don’t turn soon, we’ll be in big trouble.”

So hear that clearly before we turn to their longer-term prophecies -- most prophecy was directed to the people of the prophet’s own generation. (AND it speaks to you and me a hundred generations later because we keep finding ourselves in the same predicaments!)

With that as a prelude, we turn to one of the most powerful parts of the Bible -- the Messianic prophecies. A thousand years before the birth of Jesus, the prophets began to foretell the coming of the Messiah!

Hope of Israel -- an organization of Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah -- states that there are 324 Messianic prophecies. Other sources put the figure well over three hundred too. Let’s take a look at a few of the better known prophecies, starting with the most powerful prophecy of all ...

### **READ ISAIAH 53**

### **WHAT DOES GOD SAY?**

Seven hundred years before the cross — before the brutal practice of crucifixion was even invented — listen to the specificity with which Isaiah described the final hours in the life of Jesus -- the suffering servant.

### **WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?**

God knew the brutality of the cross — yet he loved the world so much that he still sent his Son.

Jesus knew the cost of salvation — yet he loves you so much that he offered himself as a suffering servant.

With this in mind, do you believe ... do you really

believe ... deep down to you core ... in spite of your imperfections ... in God's amazing love for you?

If so, thank him, thank him, thank him!

If not pray that your heart may be opened to the love and grace of our God.

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Three hundred and twenty four Messianic prophecies - that's huge!

I'm not a mathematician but I've heard someone say that if the odds of fulfilling each prophecy were just 50-50, then the odds of fulfilling just forty of the best known would be about one in a trillion.

Here are a few of the best known.

Again I've put these verses in the text so that you can reference them more quickly. Nevertheless, I'd encourage you to find them in your own Bible and underline them.

## THE CHILD

ISAIAH 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

## THE VIRGIN

ISAIAH 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

## THE GENEALOGY

MATTHEW 1:1,6 the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David ... and Jesse the father of King David. ISAIAH 16:5, 11:10 In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness. ... In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

## THE CITY

MICAH 5:2 But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

## THE REGION

MATTHEW 2:23, 4:13-16 So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene." ... Leaving Nazareth, [Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali — to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles — the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." (SEE ISAIAH 9:1-2)

## THE PERSECUTION

MATTHEW 2:16-18 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." (SEE JEREMIAH 31:15)

## THE JOURNEY

HOSEA 11:1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. MATTHEW 2:14-15 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

The Gentiles

## THE GENTILES

ISAIAH 49:6 ... I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the

earth.” MATTHEW 12:17-21 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “Here is my servant whom I have chosen ... I will put my Spirit on him ... A bruised reed he will not break ... In his name the nations will put their hope.”

### THE HEALINGS

ISAIAH 35:5-6A Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

### THE RELEASE

ISAIAH 61:1-2 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, LUKE 4:16-21 “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

### THE CORNERSTONE

PSALM 118:22-23 The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. (SEE MATTHEW 21:42)

### THE BETRAYAL

ZECHARIAH 11:12-13 ... So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter” ... MATTHEW 26:14-15, 27:3-10 Judas Iscariot ... went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty silver coins ... When Judas ... saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders ... “They took the thirty silver coins ... and they used them to buy the potter’s field ...”

### THE SCATTERING

MATTHEW 26:31 Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

“ `I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” (SEE ZECHARIAH 13:7)

### THE CROSS

Psalm 22: We covered this in our reading of the Psalms, but this Psalm is powerful and specific as it talks about his bones being out of joint, his mouth being dry, the evildoers scoffing, the casting of lots for his clothing, etc.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

God has spent several hundred years laying out plans for the future. Do you believe he has specific plans for you?

What are you hearing that they are?

## DAY 29

We’re almost at the end of the Old Testament. Let’s glimpse three more books -- Ruth, Esther, and Job.

### 1 - RUTH

The setting for the book of Ruth is during the end of the time of the Judges -- in fact, it is precisely three generations before David will rise as King.

- + Because of a famine in Judah, a family moves from Bethlehem to foreign land of Moab.
- + Naomi’s two sons get married.
- + Naomi’s husband and her two sons die.
- + Naomi decides to move back to Bethlehem.
- + One of Naomi’s daughter’s-in-law -- Ruth -- goes with her.
- + Naomi and Ruth have no way to support themselves.
- + To eat, they glean leftovers from the field of Boaz -- one of Naomi’s relatives.
- + Boaz redeems Ruth by marrying her.
- + He is called her “kinsman redeemer” -- which is a prefiguring of Christ’s redeeming his kin, us.

- + Boaz has a son named Obed. Obed has a son named Jesse. Jesse has a son named David -- who becomes King. David has an ancestor named Jesus.

## READ RUTH 1

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

In the Word of God, Naomi says “<sup>20</sup>call me Mara” -- which means bitter; nevertheless, Ruth says, “<sup>16</sup>Where you go, I will go ... Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Are all of God’s people “your people”? Who do you have trouble loving?

## 2 - ESTHER

The Book of Esther occurs just after the Babylonian Exile, probably during Persia’s short reign. At this point in history, the Jews, including Esther and her family, were dispersed throughout the Middle East.

Here’s a quick summary of this book ...

- + Esther is a Jew.
- + Not aware that she’s a Jew, the king marries her.
- + Haman works for King.
- + Haman wants to get rid of the Jews.
- + Mordecai, Esther’s cousin, realizes the plot.
- + Haman wants, therefore, to kill Mordecai most of all.
- + Mordecai tries to talk Esther into standing up for the Jews.
- + Esther is hesitant because this could get her killed.
- + In the end, this is a tale of bravery and faith.

## READ ESTHER 7

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Here’s an odd piece of trivia. What’s the only book in

scripture that doesn’t mention God by name?

The answer, of course, is Esther.

So what does God say? Nothing directly. Nevertheless, this Word of God encourages us to stand up for our faith and for God’s people.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

What do you think you need to stand up for more in your life?

## 3 - JOB

Here’s a quick summary of the very strange and little-affirming book of Job ...

- + Job was a prosperous man who praised God.
- + Satan made a wager with God, saying essentially that if God took his hand off Job, Job would quit worshiping God.
- + Now comes the hardest part of the story to reconcile with what we know about God -- God said to Satan, “1:1 Very well, all that [Job] has in your power.”
- + Satan wiped Job out.
- + Job’s wealth disappeared.
- + Job’s health disappeared.
- + Job’s children even died.
- + By Job 3:1, Job was cursing the day he was born.
- + Three unhelpful friends keep coming to Job, insisting that he must have committed a horrible sin.
- + What follows is a long discourse into the problem of evil.
- + After about forty chapters, God challenges Job, and Job, who’s been very prideful all along, is finally humbled. Essentially the Lord says, “Job, can you create the earth?” (That’s my summary of Job 40 and 41) Job finally and humbly replies,

“<sup>42:1</sup>I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted ... <sup>2</sup>Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me.”

- + Job ends without all his questions being answered ... and yet he ends with hope, faith, and trust!
- + Job's fortunes are restored to him two-fold.

## READ JOB 42

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Here's my summary of Job 40 and 41. God says, "I am God; you're not."

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Alright, if you've gone back to the beginning of this book and are trying to figure out why God took his hand of protection off Job, then join the club!

My brain keeps rushing toward some logical-sounding answers like "It's just a story. It didn't really happen" ... or ... "God just did this once to one man so that none of the rest of us would have to endure it to make these points" ... or ...

That's the rational, human, need-a-nice-answer-right-now side of me. But the faith part of me reaches for a different answer: "I don't understand. I can't explain evil. But like Job, I want to end each of these and similar ponderings with Job's hope and faith and trust!"

What in this life keeps you most from faith, hope and trust?

Job tells us that God's ways are "too wonderful for [us]." Pray that you may be able to see God and wonder even in the midst of life's trials.

*Wait ... "keep your chin up when times are hard" is a crummy answer, isn't it? But what we always need is a little perspective. God and wonder are always woven together in this sinful, broken world. For example, in one hospital room one family is asking "Why?" as they lament a tragedy and a death. In the next hospital room, however, the next family is rejoicing at the joy and wonder of a birth. Therefore, we cannot ever say that God and wonder are not present. It's just in one room it's veiled. Behind the veil, however, God comforts the grieving and raises the dead. Our problem is that we look from the perspective of earth. Hope comes from the vantage-point of heaven.*

## DAY 30

### READ

#### EZRA 1

#### NEHEMIAH 1, 2, 8

Ezra and Nehemiah, the namesakes for the two last people we'll study in the Old Testament, are two of the most important -- and overlooked -- people in the hall of faith. Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor were responsible for much of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and Jewish nation after the Exile.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

As Christians, many of us have the tendency to think that we, like the Jews, are God's chosen people. Therefore, if God's going to do anything, it's going to be through us!

It would do us good to realize that this story begins with a foreigner who doesn't even believe in God. In order to bring his people home, God first began working on the heart of King Cyrus of Persia.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

Have you ever seen God moving in unexpected places?!

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Pay close attention to Nehemiah's road to becoming governor.

- + He started as a cupbearer to the king who had a burden on his heart.
- + For days he mourned and wept when he comprehended the condition of his native land.
- + Then he prayed ... and prayed ... and prayed.
- + Prayer aligned Nehemiah with God's wisdom and opened a door with King Artaxerxes, allowing him to rebuild Jerusalem's wall and restore the glory of God's city.

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

What are you so concerned about that you are weeping and worrying?

What keeps you from praying and/or aligning yourself more fully with God?

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

One of my favorite passages in all of scripture is in Nehemiah 8:5. The wall has been completed, Jerusalem is being restored, the people gathered for a celebration, "and Ezra opened the book ... and when he opened it, all the people stood up."

That's the power of the Word of God, and that's the reverence we need to have for it. God is alive and active and good.

When the people stood up, they began, in some ways, the most alive period in Jewish history. No, they wouldn't have the peace and prosperity that they had during David's reign. Nevertheless, in this moment, the people who'd rejected God's laws for a thousand years and persecuted the prophets, finally made God, law, and scripture the center of their faith!

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?

That's a great way to end this section on the Old Testament: "God, center my life around your Word!"

## DAY 31

### YOU MADE IT TO THE FINISH LINE

### NOW READ ONE LAST THING ...

Do you remember the story about the woman who wanted to be buried with a fork in her hand? Whenever we're told to keep our forks, we know that something better is coming!

You've journeyed through the Old Testament, but that's barely the appetizer. The New Testament is the feast! It is main course and dessert! It is Christmas and Easter. It is forgiveness, hope, and resurrection. It is the fulfillment of all the prophesies. *It is Jesus himself!*

Therefore, let me suggest two ways to keep your faith and this journey going -- the first is self-paced, the second is online with me.

### A CHAPTER A DAY ...

Did you know it takes two weeks to form a habit. Don't waste these last four weeks. Keep it going!

Turn to the New Testament and read a chapter a day. This reading will be on your own but you're absolutely ready for it! Here's some quick tips to help:

- + Ask the same questions: "What does God say?" and "What, therefore, is God saying to me?"
- + Make a plan -- it keeps you accountable -- but start with the Gospels. In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, it's easy and wonderful to hear God's voice. Why? Because every time the Jesus speaks, that's the voice of God!
- + Get a good Study Bible -- then you're never on your own! It will help focus your reading and answer your questions.

## A VERSE A DAY ...

The second option is an online Bible Study with me. I aim to make it short, pointed, and daily (or at least as daily I can make it!).

I'll start with the words of Jesus -- probably a phrase or two at a time.

WHAT I REALLY HOPE that you'll do is treat my daily devotions as a snack -- quick and tasty.

But I pray that your own Bible reading -- a chapter or two a day -- will become your daily feast!

You don't have to know everything.

You just need a hunger.

## EPILOGUE

### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Over the years, I've heard people say, "I don't like the God of the Old Testament. He's mean ... cruel ... judgmental."

I don't see it that way at all. If the Old Testament tells me anything about God, it's that he's patient! There was a lot of human thick-headedness and rebellion from Genesis to Malachi. Therefore, the Old Testament teaches me that God is patient.

It also teaches me that he had a plan.

GOD'S PLAN FROM THE BEGINNING was to send his Son.

Why? Because he knew several things:

1. If he created human beings, he would love them! (That's who God is -- love!)
2. If he created human beings, they would rebel and sin. (Any being that is not God is by definition imperfect and fallible.)
3. Therefore, God in his love would have to redeem them himself. (Why? Because in our im-

perfection, no matter how hard we'll try, we'll always and inevitably fall back into sin.)

4. This redemption would cost God personally, and the cost would be blood -- death.
5. To pay this debt, he would send his Son.

This begs two questions: Why are blood and death the proper payment for sin? And if there were generations of sin -- and God was going to send his Son anyway -- why did God wait so long to send the redeemer?

WHY ARE BLOOD AND DEATH the proper payment for sin?

One of my favorite scenes is from the old movie *Camelot*. King Arthur is a just king. In a violent age, he draws the factions together at a round table and establishes a rule of law.

King Arthur is also a loving husband. However, his cherished queen, Guinevere, has a fickle heart. She is caught in an affair with the great knight Lancelot, and the penalty for cheating is, of course, death.

Merlin's smile is evil and delighted as he whispers to Arthur,

"What a magnificent dilemma!

Let her die, your life is over;  
let her live, your life's a fraud.

Which will it be --  
kill the queen or kill the law?"

That is our God and -- to use the repeated image of the prophets -- we're the straying bride. If God let's us live, his holiness, justice, and purity are a fraud. If he let's us die, his loving heart is crushed.

What a magnificent dilemma!

What, therefore, is the answer? The penalty must be paid ... and yet God's love cannot let us go. Therefore, he sends his Son. His Son takes on our sin, our death, our penalty.

Over the years, a friend has told the story of little boy in his congregation disobeying his mother, riding his bike in a very dangerous place, and getting killed by a car.

At the funeral reception, the pastor couldn't find the mother. Walking outside, he saw her standing by alone looking into the sky. He expected questions like, "How could God ...?" and "Why?" What she said, transformed the pastors faith.

"I can't believe how much God loves us. Now I know how much it hurts to lose a son. How could he do that voluntarily for us?"

What a magnificent dilemma.

What a magnificent love!

SO ... IF THERE WERE GENERATIONS OF SIN -- and God was going to send his Son anyway -- why did God wait so long to send the Redeemer?

My answer: *He had to eliminate all our excuses!*

Let me give you some examples ...

- + Have you ever heard anyone say, "How come God didn't just make everything perfect?" God says, "I did -- Garden of Eden! But perfect didn't work. Adam and Eve had everything and still rebelled."
- + Have you ever heard anyone say, "How come God didn't just make everything like one big happy family?" God says, "I did! But what happened in the first family? Cain killed his brother Abel."
- + Have you ever heard anyone say, "How come God doesn't just start all over again?" God says, "I did! But even the most righteous man in the whole world couldn't get off the boat, stay sober, and not humiliate his family."
- + Have you ever heard anyone say, "How come God doesn't choose one group of people and work with them so closely that they follow his

will?" God says, "I did! But it didn't work perfectly for Abraham and his descendents back then (and it doesn't work perfectly for us and the church now either)."

- + Have you ever heard anyone say, "How come God doesn't just give us a sign." God says, "I gave the people of Israel ten signs in a row *and then* I parted the Red Sea. But how many days journey was it into the wilderness before my people started complaining? Three days! The effects of signs and wonders lasts three days."
- + Have you ever heard anyone say, "How come God doesn't send kings ... and prophets ... and teachers ... and warnings." God says, "I did! But my people ignored all of them."
- + Have you ever heard anyone say, "If people could only learn to work better together." God says, "When people building things together -- like the tower of Babel -- they revel in their accomplishments and think that they are God."
- + Have you ever heard anyone say, "How come God didn't just give us rules, laws, and clear instructions to follow." God says, "I did! But my people mostly ignored them for the first thousand years, and then when they started following them, they turned them -- by the time of Jesus -- into the legalism of the Pharisees."

#### WHY DID GOD SEND HIS SON WHEN HE DID?

He had to get rid of all our excuses!

We need to trust that if God had sent his Son one minute sooner, we would have said, "We don't need a Savior; we can do it ourselves." The point is ... we can't.

What's the connection between Old and New Testaments? It shows us our need for a Savior.

Now, let's begin our New Testament journey! Let us greet the Savior. Amen.