

**THE GOSPEL PROJECT  
FOR STUDENTS**  
LEADER GUIDE / FALL 2016  
VOLUME 5, NUMBER 1

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**Printed in the  
United States of America**

*The Gospel Project® for Students  
Leader Guide*  
(ISSN 2163-0917; Item 005508633)  
is published quarterly by  
LifeWay Christian Resources  
One LifeWay Plaza,  
Nashville, TN 37234  
Thom S. Rainer, President.

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Church Resources Customer Service, One  
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# FROM THE EDITOR



**Andy McLean**

Editor

*The Gospel Project  
for Students*

As with every volume in our chronological study through the Bible, our journey through the pages of the Old Testament exposes us to some familiar names and characters in Scripture. The lives and stories associated with such figures not only teach us about their role in God's Story of redemption, but also about the character of God and His desire to draw people into a saving relationship with Him.

Many of you will likely recognize familiar names such as Elijah, Isaiah, and Jonah. You will probably also be able to recall a story or two about each of these characters; maybe you remember reading about Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel or Jonah's reluctance to preach to the Ninevites. However, as you walk through these events and stories, keep in mind exactly who is the main character—God. These stories aren't ultimately about Elijah or Jonah or even the extraordinary details surrounding their ministries. These stories are about God and what He reveals to us about Himself through the lives of these biblical heroes of the faith. When we keep this vision in mind, we walk away from these accounts with a clearer vision of a God who actively reveals Himself in the lives of His people. And in doing so, we cultivate a deeper love for the One who actively pursues people for His name's sake and their good and joy.

God recorded the lives of these biblical characters for our benefit, so we could learn from and imitate them (Heb. 13:7). But even more so, God has given us the privilege of seeing who their lives ultimately pointed to—God Himself!

# AUTHORS

## UNIT 1



**MARY JO SHARP** (sessions 1,2,4) is an assistant professor of apologetics at Houston Baptist University and is the founder and director of Confident Christianity, a non-profit apologetics ministry. A clear communicator with a heart for people, she finds great joy in sharing the deep truths of her Lord and Savior. She and her husband, Roger, have one daughter.



**ADAM DOOLEY** (sessions 3,5,6) serves as the senior pastor of Sunnyvale First Baptist Church on the northeast side of Dallas. He is a two-time graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he has also served as an adjunct professor. Adam is married to Heather, and they have three sons and one daughter.

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## UNIT 2



**MICHAEL KELLEY** (sessions 7-13) lives in Nashville, Tennessee, with his wife, Jana, and their three children: Joshua, Andi, and Christian. He serves as the Director of Discipleship for LifeWay Christian Resources. Michael speaks across the country at churches, conferences, and retreats and is the author of three Bible studies and the book *Wednesdays Were Pretty Normal: A Boy, Cancer, and God*.

# HOW TO USE

## ▶ INTRO

The two introductory pages begin with a summary that provides a brief overview of the session, including a list of Scriptures. The main point is also listed here, as well as two introductory options to choose from to begin the session.

## ▶ HIS STORY

The five His Story pages contain the main teaching material for each session. This section follows the storyline of the Bible, focusing on what God has done in redemptive history throughout the pages of Scripture. The first page restates the main point that is to be emphasized throughout the session and is followed by an overview of the main characters. There is also an introductory plot that serves as a transitional entryway to the main part of the session that begins on the following page.

In addition to these, there are other things to notice throughout the His Story section:

- **Personal Study Guide:** Any time you see a vertical bar in the His Story section, it indicates that the material can also be found in the student's personal study guide.
- **Timeline:** Each session features a timeline of events that corresponds to the timeline located in the student's personal study guide.
- **Going Further With The Story:** Most sessions will include at least one of these. They contain additional material that allows leaders to go deeper into the biblical story. It is up to the leader's discretion whether he or she would like to utilize this material in any way. One can simply bypass this option, however, and not miss anything vital to the session.

## 01 SESSION ONE

# Elijah Faces the Prophets of Baal

### SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see how the prophet Elijah demonstrated the stark contrast between the demands placed on us by the pursuing false god and the covenant God promise for us to pursue our relationship with Him. In the end, one person loses an idol and is used by the other built up by and sustained by us, we see our commitment to others.

### SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 18:17-39

### THE POINT

**Pursuing false gods leads to enslavement, but submission to the one true God leads to freedom.**

### INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

#### Option 1

In recent months, hearing names like Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao seems like an every day thing through MMA (MFC) and mixed martial arts. These names and much longer than that of challenge, honor, and victory. Last year's most popular was between Brandon Rousey and Holly Holm. Both women were considered as they headed into UFC's (Ultimate Fighting Championship) on November 14, 2015, the UFC on world leading promotions in Orlando, Florida, who had been in conflict of her victory. She knocked her out early in the second round. Rousey was heavily favored to win the fight, yet Holm emerged as the victor.

Just as Rousey represents unblemished Holm's, prophet Elijah was considered 400 to one. He prepared a seemingly simple challenge to King Ahab, who had the long tradition against the prophets and many different ways to go Baal to ensure there, but no answer came. However, Elijah made a much toward the area and filled with water, and then asked the other would stand there. The king and prophets of Baal most likely rejected Baal's victory. Yet, God provided a sign of "victory" showing the prophet of Baal, who was the one true God, God was, in fact, always will be victorious, no matter the odds.

- What prompts you to doubt God's power when the odds of victory seem impossible?
- Do you think you would respond to the challenge as Elijah did, with complete faith that God would emerge victorious? Why or why not? What can you do to change your outlook on this?

#### Option 2

The tradition of mind from watching the one true God or watching Baal. Just as God had instructed them not to do, they thought something to do with. We all know something. Even if we don't know down to an inch of detail, we all know something to do with. We all know that if "god" is not here, we are the students to let things that could only become idols. Begin the discussion with an example such as money, popularity, social media, and so on. Allow a few minutes of discussion, then answer the following questions as a group.

- The teacher's inability to decide between Baal and God plainly revealed their identity. When we find a hard choice between Baal and God, what do we learn about the hidden idols in our lives?
- Why do you think the Bible discusses identity so often? Why does God express such contempt for idolatry in the lives of His people?

## HIS STORY 15-20 MINUTES

### THE POINT

**Pursuing false gods leads to enslavement, but submission to the one true God leads to freedom.**

### CHARACTERS

- The True God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Elijah: prophet of God who faced 400 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel

### PLOT

As we continue our journey through the Bible, we arrive at a time in Israel's history when God's covenant character to His people in a number of ways. God was not hiding; He chose to reveal Himself to the world as we study, and the people who will encounter, we will see the characteristics of our loving and powerful God on display.

### ELIJAH CONFRONTS THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Other times when people find out the story of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, their initial response is to wonder why the Israelites were allowed enough to have fallen so easily into worship of the other gods. Why were there not more Christians who were more faithful and better followers of the one true God? The level of devotion of your god. However, as we go throughout this story, we begin to see that people today are not that different from people thousands of years ago, especially when it comes to learning not being left to God.

Today's society has become so desensitized that we think intelligent people constantly compare everything. Our society's materialistic society has led to an increasing "ah-ha" or "oh my" of things that, which is why they are called "ah-ha" or "oh my" things. "Elijah took a similar position when the Israelites were not that faithful and better followers of the one true God.

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troublemaker from another land?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your fathers' idols, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 400 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who are at the people's side." So Ahab sent for all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel, and Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I have only one thing to propose of the Lord, Baal's prophets are 450 men. Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it pieces and lay it on the wood and put fire to it. And you will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put fire to it. And you will call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is the Lord's God." (1 Kings 18:17-24)

### GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

The prophet's initial call to the people to stop the idolatry by building altars to the true God was not to be taken lightly. It was a call to the people to choose between the false gods and the true God. The prophet's initial call to the people to stop the idolatry by building altars to the true God was not to be taken lightly. It was a call to the people to choose between the false gods and the true God.

### TIMELINE

**ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL**  
Elijah publicly showed that he was a prophet of the true God.

**ELIJAH'S CONFRONTATION**  
Elijah faces the 400 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah.

**THE REVELATION OF MAANAN**  
The people witness the power of the true God.

## HIS STORY 15-20 MINUTES

### THE POINT

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**THE REVELATION OF MAANAN**  
The people witness the power of the true God.

# THIS STUDY

- **Essential Doctrines:** Each session will also contain an essential doctrine that directly relates to the Bible study material. The essential doctrine is also located in the student's personal study guide, though in an abbreviated format.
- **Christ Connection:** Each session will end with a direct look at how the content studied connects with Christ, emphasizing to students how all of Scripture is pointing to Him. The material in the Christ Connection will also be provided in the student's personal study guide.

## ▶ YOUR STORY

The Your Story section is designed to connect what God has done in the past to students' lives today by introducing group discussion questions that highlight how God's Story connects with their story. There are lead-ins with each question in the Leader Guide to help the leader walk students through each question.

## ▶ YOUR MISSION

The Your Mission section is designed to show how God's Story is capable of creating lasting transformation into how we think, feel, and live from day to day. By doing so, we emphasize to students that every session goes beyond mere Bible study to a calling to be on mission with God.

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

The final page of each session points leaders to additional resources that can be used in conjunction with each study. The resources listed, such as teaching tips videos and One Conversations, are designed to help leaders prepare for each session. There is also information about the leader pack posters that can be used with each session.

In the contest between Elijah and prophets Baal, Elijah left his men the prophets to continue making the people of God. He passed to reach upon the sacrifice that there was no way it could naturally burn, and no incense could be brought to the altar. He did not even exchange words for a challenge, as physical evidence for God's glory to be denied. Elijah also rebuked the altar, a visual reminder to the leaders of their identity as the people of God. Though many may neglect who you are as a Christian, God never forgets your identity as His.

And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word." Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back. "Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." (1 Kings 18:36-39)

With no flinching, no wailing or shouting, no self-satisfaction, and no outrageous religious gestures or reactions, Elijah called upon God to show Himself to the true God. Notice Elijah's intention and motive when he said, "Answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." Elijah's prayer was for God to receive the honor and glory of His incomparable. The people, upon seeing God's swift and powerful response, fell to the ground in reverence proclaiming, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." (1 Kings 18:36-39)

Why do you think God responded this way? Answer will vary.

Why do you think God responded this way? Answer will vary.

**CHRIST CONNECTION**

No matter where we are in life, one thing is clear from this passage: God is in us. In the battle between truth and falsehood, we see that the falsehood endures and blinds our sin. However, the truth faces us and gives back to us the real God. The prophet of God saw Himself and did not give the attention of the god. The true God of the universe did and did for His creation, not because of some great need or because of some righteousness. The God who is worthy of worship offers redemption to us before we even recognize we need it. Remember to look at the way. The truth we need will work at the right time. Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would even give to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES**

**GROUP QUESTIONS**

- Elijah stood on the side of truth in the midst of widespread opposition to him and his belief in God. What are some ways we can do the same in our own culture today? For this question, it might be helpful to start with some examples where Christians face opposition in our culture today. Then move on to discuss ways in which Christians can respond in both and love to those challenges.
- Elijah confronted the false prophets, not to show that he was superior, but so they would know God is the one true God who could turn their hearts to Him. What does this tell us our motivation should be today when we stand for truth? If there is one that we should care more for the spiritual state of others than just winning an argument or being powerful.
- Why is it important to see that God's display of power was not only for His glory, but so that the people might also turn from their false gods to the one true God? In short, it is important to show that God's glory and our own personal good and joy are not contradictory, but are rather like two sides of the same coin.
- How has this session challenged you personally? Answers will vary.

**HIS STORY**

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy
- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- 1 Samuel
- 2 Samuel
- 1 Kings
- 2 Kings
- 1 Chronicles
- 2 Chronicles
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Esther
- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Lamentations
- Ezekiel
- Daniel
- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi
- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke
- John
- Acts
- Romans
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians
- 1 Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- James
- 1 Peter
- 2 Peter
- 1 John
- 2 John
- 3 John
- Revelation

**YOUR STORY**

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**YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES**

**HEAD**

No matter what century or culture you are in, one thing is for certain across the ages—humans will always struggle. That's why we have had to sacrifice to find a way of many different things: hot logic, claims, courts, subsidies, politics, money, possessions, faith, and love. Though the modern Western mind sometimes struggles with the concept of a deity and great people, we are still in a worship-like state of something when we sacrifice our lives on the altar of this thing.

- How you explain the difference between sacrificing your life for a false god and allowing God's sacrifice to give you life? Answers will vary.
- What are some "idols" that have been established in your life that have caused you to neglect your relationship to God? Answers to their will vary, but may include things like possessions, sports, group projects, and jobs.

**HEART**

As we see with Elijah and the people of his day, the real problems in our own society today is spiritual idolatry. Spiritual idolatry ultimately leads to spiritual drought and destruction. We constantly look for peace, love, and grace in things that are incapable of bringing them to us in a lasting sense. And when we do that, we end up rejecting the Creator instead of the Creator. It is only when our eyes are opened we can look up and see that the true God, and see the things He has made, in the name of all we need and do.

- What are some of the things that attract a person's loyalty in our current culture, thus compromising their loyalty to God? Answers will vary.
- How can we show others that loyalty and faithfulness to God are better than those worldly loyalties? Answers will vary.

**HANDS**

When the people of God spent the majority of their time and energy on the things of this world, they quickly realize that the desire to please God's desires to others is reduced. This is because they lose up our time and energy and display it, often demanding much of our physical and spiritual resources. The true God of the Bible has a back up destination for us, so that we have the potential to be effective witnesses to the power and grace of God.

- Can you name any "false gods" in our day that consume our time and effort (in preference to both Christians and non-Christians)? Answers will vary.
- Can you think of why these things take so much of our time and effort? Answers will vary.

**ADDITIONAL INFO**

**LEADER PACK**

For this session, print students to pack item #4, which contains individual cut-outs of a quote pertaining to the session. Feel free to use these out ahead of time and distribute to your students to use as bookmarks.

**SOURCES**

1 King 18:36-39, "Elijah Shows Victory Again. All you need to know about 1K 18:36-39" (BibleProject.com, November 13, 2015, <http://www.bibleproject.com/sermons/1king-18-36-39-epijah-shows-victory-again>).

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- Leader Training Videos
- One Conversations
- Missional Studies resources from Midweek Study, go to <http://www.gospelforstudents.com/759FALAC.html>
- Circular Timeline Poster
- App (for both leader and student)

Address suggestions for specific groups are available at [GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources). And for free online training on how to lead a group visit [Missionary.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://Missionary.com/web/TheGospelProject).

Don't forget to check out these additional resources to help equip you for each session.

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# 01

## SESSION ONE

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# Elijah Faces the Prophets of Baal

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we see how the prophet Elijah demonstrated the stark contrast between the demand placed on our lives by pursuing false idols and the resources God provides for us to pursue our relationship with Him. In the end, one pursuit leaves us bled dry and used up; the other builds us up and ministers to us, so we can minister to others.

### SCRIPTURE

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1 Kings 18:17-39

# THE POINT

---

**Pursuing false gods leads to enslavement, but submission to the one true God leads to freedom.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

---

### Option 1

In sports media, hearing names like Floyd Mayweather and Manny Paquiao seems like an every day thing. *Boxing. MMA. UFC. Knock out. Champion.* These names and words bring about thoughts of challenges, battles, defeat and victory. Last year's most popular was between Rhonda Rousey and Holly Holm. Both women were undefeated as they headed into UFC 193's bantamweight championship. On November 14, 2015, the UFC saw record-breaking attendance as Rhonda Rousey, who had been so confident of her victory, was knocked out early in the second round. Rousey was heavily favored to win the fight, yet Holm emerged as the victor.<sup>1</sup>

Just as Rousey supporters outnumbered Holm's, the prophet Elijah was outnumbered 450 to one. He proposed a seemingly simple challenge to King Ahab, and the king readily agreed. The prophets tried many different ways to get Baal to answer them, but no answer came. However, Elijah made a trench around the altar and filled it with water, and then soaked the wood stacked there. The king and prophets of Baal most likely expected Baal's victory. Yet, God prevailed despite the "odds," showing the prophets of Baal, and all of Israel, who was the one true God. God was, is, and always will be victorious, no matter the "odds."

- **What tempts you to doubt God's power when the odds of victory seem impossible?**
- **Do you think you would respond to the challenge as Elijah did, with complete faith that God would emerge victorious? Why or why not? What can you do to change your outlook on this?**

### Option 2

The Israelites turned from worshiping the one true God to worshiping Baal. Just as God had instructed them not to do, they gave themselves over to idols. We all worship something. Even if we don't bow down to an idol made of stone, we all elevate something to the status of "god" in our lives.

Ask the students to list things that could easily become idols. Begin the discussion with an example such as money, power, popularity, social media, and so on. Allow a few minutes of discussion, then answer the following questions as a group:

- **The Israelites' inability to decide between Baal and God plainly revealed their idolatry. When we find it hard to worship God alone, what do we learn about the hidden idols in our lives?**
- **Why do you think the Bible discusses idolatry so often? Why does God express such contempt for idolatry in the lives of His people?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

---

**Pursuing false gods leads to enslavement, but submission to the one true God leads to freedom.**

## CHARACTERS

---

- **The Triune God-** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Elijah-** prophet of God who faced 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel

## PLOT

---

As we continue our journey through the Bible, we arrive at a time in Israel's history when God revealed His character to His people in a number of ways. God was not hiding; He loves to reveal Himself. In the events we will study and the people we will encounter, we will see the characteristics of our loving and powerful God on display.



**Remember, every time you see this bar in the leader guide, it indicates the same material is also found in the personal study guide as well.**

## ELIJAH CONFRONTS THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Often times when people first read the story of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, their initial response is to wonder why the Israelites were shallow enough to have fallen so easily into worship of Baal, a pagan god. Not only that, but we assume that we would never fall into a trap like that—after all, we are modern Christians who are more educated and better informed than people who lived thousands of years ago. However, as we go throughout this story, we begin to see that people today are not that different from people thousands of years ago, especially when it comes to humanity not being loyal to God.

Today's society has become so skeptical that we think intelligent people constantly question everything. Our society's intellectual wavering has led us into accepting a *pluralistic view* of religious beliefs, which is *the belief that says, "All religions are equally true."* Elijah dealt with a similar problem when the Israelites wavered in their loyalty and faith in Yahweh as the true God.

**When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken." (1 Kings 18:17-24)**

### GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

The people had strayed so far from the worship of the true God that King Ahab actually blamed Elijah as the "troubler" or destroyer of their nation! Elijah, in unwavering loyalty to God, would not bow down; instead, he openly opposed the worship of the pagan storm/fertility god, Baal. So, Elijah was blamed for attracting Baal's wrath. Ahab, the leader of the nation that was explicitly told to have no gods other than the one true God (Ex. 20:3), had gone so far astray that he could no longer recognize the problem of "having another god."

### TIMELINE

#### ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

*God makes it known that He alone is God.*

#### ELIJAH'S PERSECUTION

*Elijah flees in the midst of persecution.*

#### THE HEALING OF NAAMAN

*Naaman is healed from his leprosy.*

**Remember, these sections are optional and can be skipped if preferred.**

“How long will you go limping between two different opinions?” Elijah asked. The Israelites, the people who should have adamantly opposed pledging their loyalty to false gods, gave no answer. Their lack of response revealed their unfaithful hearts and minds. Beginning when King Solomon allowed the influence of foreign religions and cultures and extending all the way through Ahab’s kingship, the Israelite nation gradually strayed from the worship of God.

In his challenge, Elijah states that the true God is the one who would answer. Here we find an important reason why God deserves our loyalty in worship, even when our society strongly opposes us. God not only demonstrated His ultimate power, but His ultimate grace by providing Israel with a chance to turn back to Him. As the true God of grace and power, Yahweh is deserving of our loyalty.

- **What were the two opinions Elijah referenced? In what ways do you sometimes waver between serving God and serving “other gods”?**

*(p. 10, PSG)*

**Whenever you see PSG page numbers listed, it indicates that there is a section in the personal study guide for students to interact with.**

## THE CRIES FROM PROPHETS OF BAAL GO UNANSWERED

The test of the true God was set by Elijah and accepted by King Ahab and the people of Israel. And so, the contest takes place on Mount Carmel, a noted high place for Baal worship. The sacrificial bulls were chosen, the altars built, and the contest commenced.

**Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it.” And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention. (1 Kings 18:25-29)**

Though it may seem like a spectacle to modern readers, the prophets of Baal create a common pagan worship scene to evoke the empathy of their god. Notice the effort put forth by the prophets of Baal to evoke the god to action: shouting, cutting themselves with spears and knives until covered in blood, dancing, and raving, crying out “O Baal, answer us!” Note how much time and effort the human worshipers used in their attempt to capture the attention of the false god.

Elijah demonstrated how foolish it is to trust in false gods when he taunted the prophets of Baal because their god was unable to answer. Each statement of mockery was directly related to the myth of Baal. *Why was there a need to shout if Baal were truly a god? Was Baal on one of his epic journeys? Was the god tired and needing sleep? But isn't Baal a god? Why would a god need sleep?* A god who was worthy of worship would not require such frivolous exertion of human effort to “make” him respond. A god who is worthy of worship cannot be tamed and corralled by human effort. The God who is worthy of worship is sovereign.

The prophets brought ritual, tradition, ceremony, and religion into the call to Baal. Elijah brought trust when calling upon Yahweh. The prophets of Baal demonstrated their belief that the people must be for their god. However, Elijah showed us that the God of glory is for us. What a vast difference between the two views! God wants us to be free to live in relationship with Him, not bind us to bleed out our lives in servitude to false gods, traditions, rituals, idols, and the worship of created things. It is the true God who gives humans true life.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### God is Transcendent

*God's transcendence refers to the fact that He is distinct from and independent of His created world. He is transcendent over us in regards to His greatness and power as well as His goodness and purity. The implication of this doctrine is that God is inherently superior to humanity; His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9). When God saves us, He restores us so we can fulfill our human purpose; this does not mean that we become God or that distinctions between God and humanity are obliterated. Understanding God's transcendence evokes awe and wonder at His goodness and power.*

## GOD DEMONSTRATES THAT HE ALONE IS WORTHY OF ALL WORSHIP

After the prophets of Baal spent most of the day in an attempt to receive an answer, it was Elijah's turn. When the day reached the hour of the Jewish evening sacrifice, Elijah gave his offering and call to God.

**Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down. Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, “Israel shall be your name,” and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” And he said, “Do it a second time.” And they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time.” And they did it a third time. And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water. (1 Kings 18:30-35)**

## TIMELINE

### ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

*Isaiah encounters God and is forever changed.*

### ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

*Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.*

### GOD RESCUES JUDAH

*God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.*

In the contest between Elijah and prophets of Baal, Elijah left no room the prophets to continue misleading the people of God. He poured so much water over the sacrifice that there was no way it could naturally burn, and no trickster could use sleight of hand or deception. He left no excuse to exchange truth for a falsehood, no physical evidence for God's glory to be denied. Elijah also rebuilt the altar, a visual reminder to the Israelites of their identity as the people of God. Though you may neglect who you are as a Christian, God never forgets your identity in Him.

**And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God." (1 Kings 18:36-39)**

With no flashy dancing, no wailing or shouting, no self-mutilation, and no extravagant religious routines or exertion, Elijah called upon God to show Himself as the true God. Notice Elijah's intention and motive when he said, "Answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." Elijah's prayer was for God to receive the honor and glory of this redemptive act. The people, upon seeing God's swift and powerful response, fell to the ground in repentance proclaiming Yahweh as God.

- **Do you think Elijah's actions caused God to respond the way He did? Why or why not?**
- **Why do you think God responded this way?**

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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No matter where we are in life, one thing is clear from this passage: God is for us. In this battle between truth and falsehood, we see that the falsehood enslaves us and bleeds out our lives. However, the truth frees us and gives back to us life itself. The prophets of Baal cut themselves and bled to gain the attention of their god. The true God of the universe bled and died for His creation, not because of some great ritual or because of human righteousness.

The God who is worthy of worship offers redemption to us before we even recognize we need it. Romans 5:6-8 says it this way: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Elijah stood on the side of truth in the midst of widespread opposition to him and his belief in God. What are some ways we can do the same in our own culture today?** *For this question, it might be helpful to start with some examples where Christians face opposition in our culture today. Then move on to discuss ways in which Christians can respond in truth and love to those challenges.*
- **Elijah confronted the false prophets, not to show that he was superior, but so they would know God is the one true God who could turn their hearts to Him. What does this tell us our motivation should be today when we stand for truth?** *It shows us that we should care more for the spiritual state of others than just winning an argument or being proved right.*
- **Why is it important to see that God's display of power was not only for His glory, but so that the people might also turn from their false gods to the one true God?** *In short, it is important because it shows us that God's glory and our own personal good and joy are not contradictory, but are rather like two sides of the same coin.*
- **How has this session challenged you personally?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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No matter what century or culture you are in, one thing is for certain across the ages—humans will always worship. That's why we see humans sacrificing their lives in worship of many different things: hot-topic causes, sports, celebrities, politics, money, possessions, fashion, and so on. Though the modern Western mind sometimes relegates *worship* to something done by ancient and ignorant people, we all end up in a worship-like state of something when we sacrifice our lives on the altar of that thing.

- **How can you explain the difference between sacrificing your life to a false god and allowing God's sacrifice to give you life?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some "altars" you have established in your own life that have caused you to neglect your relationship to God?** *Answers to this will vary, but may include things like: relationships, sports, good grades, and so forth.*



## HEART

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As we see with Elijah and the people of his day, the real problem in our own society today is spiritual disloyalty. Spiritual disloyalty ultimately leads to spiritual drought and destruction. We constantly look for peace, love, and grace in things that are incapable of delivering those to us in a lasting sense. And when we do that, we end up worshiping the created instead of the Creator. It is only when our eyes are opened we can clearly see that only the true God, and not the things He has made, is the source of all we need and desire.

- **What are some of the things that attract a person's loyalty in our current culture, thus compromising their loyalty to God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can we show others that loyalty and faithfulness to God are better than these worldly loyalties?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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When the people of God spend the majority of their time and energy on the things of this world, they quickly discover that the desire to join in God's ministry to others is reduced. This is because false idols use up our time and energy and deplete us, often demanding much of our physical and spiritual resources. The true God is the One who builds us back up and ministers to us, so that we have the potential to be effective witnesses to the power and grace of God.

- **Can you name any "false gods" in our day that consume our time and effort (in reference to both Christians and non-Christians)?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Can you think of why these things take so much of our time and effort?** *Answers will vary.*

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, point students to pack item #4, which contains individual cut-outs of a quote pertaining to the session. Feel free to cut these out ahead of time and distribute to your students to use as bookmarks.

### SOURCES

1. Rory Brigstock-Barron, "Ronda Rousey vs Holly Holm: All you need to know about UFC 193 fight in Melbourne," *Daily Mail*, November 13, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/ufc/article-3317036/Ronda-Rousey-vs-Holly-Holm-UFC-193-Start-time-watch-TV-need-know-fight-night.html>.

### ● ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at  
**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit  
**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**

***Don't forget to check out these additional resources to help equip you for each session.***

# 02

## SESSION TWO

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# Elijah Flees for His Life

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we see how the prophet Elijah gave in to discouragement and despair. In response to Elijah's circumstances, God revealed Himself. The God who sent down fire from heaven in a bold and spectacular display of His power is the same God who whispered to Elijah in a quiet moment of sustaining grace. God strengthens us in our despair, challenges the lies we believe, and then ministers to us through His Word and through His people. As the recipients of God's grace, we rely on His power to deliver His message of comfort.

### SCRIPTURE

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1 Kings 19:1-18



# THE POINT

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**Even in our moments of fear and disbelief, God is with us.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

We all have moments in our spiritual lives that bring us to those joy-filled “mountain top” experiences. However, it’s important to remember that mountains are surrounded by valleys. In the same way, our spiritual lives will be filled with ups and downs, successes and failures. Instead of obeying God, we sometimes give into the fear that we may be headed straight for a valley. As a group, discuss common excuses we give for not following God. Then ask:

- **In what ways are you sometimes discouraged from doing God’s work? Have you ever faced something so discouraging you wanted to quit?**
- **When Christians face difficult situations and fear the outcome, what should we do?**

Elijah experienced victory on Mount Carmel, but Queen Jezebel was angry over the loss of the prophets of Baal and threatened to kill Elijah. So, Elijah ran. He was afraid, exhausted, and so discouraged he asked to die. Stories like Elijah’s are recorded throughout the Bible—God used him in a mighty way, but Elijah still faced difficulties and discouragement.

Sometimes, evil waits for us at the other side of victory. Even the strongest believers are subject to fear and doubt, but God never promised believers an easy life. However, He did promise to care for us and walk through those valleys with us. His quiet presence, like the whisper on the mountain, invites us to restored trust and faith.

### Option 2

As students arrive, place them into teams. Give the students a poster board and marker. Instruct them to label the poster *Most Discouraging Day Ever* and to make up a story describing what they think this bad day would look like. Give a few minutes to complete the activity, and then ask each group to tell or act out their story. After each group has presented, gather the students together and ask these questions:

- **How would you respond to some of the scenarios described by each group?**
- **Why do you think one bad day seems to erase our memory of previous good days?**
- **How could we look at these scenarios differently, noting God’s presence in the details?**

As believers, we sometimes allow negative circumstances to block our view of God. And it seems these discouragements often come after victory or encounters with God. Just like God took care of Elijah, He will take care of you, reminding you of His presence in your life and your purpose in His plan.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Even in our moments of fear and disbelief, God is with us.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God**- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Elijah**- prophet of God who faced 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel
- **Ahab and Jezebel** - king and queen of the northern kingdom; Ahab is known for being one of the most wicked kings ever to have served Israel

## PLOT

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As we pick up the story of Elijah, we find the prophet of God in a tough situation. In the previous session, we witnessed Elijah's spectacular contest with the prophets of Baal. The people had proclaimed Yahweh as Lord! Surely, Elijah expected spectacular results after such a miracle. However, neither Israel's king (Ahab) nor queen (Jezebel) had undergone a heart change after the fire came down from heaven. Instead, Queen Jezebel threatened Elijah's life. As a result, Elijah found himself in a situation of loneliness and despair.

## TIMELINE

### **ELIJAH'S PERSECUTION**

*Elijah flees in the midst of persecution.*

### **THE HEALING OF NAAMAN**

*Naaman is healed from his leprosy.*

### **ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD**

*Isaiah encounters God and is forever changed.*

## ELIJAH RETREATS OUT OF FEAR FOR HIS LIFE

Elijah and the people witnessed a spectacular display of God's power in the contest on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:18-39). In this contest, God proved to the Israelites that He is the Lord of all creation and that Baal was a powerless creation of mankind. The people repented and professed Yahweh as Lord—at least almost all. Let's take a look:

**Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. There he came to a cave and lodged in it. (1 Kings 19:1-9a)**

It is difficult to believe that after the events of Mount Carmel, Elijah would respond to the threat against him by running away in fear. But this is what we see. Like we often do, Elijah forgot the truth of God's power and responded to threatening circumstances by creating distance between himself and the threat.

By the time Elijah arrived, he was utterly depressed and hopeless, despairing of life itself. He counted himself as a failure, stating that he was "no better than my fathers," meaning, the prophets that had come before him. Elijah believed his work on Mount Carmel had no greater effect on turning the people back to the worship of God than did the work of any previous prophets of Israel. So, he desired to not only resign from his prophetic ministry, but also to die. He hit rock bottom. But in this moment of despair, the Lord sent food to Elijah and let him rest. By doing so, God provided Elijah with the necessary strength to keep going. God was still there, ministering to Elijah during his lack of faith and his despair.

- Share about a difficult time in your own life where God was faithful in ministering to you. (*p. 16, PSG*)
- In what ways are you tempted to forget about God's power and allow your circumstances to overwhelm you? (*p. 16, PSG*)

## GOD MINISTERS TO ELIJAH IN HIS DISTRESS

After ministering to Elijah's physical and emotional exhaustion through the gift of food and rest, the Lord questioned Elijah. He engaged Elijah's reasoning.

**And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks 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. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:9b-14)**

Elijah responded to the Lord's questioning by expressing his disappointment and hopelessness. His words indicate that he was considering only a narrow selection of Israel's past events. In his accusations against Israel, he failed to mention what God had just done in sending fire from heaven, or the repentant response of the people, or the execution of the prophets of Baal. Simply put, Elijah's vision was narrow and misinformed.

### GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

As the Holman Old Testament Commentary states, "But there was a profound difference between his feelings and reality. He had lost sight of the nature of his God. As a result his vision was distorted. At the bottom of his complaint was a complaint about God himself. The Lord had not treated him well by allowing him to experience such things. Despair had made Elijah self-centered."<sup>1</sup>

Hopelessness can make the light around us look dim. We can lose our way in the darkness of our clouded minds, unable to see the “light at the end of the tunnel,” unable to discern truth. In his despair, Elijah rolled out accusations against the Israelites that were focused on the negative events. He had a limited, a self-centered view of the situation: Surely, if the people did not return to God after fire fell from Heaven, they would never return.

God’s reply to Elijah was extraordinary. Rather than argue with Elijah, God drew Elijah into an encounter with Himself. The encounter was an important moment in Elijah’s life, because God showed Elijah a truth about His nature: God doesn’t always display His work in fantastic ways, He also works in small and subtle ways.

## GOD REAFFIRMS TO ELIJAH HIS MINISTRY AND PURPOSE

One way God ministered to Elijah was to re-commission him to prophetic ministry and show him a remnant of people who were still faithful. God would minister through Elijah to others and through others to Elijah.

**And the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:15-18)**

Elijah’s new role was to prepare the way for others to do God’s work. Other men would complete the task Elijah began. Once again, the Lord taught Elijah that He had other ways of working—it was not only through Elijah that this battle with idolatry would be won. A new order was to come to God’s people; however, this time Elijah would not be the one to usher in the new order.

When our thinking becomes negatively self-centered, we can forget to acknowledge the goodness and light spread by God revealing Himself through us. We can also forget to acknowledge the goodness and light that has spread from the work of others. Yet God calls us to remember that we live in community with others who also desire to spread the truth of God’s love.

## TIMELINE

### ISAIAH’S PROPHECY

*Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.*

### GOD RESCUES JUDAH

*God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.*

### HOSEA AND GOMER

*God’s faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Our work in the Kingdom matters beyond the big moments, and our purpose extends beyond our lives. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, God's messenger who faced opposition and persecution, we know that all our labor for the Lord matters. It will endure into eternity. God's Word will not return void, but will accomplish His purpose. Trusting in the God who whispers to us in our times of greatest need, we set our hearts forward and follow Jesus.

And as we look to Jesus, it is important that we remember that Jesus taught us to daily take up our cross—or die to ourselves—and follow Him as part of God's redemptive mission. He has given us a daily battle plan of surrendering our lives to His authority, so we can be used big and small ways, for His kingdom and glory.

### 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

#### God is Immanent

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*When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and relatable to those made in His image, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity (as imagined by the deist) who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal relationship with Him.*

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What does God's ministry to Elijah during this season of doubt and despair tell us about the character of God?** *At the very least, it tells us that God is gracious, merciful, and faithful to us even when we struggle in being faithful to Him. Like a loving Father who cares for His children during hard times, God draws near to us to provide the comfort and encouragement we need to get back up.*
- **Elijah's emotional disappointment and despair contributed to him not being able to see beyond his immediate circumstances. What are some ways we can help those around us to see the bigger picture when blinded by emotional pain?** *The best way to help people see beyond themselves is to point them to Jesus and God's Word. By pointing them to specific biblical stories, the person sees not only that God cares, but also that God is at work even when it may not "feel" like He is.*
- **Part of Elijah's disappointment came from the fact that the events at Mount Carmel didn't have quite the impact he imagined they would. Have you ever experienced something similar? In light of Elijah's story here, how should you respond to similar moments?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Surely Elijah was encouraged to hear others would be joining him in his cause for truth. What does this teach us about the importance of surrounding ourselves with other believers as we seek to live out the Christian life?** *There are many benefits of actively living in Christian community with others, one of them being that Christians are strengthened and emboldened in their own faith and live out that faith as a result of living out their lives in Christ with other believers.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Many churches tend to focus so much on doing the “big things” for God, like musical and drama productions or mission trips and big evangelism events. But what if we are overlooking the small ways God works in our daily lives? Here is an area of church life that is difficult for us: learning to find God in the small things and in the quiet of the world. We must learn to drown out the human noise, quieting our souls long enough for God’s Word to break through and change us. When we only expect “fire from heaven,” we miss the “still, small voice.”

- **What are some smaller ways we can see God working in our own lives?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can the student ministry you are a part of encourage one another by pointing to God's work in these smaller ways?** *One way might come through sharing our testimonies with one another, thus highlighting God's active presence in even the small areas of our lives.*



## HEART

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Everyone faces the disappointing sting of failure in one way or another. We do not need to beat ourselves up for our moments of despair, nor do we need to deny them. Yet we cannot stay in those moments forever. In this passage, God ministered to Elijah in his despair for over a month while Elijah made his way to Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai). Yet, as the angel noted, there was more to come. Elijah still had a good purpose to fulfill in this world. The Lord wanted to use Elijah, which should encourage us and strengthen our faith that God would want to use us as well.

- **How do you typically respond to moments of disappointment and failure?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some biblical and healthy ways we can respond to these moments?** *One way to respond to moments of disappointment is by reminding ourselves of the truth of Scripture. Instead of allowing our emotions and circumstances to drive our thinking and behavior, the truths of Scripture can shape our responses.*



## HANDS

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Even in our dark and difficult times, God still works through us to affect our world for His purposes and Kingdom. This is why we need to resist the temptation to think that our lives do not truly matter. Like Elijah, we can be tempted in exhaustion and pain, to become narrow-minded and blind to God’s mission for mankind. We might say things like, “If these big things didn’t change the hearts of men, then I give up! Nothing will work.” Yet, God has shown us through the obedient suffering of Jesus Christ and His redeeming resurrection, there is hope no matter how grim our current situation.

- **What are some ways God has worked through you in difficult times to minister to others?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways God has worked through others in difficult times to minister to you?** *Answers will vary.*



## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### SOURCES

1. *Holman Christian Standard Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010). Accessed via mywsb.com.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**



# 03

## SESSION THREE

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# The Healing of Naaman

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will look at the story of the prophet Elisha's healing of a foreigner named Naaman. This story gives us a beautiful illustration of our need for salvation and healing from God, as well as the humility required to receive that healing. Unless we are humble enough to receive God's salvation in the way He has planned, we will not be healed of our spiritual disease. However, once we humbly receive His grace, we are set free to testify to His goodness and reflect glory back to Him through our obedience.

### SCRIPTURE

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2 Kings 5:1-19

# THE POINT

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**God's cure for spiritual sickness involves humility and repentance.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Nearly every story, whether in a book or movie, has a main character who's main goal is to overcome some personal flaw or struggle. Often times the character will appear to be strong and larger than life on the outside, but struggles within to find some sort of redemption in those areas where he or she falls short. In the story you are about to see, we meet such a character in the person of Naaman. Naaman was a strong warrior and leader, but Naaman had some serious struggles to overcome—both a physical one in the form of leprosy, and a spiritual one in the form of a prideful heart. And as we will see, Naaman's path to overcoming his physical struggle would only come about by first addressing the internal struggle of pride that waged war in his heart.

- **Who are some characters from books or movies that you can think of that needed to overcome some personal flaw or struggle?**

### Option 2

Place students into groups of three. Give each pair one piece of tissue paper, five marbles (or another weighted item), a cup of water, and a cotton swab. (*Tip: If able, go outside for this activity.*) Instruct two students to hold the tissue paper tightly between them. Then, instruct the third student to dip the cotton swab in the water, and allow a few drops to fall on the center of the tissue paper. Next, ask the student to place the five marbles on the tissue paper. Instruct the students to pour half of the remaining water onto the marbles and paper, so the marbles fall through the paper. Bring the group back together as a whole, and ask:

- **What did the water do to the tissue paper? Why do you think the marbles fell through when you added more water?**

The water weakened the paper and allowed the marbles to fall. Similarly, sickness weakens us. Doctors can prescribe medicines that help us heal, but there isn't anything we can do to heal ourselves, we can only rest and follow the doctor's orders. In the same way, spiritual sickness (sin) weakens our spiritual lives. Just like we use doctors and medicine to help with physical healing, we needed someone to heal the rift in our relationship with God. There is nothing we can do to heal that rift on our own. The only way to be healed from spiritual sickness is to humble yourself, repent of your sins, and trust in Jesus for salvation.

- **What are some things that might keep you from admitting your need for spiritual healing or asking God for help?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God's cure for spiritual sickness involves humility and repentance.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Elisha** - prophet of God
- **Naaman** - commander in a foreign army

## PLOT

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From the beginning, Adam and Eve were dependent upon God for life, purpose, and their daily sustenance. Soon, however, in the arrogance of their independence the couple chose to be like God rather than depend upon God (Gen. 3:4-5). Not only was the first family driven from the Garden because of their disobedience, but each subsequent generation down to today received from them a fallen nature scarred by the arrogance of their rebellion. Diseased by our pride, certain death looms on the horizon unless we return to the childlike faith God requires.

In this session, we will look at the story of the prophet Elisha's healing of a foreigner named Naaman. This story gives us a beautiful illustration of our need for salvation and healing from God, as well as the humility required to receive that healing.

## TIMELINE

### THE HEALING OF NAAMAN

*Naaman is healed from his leprosy.*

### ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

*Isaiah encounters God and is forever changed.*

### ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

*Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.*

## NAAMAN RECOGNIZES HE HAS A SERIOUS DISEASE

Physical miracles in the Bible are historical manifestations of the power of God. From these manifestations, we glean important spiritual truths. Naaman's dramatic healing is an ancient account of God's active grace in one man's life. It is also an important reminder of the impact of grace for us today. Look at how the story begins.

**Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." (2 Kings 5:1-4)**

At first glance, Naaman seemed to possess all the necessary qualities and blessings of what we might consider a successful life. As the commander of the Syrian army, he was highly esteemed by the king himself. Despite his being a Gentile, the Lord actively blessed Naaman's work. His military prowess and relentless bravery were unquestioned.

But behind all the accolades, this Aramean hero battled a skin disease called *leprosy*. Not only was this malady incurable, but it also tainted every good thing in Naaman's life. The joy of his present reality could not rival the future demise that awaited him. Leprosy was a death sentence, leaving the star general hopeless and defeated.

Naaman's road to healing began at an unusual place with a young Jewish servant who compassionately shared a word of hope that changed everything.

**And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me." But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn**

**his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel.” So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha’s house. (2 Kings 5:5-9)**

In an effort to be helpful, the king of Syria loaded his general down with gifts in order to secure the action of the Israelite king. Acknowledging his inability to perform a miracle of healing, the monarch responded with fear that the entire exercise was nothing more than an effort to renew an old Syrian feud.

However, the prophet Elisha saw the genuine desperation of the appeal. Apart from God’s action, nothing would prevent Naaman’s death. As God’s prophet in Israel, Elisha was not the solution to the problem; instead, he was the appointed means for dealing with it. The seriousness of leprosy mandated miraculous intervention. With every other avenue exhausted, the God of Elisha was the last remaining hope for this dejected warrior.

## **NAAMAN RESPONDS TO GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS**

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Imagine the scene. Naaman has shown how desperate he was by traveling all the way to the door of Elisha’s house. He certainly recognized the seriousness of his health situation and his absolute dependence on someone or something else to bring healing. But recognition of his desperate state was not all that was required of Naaman. He would have to humble himself. That is what we see next, when Elisha’s puzzling instructions struck at the heart of Naaman’s pride.

**And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.” But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, “Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, “My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. (2 Kings 5:10-14)**

The focus of this story is not the supernatural ability of Elisha. That’s made obvious by the prophet sending a messenger to meet Naaman instead of greeting him personally. The focus was on the humility required to receive grace and the single source from which grace comes—God Himself.

A similar pattern shows up in two other recorded instances of leprosy in the Old Testament (Moses and Miriam). Diagnoses such as these are so severe that only God can bring healing. That's why, when Jesus healed lepers in the New Testament He was demonstrating His identity as the powerful God of the Old Testament. In a spiritual sense, leprosy's physical depiction of our spiritual sickness reminds us that only God can make us alive.

Unfortunately, we are not always eager or willing to yield to God's prescription for healing. Expecting a ritual of some sort, Naaman was insulted and angry over the seemingly ineffective remedy for his predicament. Likewise, we often reason that there must be some sort of ceremonial observance, religious activity, or sacramental participation that will make us right with God. Or we simply presume upon God's gracious nature and hope for forgiveness that requires no repentance or humbling of ourselves.

## NAAMAN PRAISES GOD FOR HEALING

As we pick up the story, we see Naaman doing two things in response to his miraculous healing. First, he gives credit to the Lord by praising the God of Israel. Secondly, he wants to give something in return. Look how Naaman, the once-proud foreigner concerned about his own glory, sought to reflect glory back to God through his praise.

**Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Then Naaman said, "If not, please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD. In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter." 19 He said to him, "Go in peace." (2 Kings 5:15-19a)**

Realizing the magnitude of what took place in his body, Naaman's eyes were opened to the reality that grace is found in the God of Israel alone. No false god could have brought about immediate, comprehensive healing such as this. The general humbled himself and confessed the core Jewish belief that there is only one true God who deserves worship and praise.

- **Compare Naaman's words in the previous passage with his words in this passage. What difference do you see in his attitude? What are the signs that he has been radically changed? (p. 24, PSG)**

## TIMELINE

### GOD RESCUES JUDAH

*God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.*

### HOSEA AND GOMER

*God's faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.*

### JONAH

*God goes to great lengths for people to hear the good news of salvation.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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As we have seen throughout our study of the Bible's storyline, the people of Israel wavered and faltered often in their faith. They continually devoted themselves to the idols of the surrounding nations and abandoned the purity of their worship of the one true God. The story of Naaman is interesting because the author of this account wanted us to see that a *foreigner* in this case is more *faithful* than God's chosen people. Naaman made a confession that the backslidden Israelites were unwilling to make. Jesus lamented this same reality in Luke 4:27, saying, "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

Like Naaman, the solution to our sickness is the same. No amount of effort, resources, or human connection can rescue us from the heart infection that we all suffer from. Left to ourselves, we will die in our trespasses and sins despite our attempts to the contrary. Apart from the cross, our lives spiral toward certain death and judgment (Rom. 1:18-19).

The good news is that Jesus Christ bore the leprosy of our souls by sacrificing Himself for us (Isa. 53:4). Jesus is not just the best hope we have; He is the only hope we have. Receiving the grace of God through His Son in no way diminishes the offense of our fallen existence. If anything, Christ's insistence that He must do for us what we cannot do for ourselves reinforces how painfully wicked we are apart from God's rescue.

### 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

#### Guilt and Shame

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*Guilt refers to the objective status of someone being found guilty for a wrong committed, as well as the incurring of punishment that comes with it (Matt. 5:21-22; Jas. 2:10). Shame is the emotional pain that comes from sinful actions. Scripture teaches that human beings are guilty in an objective sense, and also feel the weight of shame in a subjective sense.*



# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What external factors do we look to when evaluating whether a person is “successful” or not? How might these external factors distract us from the seriousness of our spiritual disease?** *Answers to this will vary, but may include things like: how well known or liked someone is, how much money someone has, how talented one might be, and so forth.*
- **Naaman's story teaches us that receiving forgiveness requires humility and repentance. Why do you think humility and repentance are rarely mentioned when people talk about salvation?** *People sometimes talk about salvation as if it only involves affirming certain truths, rather than a heartfelt trust in God that includes repentance and humility. While it is true that we cannot earn favor with God or work our way into His good graces, it is also true that the Bible repeatedly states that repentance (which comes with humility) is a must for a right relationship with God.*
- **How can familiarity with the gospel leave us unmoved by its reality? What are some ways to overcome this temptation? What are practical ways to give glory back to God?** *One way to overcome this temptation is by keeping an open eye to the ugliness of sin in one's own life. By doing so, one can remain sensitive to the harsh reality of what sin is and its devastating effects, making him or her all the more appreciative of the grace of God in salvation, which in turn cultivates the heart for worship and praise.*
- **How has the story of Naaman challenged you when thinking about your own sin and pride?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Often we have the notion that we must add to or complete God's work in our lives. Like Naaman, calling on the Lord in repentance and faith seems as minimal to us as washing ourselves in the Jordan River. But this lack of humility comes not only from a hopeless confidence in our diseased will, but also in thinking that God's contribution to our salvation cannot possibly be enough. This is why God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6).

- **To receive healing, Naaman wanted to wash in waters other than the river prescribed. What are some "waters" people turn to for salvation, other than humble repentance and faith?** *This question is simply designed to help students think through the things we often turn to, believing they will contribute to our salvation. So, "other waters" might include things like: good works, faithful church attendance, and so forth.*
- **When we look to these "other waters," what does that tell us about how we actually view the sacrifice of Christ?** *In short, it tells us we underestimate the work of Christ on the cross by thinking we need to contribute or add to His work of salvation.*



## HEART

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As we will see, Israel's northern kingdom will soon fall (2 Kings 17), only to be followed by the southern kingdom's demise (2 Kings 24-25). The root cause of such destruction was simple: a refusal to worship God. The religious hypocrisy of these Israelites can serve as a warning to us about what to avoid in our own lives. Those who are outwardly religious often lack a sincere, heartfelt relationship with God. To remain unmoved by all that Christ endured to purchase our redemption suggests that an individual has not truly experienced the transforming power of God. To know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to worship Him.

- **What does a hypocritical life look like?** *A hypocritical life often looks good on the outside (behavior looks good, speech is clean, etc.), but is completely dead on the inside (no genuine love for God or others, no submitting to Jesus' Lordship over their lives, etc.).*
- **How can you avoid living life hypocritically?** *The biggest way to avoid being a hypocrite is to fall in love with Jesus, humbly submit to Him, and repent of one's sins. Being in a right relationship with God is the key to being alive on the inside.*



## HANDS

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The contrast between this powerful Syrian man and the weak maiden who aided him could not be more evident. It teaches us once again that God uses the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong, and things that are viewed as nothing to lead to something only God could accomplish.

- **How does the maiden serve as an example for us to point others in our lives to the saving knowledge of truth?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does this teach us about being used by God in our own lives?** *For starters, it teaches us that God doesn't necessarily use those who, by worldly standards, are the best and brightest. Instead, as we often see, He uses those whose character and heart are in pursuit of Him.*

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
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# 04

## SESSION FOUR

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# Isaiah Encounters God

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, the prophet Isaiah had a vision of God high and lifted up—holy and glorious in His temple. In light of God’s holiness, Isaiah received a proper vision of his own sin and unworthiness. But God, in His grace, restored Isaiah to service and gave the prophet a message for the people. Like Isaiah, we are also undone by the vision of God’s glory. Thankfully, through His grace, God deals with our sin and commissions us to deliver His message of love to the world.

### SCRIPTURE

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Isaiah 6:1-8

# THE POINT

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**The reality of sin can only be rightly understood when compared to God's personal holiness.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Holiness is a difficult concept for many Christians to grasp, and holy living is difficult to put into practice. But there is no backing away from this character trait—holiness is essential to the Christian life. We are to be holy, just as our God is holy.

In previous sessions, we have seen how God reveals Himself—through spectacular miracles and quiet whispers, through encouraging words and challenging commands. Today, we are introduced to the prophet Isaiah, a man who had a magnificent vision of God that altered his life forever.

As we approach this passage about Isaiah's vision of God, it would be normal to feel a sense of nervousness in considering the "holiness of God." Like Isaiah, we might feel like the whole of our existence has been mixed with a lot that is "not holy." Not only that, but we might struggle to comprehend Isaiah's vision and the awe that it should produce in us. The vision of God was terrifying to Isaiah, and yet God's purpose was not for destruction, but for redemption.

- **What comes to mind when you think of the word *holy*? Why do you think God is so serious about His holiness?**

### Option 2

On a white board at the front of the room, write out the words *Who's coming over?* As students make their way to a seat, instruct them to think about three famous people they would like to hang out with. Make sure students know that these famous people can be living or dead. After a few minutes, invite the students to share their answers. Note the people they have in common. Then, ask them to discuss things like: *If you ate a meal together, what would you serve? What would you wear? What questions would you ask them? What would you talk about?* Choose three of the people your students mentioned and talk about what it would be like to hang out with those people and how the students would respond to them. After discussing this for a minute, ask:

- **Would your answers change if Jesus was one of your guests? If so, how? If not, why?**

Then talk about how our reaction to God should be different because He is holy. As His people, He has also called us to be holy, and to respond to Him in awe and reverence.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**The reality of sin can only be rightly understood when compared to God's personal holiness.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Isaiah** - prophet of God who is most known for his prophecies of the coming Messiah

## PLOT

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At this point in God's story we meet the prophet Isaiah. We see he had a vision of God high and lifted up—holy and glorious in His temple. In light of God's holiness, Isaiah received a proper sense of his own sin and unworthiness. But God, in His grace, restored Isaiah to service and gave the prophet a message for the people. Like Isaiah, we are also undone by the vision of God's glory.

## TIMELINE

### ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

*Isaiah encounters God and is forever changed.*

### ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

*Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.*

### GOD RESCUES JUDAH

*God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.*

## ISAIAH ENCOUNTERS GOD IN THE TEMPLE

Isaiah's vision took place in the year the ruler of Judah, King Uzziah, died. Uzziah was set upon the throne of Judah at age 16 after the people conspired against and killed his father, King Amaziah (2 Chron. 25–26). Uzziah was a king who did what was right in God's eyes, in accordance with the teachings of Zechariah. He became a famous and powerful king throughout the land.

Though God made him a strong ruler, over time Uzziah grew arrogant and unfaithful. Enraged at the priests who warned him, Uzziah entered into the Holy of Holies to burn incense on the altar of sacrifice himself. In that moment, the Lord struck him with leprosy, a disease that remained with him until his death. In all, Uzziah reigned for 52 years.

In 2 Chronicles 26, we read that Isaiah chronicled Uzziah's reign. It is likely Isaiah was greatly affected by the death of the king. Within that context, here is Isaiah's testimony of what took place on the day of his vision:

**In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. (Isa. 6:1-4)**

- **Take a few minutes to jot down the different words and phrases that describe Isaiah's vision of God. What do these words communicate? What atmosphere do these phrases create? (p. 28, PSG)**

### GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

The seraphim ("fiery" winged creatures) surrounding Him cover themselves in humility. In the presence of God, these winged creatures also cry out the truth of God's character: "holy, holy, holy!" Repeating the word "holy" three times is intended to express the great difference between God and His creation. "God's holiness reveals how very separate, different, totally other he is in comparison to all other aspects of the created world."<sup>1</sup> Furthering the awe-inspiring scene in Isaiah's vision, the voices of the seraphim call to one another, rocking the very foundation of the building.

From what Isaiah recounted, we can see that the Lord is exalted above all kings, a truth displayed by God being on “a throne, high and lifted up.” His presence exceeds that of any human ruler on earth, because the Lord’s presence fills the entire temple and His glory fills the whole earth.

There is no doubt God’s revelation of Himself to Isaiah was awesome and terrifying. But I wonder if we are sheltered from being impacted so profoundly by reading Isaiah’s vision because of the society we live in. Our culture that has lost the note of God’s ultimate greatness and power.

We live in a culture that overlooks the glory of God displayed in the heavens because of light pollution. We mute the glory of God’s presence with human-generated noise and busyness. We shortchange true intimacy with God through the perversion of intimate relationships. We drown out the awe that comes from even the gift of life itself through the destruction of the unborn and daily exposure to violent acts in film, television, and gaming. No wonder people walk away from God; their spiritual sensitivities have been dulled. We have no room for a vision of God’s majesty that impacts every aspect of our lives.

When humans have no vision of the striking beauty of the holiness of God, we become like zombies, existing in flesh, but dead in spirit. We reject the Giver of life, refusing to see and experience Him in the ways He has clearly revealed Himself. Rather, we roam the surface of the earth, consuming and consuming, trying to make the deadness of our lives more tolerable.

## ISAIAH RECOGNIZES HIS SIN IN LIGHT OF GOD'S HOLINESS

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Once Isaiah was made aware of the wonder of God’s holiness, he came to a greater knowledge of himself and his nation. In short, he saw himself and his people against the backdrop of the glorious standard of God’s goodness. Watch how he responded:

**And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5)**

Isaiah was filled with both awe and terror. In recognizing the purity and goodness of God, he came to see his own lack of goodness—his uncleanness and sin. Even more importantly, he recognized that he was ruined in light of God’s holiness.

In our culture, some people confuse “cleanness” with a list of do’s and don’ts. In this way, a godly life gets reduced to self-righteous rule keeping. But other folks excuse anything and everything, so that nothing is considered unclean or evil. Isaiah’s vision strikes at the self-righteous rule-keeper as well as the moral relativist. Unless we have a proper vision of our sin, we will fail to understand the essential need for God’s forgiveness and grace in Jesus Christ. We will have no moment when we recognize we are unclean in the presence of God’s goodness and holiness, and cry out to Him.



Isaiah's vision gives us the prologue to the gospel: We must realize what we are as sinful human beings in contrast to the glorious nature of God. Only then can we too receive the redemption that God alone can provide.

## ISAIAH RECEIVES GRACE AND IS SENT ON MISSION

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So far, we have seen how Isaiah's vision showcased the glory and holiness of the Lord. We've also seen how inadequate and unclean Isaiah felt in the presence of such moral purity. Now, we see how God responds to Isaiah's confession of his sin.

**Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." (Isa. 6:6-8)**

In the next scene of Isaiah's vision, an angel of the Lord took a burning coal from the altar. The imagery of the altar is important. On earth, the priests performed the sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, but here, the heavenly messengers performed the imagery-laden ritual of the removal of sin.

It is interesting to note that Isaiah never pleaded with God. Nor did he beg for God to show him mercy. He did not attempt to strike a bargain with the Lord. Rather, the atonement was an act of God's sheer grace in response to Isaiah's confession of his sinfulness. There was nothing magical about coal that could deal with the sinful condition of Isaiah's heart. It was a sign of God's mercy and forgiveness, of God's good gift of redemption.

The imagery of the altar and the burning coals of the sacrifice would have been familiar to Isaiah. The perfectly good justice of God that would bring His wrath on Isaiah's sin had been satisfied, and as a result, Isaiah would not immediately suffer the consequence of his sin—death.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### God is Holy

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*God's holiness refers to His uniqueness in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for holy means separate or set apart. God's holiness also refers to His absolute purity. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God's image, we are called to holiness.*

## TIMELINE

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### HOSEA AND GOMER

*God's faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.*

### JONAH

*God goes to great lengths for people to hear the good news of salvation.*

### JOEL

*A prophet who warns God's people about the Day of the Lord.*

The Lord did not intend to destroy Isaiah; rather He intended to redeem Isaiah, to establish relationship with him, and to use him greatly to serve others. In these last verses, the Lord revealed something more of his intention with Isaiah. He had given Isaiah a vision of His holiness and glory, from which Isaiah experienced self-despair. Isaiah's despair produced a confession that brought him the forgiveness of God's grace and mercy. The forgiveness of God provided an opportunity for service. These experiences came together in a final offering of Isaiah's life in service to God.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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As a response to Isaiah's vision of God's holiness, we should stand in awe of the glory of God, manifested in all His attributes. Once we see ourselves for who we are in light of who God has shown Himself to be, we are undone in our sin and uncleanness. But thankfully, we serve a God who restores and commissions us through the sacrifice of His Son. The holiness and love of God meet at the cross, where Christ laid down His life for us.

Where does that leave us now? With the forgiveness we have in Christ, we lift our hands and say, "Here I am! Send me." We seek to spread the awe and wonder of God's glory and grace to those around us. We do so, fully acknowledging the risk that people will reject the beauty, power, and goodness of the Lord in favor of a ruined vision of their own making. But we believe that the Author of life will shine His light through us and lead to the salvation of others—people captivated by the beauty and power of God's absolute goodness, which transcends this present world.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Like Isaiah, what have you witnessed that reflects the power, majesty, and beauty of God? How did that affect you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why do you suppose that we, as a culture, often lack awe and wonder? What are some ways believers can enhance our vision of God's glory and holiness?** *One reason we often lack awe and wonder is because we over-entertain ourselves with the latest gadgets, games, and social media, drowning out even the possibility for something else to grasp our attention. One way to fight this would be to lay these distractions down and look to Jesus by getting into God's Word, living in biblical community with others, spending quality time in prayer, and so forth.*
- **As with Isaiah, why is it important to not only recognize our own sinfulness, but to also confess and admit that sinfulness before God?** *Confession of sin is important because it means (1) that you recognize your sinfulness and guilt before God and (2) that you admit that your sin deserves punishment. Ultimately, confession is an act of humility and dependence, where we find ourselves completely at God's mercy as we cry out to Him for forgiveness and grace.*
- **When Isaiah encountered God, it changed His life forever. Share the ways your own encounter and relationship with God has changed you.** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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It is clear throughout the Bible that death is the proper consequence for sin, as seen most clearly in Paul's letter to the Romans (6:23). Isaiah fully realized this. In fact, he was certain death would result after he realized the depths of his own sin in light of the obvious goodness and holiness of God. It was a devastating realization, one that led to a confessional cry to God.

- **Why do you think most people don't see sin as deserving of death?** *Primarily because they don't understand sin for what it truly is, and they do not truly understand the God who is offended by it.*
- **Isaiah saw sin as an infinite offense against a holy God, and as a result, he felt ruined. How does seeing God accurately contribute to seeing our sin rightly?** *When we see God rightly, we not only see His holiness and perfection, but also how far short we fall from that perfect standard.*



## HEART

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The uncleanness Isaiah experienced was not something that was primarily on the outside, but the inside—his character. Jesus taught that what is in the heart of a person is what comes forth from the lips, for it is the heart of a person that defiles (Matt. 15:18-20). Here we see Isaiah's expression of that same teaching. Isaiah thought he was going to die, not because he forgot to keep a laundry list of rules, but because he recognized that his heart was so far away from the goodness of God.

- **What is the difference between keeping a list of moral rules and conforming to the character of Christ?** *The former attempts to earn favor with God through self-effort, where the latter recognizes that it is only through the transforming work of God in the heart of a person that real life change can take place.*
- **How can you be more mindful about pursuing a heart like God's in the weeks ahead?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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You have likely heard Isaiah's response of "Here I am! Send me" used in church to support missions and evangelism. However, it is helpful to remember what preceded his statement: an awesome experience with the living Lord. Now, this doesn't mean that unless we have the same type of experience as Isaiah, we cannot be on mission with God. Yet it does mean that when we seek to be in fellowship with God and see Him for who He truly is, we will be more passionate and engaging in our conversations with others when it comes to belief in God.

- **Why should forgiveness compel and motivate us to be God's messengers?** *If we truly understand our sin and what it cost to have our sins forgiven, our natural response would be to tell others.*
- **Give an example of this happening in your own life.** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #5, which contains a quote poster related to the session.

### SOURCES

1. Gary V. Smith, *New American Commentary, Volume 15a: Isaiah 1-39*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007). Accessed via mywsb.com.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**



# 05

## SESSION FIVE

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# Isaiah Prophecies About a Suffering Servant

### SESSION SUMMARY

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Hundreds of years before Christ was born, Isaiah prophesied about a mysterious Servant who would be rejected and despised, and bring salvation through His suffering. The early Christians believed this prophecy was made about Jesus and His life and work. As those who benefit from the service and suffering of Jesus, we now embrace a life of suffering and service on behalf of others.

### SCRIPTURE

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Isaiah 52:13–53:12

# THE POINT

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**Salvation comes through the suffering of God's chosen servant.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Rising to a massive 29,035 feet, Mount Everest holds the undisputed position of being the highest point on earth, rising 5½ miles above sea level. Standing on top of the majestic mountain makes climbers feel like they are on top of the world, with one foot in China and the other in Tibet. With winds exceeding 100 miles per hour and temperatures of -76 degrees Fahrenheit, even those who glimpse the unrivaled beauty of Everest's summit cannot do so for long. There is simply more beauty than any single person can appreciate surrounding this majestic treasure of the East.<sup>1</sup>

Ascending from the pages of the Old Testament, Isaiah 53 stands as a spiritual Mount Everest pointing to the glory of Christ and the hope of eternal salvation. As we journey up this mountain, we encounter a prophetic picture all of us can appreciate, but none of us can exhaust. Despite being written 700 years before Jesus died on Golgotha's hill, these verses position the reader at the foot of the cross and expound on the gospel by showing us the truth of substitutionary atonement.

- **What is the tallest mountain or highest elevation you have ever visited? What do you recall about that experience?**

### Option 2

As you begin the session instruct students to think about the word *character*. Ask them what they typically think of when they hear the word *character* and allow a few minutes for them to respond.

- **What are some characteristics that make you more likely to trust others? What characteristics might cause you not to trust another person?**

Then, read aloud the following quote from Arthur Pink: "The permanence of God's character guarantees the fulfillment of His promises."<sup>2</sup> In other words, because of who God is, we can trust Him.

- **How does it affect you to know that because of who He is, God will fulfill His promises to His people?**

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus, the promised Messiah, about 700 years before Jesus' crucifixion. These verses help prepare our hearts for the gospel by showing us the need for a substitute to die for our sins in our place, and what that substitute would be like. Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice calls us to live differently.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Salvation comes through the suffering of God's chosen servant.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Isaiah** - prophet of God who is most known for his prophecies of the coming Messiah
- **The Suffering Servant** - a title referring to Jesus and the prophecies He would fulfill

## PLOT

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As we continue looking into the life and ministry of the prophet Isaiah, we come to see that he not only had a personal encounter with God in the temple—one that would forever change his life—but he also had the privilege of catching a glimpse into the type of person the coming Messiah would be. With remarkable detail, Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would not only have the characteristics of a king, but also those of a suffering servant.



## TIMELINE

### ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

*Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.*

### GOD RESCUES JUDAH

*God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.*

### HOSEA AND GOMER

*God's faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.*

## THE SUFFERING SERVANT IS REJECTED

Scholars from every generation have celebrated the beauty and marveled over the prophetic accuracy of Isaiah 53. Consisting of five stanzas, this passage is the fourth song in Isaiah, a song that helps us understand God's servant, the Messiah.

In talking about these events, Isaiah employed the technique of using the past tense to communicate certainties about the suffering of the Messiah, even though the events had not yet occurred. Before listing the various ways Jesus would experience agony on the cross, the first stanza contrasts His final victory with the atrocities of His crucifixion. It is as if the pain of these verses is so horrific that Isaiah wants us to know how the story ends before we begin.

**Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. (Isa. 52:13-15)**

When we read Isaiah 53 today, we see it as referring ultimately to Jesus Christ. However, the original audience would have identified this mysterious "Servant" with God's chosen people—Israel. At other points in this book, Isaiah refers to Israel as God's servant (41:8). But the mystery deepens as we keep reading, and we begin to realize that this particular prophecy's meaning cannot be solely identified with Israel, because Isaiah describes the servant as someone who will die as a substitute for God's people.

**Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isa. 53:1-3)**

The Jews of Jesus' day were hoping for a Messiah who would be a king with the power to conquer their enemies. Instead, Isaiah predicted a servant who would be "despised" and "rejected," without "impressive form" and "majesty."

### Christ as Substitute

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*At the heart of the atonement is Jesus Christ substituting Himself for sinners as He died on the cross. This truth is seen against the backdrop of the Old Testament sacrificial system, which provided a picture of humanity's need for sin to be covered and guilt to be removed by an innocent sacrifice. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision for the redemption of humanity from sin.*

## THE SUFFERING SERVANT IS A SUBSTITUTE

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Next, Isaiah's song unveils for us the reason Jesus is often unattractive to those who encounter Him. Because God's Servant had to bear everything we would like to change about ourselves, His lack of beauty is the direct result of our ugly lives. With pinpoint precision, Isaiah describes for us the events of the cross before they occurred. The Servant became a suffering substitute for us.

**Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. (Isa. 53:4-9)**

Seeking to highlight the Servant's substitution for all people, Isaiah repeatedly used the words "we," "us," and "our" to communicate that we are the beneficiaries of His work and also guilty for these crimes.

But why do we need a substitute? You may recall that when Adam and Eve chose to sin, humanity was left reeling under the curse of their transgression (Rom. 5:12-14). Destined to die as a result, the only hope for salvation is that our sentence of condemnation be taken away. By dying on the cross, Jesus paid the debt we owe for our inherited nature and personal actions. Rather than ignore our sin and deny His holiness, God chose to take our punishment upon Himself through the person of His Son in order to remove our sins completely.

Thus, Jesus bore our sicknesses and pain because they are a result of the curse (Isa. 53:4). God the Father pierced and crushed Him for our transgressions and iniquities so that we could enjoy peace (53:5). Because all people are like wayward sheep deserving of death (53:6; Rom. 3:23), God the Father placed the weight of our wickedness upon Christ. Jesus stood in our place and not only became sin, but also faced the consequence of sin (2 Cor. 5:21). He was cut off from the land of living because the wages of sin is death (53:8; Rom. 6:23).

## THE SUFFERING SERVANT IS EXALTED

As predicted in his introductory stanza, Isaiah concludes his song by describing the Servant's work on our behalf with the exaltation and victory it brings.

**Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (Isa. 53:10-12)**

In case anyone would falsely believe that these atrocities against the Messiah were accidental, we learn that God not only orchestrated the whole affair, but also that He was pleased to do so. The greater good produced by Jesus' willing substitution far outweighed His agony and pain. Because He was victorious over sin and death, Jesus is exalted over all the earth with a name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9-11). In addition to receiving the glory that He clearly earned, we receive atonement and forgiveness that we do not deserve. Because Jesus willingly became an offering for sin (John 10:17-18), God the Father rewards Him.

- **Have you ever thought of yourself as a reward to Christ for His work on the cross? How does this change your desire to live for Him?**  
(p. 36, PSG)

## TIMELINE

### JONAH

*God goes to great lengths for people to hear the good news of salvation.*

### JOEL

*A prophet who warns God's people about the Day of the Lord.*

### JEREMIAH

*God's calling and presence overcomes obstacles in the mission.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Though New Testament followers of Jesus did not initially believe that God's Son would need to suffer in these ways (Mark 8:31-34), after the death and resurrection of Jesus, they recognized whom this song truly pointed to. In addition to the obvious parallels between the Gospel accounts and these words, six different New Testament authors apply these verses to Jesus in eight different places (Matt. 8:17; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; John 5:31; Acts 8:32-35; Rom. 10:16; 15:21; 1 Pet. 2:22-24).

How does Jesus' substitution help us? Two phrases demonstrate the monumental impact of Jesus becoming our substitute. First, "upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace" This tells us that Jesus' sacrifice restored our peace with God, making a relationship with Him possible.

Second, Isaiah says, "with his wounds we are healed." This "healing" primarily refers to the spiritual restoration and health Christ's substitution makes possible. In His earthly ministry Jesus often relieved the symptoms of the fall (sickness, pain, death), but on the cross Jesus removed the source of our greatest problem by atoning for our sins. As wonderful as temporary physical healing is, the focus of Isaiah 53 is the final victory we receive as a result of His substitution. Fully healed from the disease of rebellion, we can experience the reality of peace with God.

Because Jesus stands in our place in order to take our sin away, we are free to stand in His place and enjoy the peace of righteousness that is not our own. Jesus not only removed our guilt, but He also imparted His innocence to us. Our salvation is possible because, as our substitute, Jesus removes our sins and assigns His righteousness to us.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How does the fact that these prophecies were recorded hundreds of years before the birth of Christ strengthen your faith in the reliability of Scripture?** *For people questioning the authority and/or reliability of the Bible, fulfilled prophecies such as this one can be an incredible source of assurance that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.*
- **In what ways have we gone astray like sheep in our own lives?** *Answers will vary.*
- **After having gone through this session, how would you answer someone who asks you why we need a substitute for our sins?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What is something new this session taught you regarding God and His desire to rescue His people?** *Though answers will vary, it may be helpful for students to think about this question in light of the different members of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—all having a role in redemption as seen in these passages.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES

## HEAD

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A Savior who appears to be nobody is not very appealing to the masses who are desperate to be somebody. If Jesus is not a ticket to a better life now, most will find no value in following Him. We falsely assume that no one would humble himself intentionally, especially God. But make no mistake—the final exaltation of Christ will leave unbelievers, both Jew and Gentile alike, shocked when they consider the truth of Jesus in light of their previous notions of Him.

- **What are ways people mentally re-create Jesus today in order to make Him more appealing?** *For instance, people make Jesus out to be merely a moral teacher whose only message was about loving others. While loving others was certainly a part of Jesus' message, His words on love have to be understood in light of the undeserved grace of God given to a rebellious people like ourselves.*
- **How do these “re-creations” distract us from the primary work that Jesus came to do?** *Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost—us. Re-creations that don't take into account the fact that Jesus came to redeem a sinful people through His substitutionary death can, in the end, distract us from the reason He came.*

## HEART

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People who fear that salvation is unattainable or question whether they can be saved can reassure themselves that Jesus' work on the cross is an expression of His love toward all people (Rom. 5:8). No sinner is out of reach (Isa. 59:1), and no saint can forfeit the safety of the Savior's steady hand (John 10:28).

- **How encouraging is it to know the Servant lives to intercede for His people?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can this session encourage you in your own faith, especially if you have had doubts about your own salvation?** *Answers will vary.*

## HANDS

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Since God loved us enough to offer His Son as a Suffering Servant, how should we respond? What kind of lives should we live in light of such a sacrifice? For starters, we should not dare to squander such a costly sacrifice on our behalf. Christianity is more than a one-time decision, after which we choose to live independently of God. Accepting Christ's death also requires yielding to His life (Gal. 2:20). Just as Jesus sought to obey His Father in all things, we too, must die to ourselves so that He might live through us as we eagerly spread the good news that salvation is available to all.

- **How should the knowledge that God demonstrated His love in the substitution of His Son impact your daily decisions?** *In short, God's undeserved love and salvation should always motivate us to be more like Christ in our daily actions and dealings with others.*
- **What are some things you need to “die” to and submit to God in your own life in response to the Servant's dying on your behalf?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #6, which contains an informational chart of some of Isaiah's Messianic prophecies and how Jesus fulfilled them.

### SOURCES

1. Stephen Venables, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Mount Everest," accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Mount-Everest>.
2. Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 49.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
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# 06

## SESSION SIX

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# Hezekiah Prays for His People

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will learn how God's glory is personally beneficial to those who follow Him. Understanding God's glory reveals the certainty with which we can receive His promises. There is never a separation between displaying God's greatness and resting in His love. The ancient story of Assyria's calloused threats against Judah during the reign of King Hezekiah illustrate that God saves us for the glory of His name and for our good. In turn, we make His glory known so others will rest in His grace.

### SCRIPTURE

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2 Kings 19:8-20,32-37



# THE POINT

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**God saves us for the glory of His name and for our good.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Names communicate in a profound way. Whether good or bad, names connect to mental images and ideas about what those names represent. Songs like Johnny Cash’s “A Boy Named Sue” humorously illustrate the discomfort that comes when others’ names do not accurately reflect their identity.

Perhaps this is why parents stress over the right name when they welcome a new child into the world. Sometimes we even give nicknames to others because certain actions seem to mark them for life.

Being called something like Honest Abe would probably please us, but to be labeled as a Benedict would likely lead to our protest. In the world of sports, it’s a badge of honor to be pegged as a *Babe Ruth*, *King James*, *Megatron*, *Air Jordan*, or *The Rock*.

Even in the church, we’d much prefer to be considered a Barnabas over a Doubting Thomas. To be called a Paul often means you’re a mentor while wearing the designation of Timothy makes you a learner. Names are powerful precisely because they communicate ideas about those whom they identify.

Perhaps this is why God is so intentional about His name. Admittedly, speaking of God means different things for various people, but when understood correctly the name of God uncovers multiple reasons for worshipping Him. Not only do we benefit from understanding all that God’s name entails, but also from making His name known to others.

- **What comes to mind when someone mentions God or Jesus? How will your understanding of who God is shape the way you live?**

### Option 2

*Superlatives* are words that describe something with an exceptional degree of quality. In schools, people are often awarded superlatives such as *kindest*, *most artistic*, *most likely to succeed*, or *most athletic*. Ask students to come up with some superlatives—some they have heard before and some original. After a few minutes, discuss the importance of God’s name and the glory it carries. Just like superlatives often have the power to mark people with a certain label, so does the name of God. His powerful and glorious name marks us with far greater importance than any superlative—His name marks us as His very own. His name secures our salvation eternally.

- **In what ways do people often disrespect the name of God? How can you guard against this in your own life?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God saves us for the glory of His name and for our good.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Hezekiah** - king of Judah

## PLOT

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As our journey continues, we turn to the story of Hezekiah and the outside threat Israel experienced from the armies of Assyria. During a time in which many kings of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, Hezekiah stood with confidence in God's ability to protect His people. He asked God to save them not only for their sake, but also for the sake of His name and His renown.

## TIMELINE

### **GOD RESCUES JUDAH**

*God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.*

### **HOSEA AND GOMER**

*God's faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.*

### **JONAH**

*God goes to great lengths for people to hear the good news of salvation.*

## ASSYRIA THREATENS TO DESTROY

Because we live in a fallen world, pain and suffering are far too common. Even worse, most people today resist God despite His willingness to bring peace and relief from the calamities around us. The closer our walk with God, the more likely we will also be shunned by the world.

Israel's experience under the leadership of Hezekiah helps us to respond correctly when the world rises up against God's people today.

**The Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he heard that the king had left Lachish. Now the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, "Behold, he has set out to fight against you." So he sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?'" (2 Kings 19:8-13)**

Why is it so difficult to walk as a child of God in a contemporary world? Why do the kingdoms of earth rise up against the people of God? There are two things to keep in mind.

First, Satan has a limited source of power in this world. Since the garden of Eden, war has raged between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Because creation has been subjected to sin, Satan temporarily functions as "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4) and the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). Consequently, the world is a domain over which the devil exercises great, albeit temporary, power (1 John 5:18). Though Christ came to reestablish what Adam lost in the garden by means of a new heaven and earth, at the moment Satan continues to wreak havoc in the world, primarily against the people of God.

Secondly, seeing the backdrop of evil in the world helps us to understand that every hardship and suffering we face is not necessarily about us. Granted, Satan walks around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). He is the serpent of old, anxious to accuse believers (Rev. 12:10). But his attacks are also part of a much larger war that is not primarily about the individuals affected by the hardships created.

When Assyria came against Hezekiah and Israel's southern kingdom, the primary target was "your God in whom you trust" (19:10). When the Assyrians listed the other nations and the gods that were unable to save them, they became instruments of Satan used to mock the name of Yahweh by lumping Him into the same category. Through these mouthpieces, Satan mocked the notion that God was able to deliver His people (18:22-24). He even suggested that the pagan gods of surrounding countries approved and commissioned the attack due to Hezekiah's efforts to reestablish the worship of Yahweh as the only true God.

Ultimately, this is why the kingdoms of the world rise up against God's people. It is not because we are significant. And it is not because our happiness or unhappiness can alter the course of the ancient war between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. God's people are mocked, tempted, targeted, and persecuted in order to call God's name into question. Our lives are a battleground for God's glory and Satan is anxious to prove that the God we serve is no different than the false gods of dead religions.

- **Why do you think the Assyrians focused on Israel's trust in God, making Him seem deceptive?** (*p. 40, PSG*)
- **What stands out to you about their taunting? Have you ever experienced something similar—being taunted or ridiculed because you trust God? What happened?** (*p. 40, PSG*)

## HEZEKIAH PRAYS THAT GOD WOULD DELIVER AND EXALT HIS NAME

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Can you imagine the pressure Hezekiah must have felt? Despite his efforts to honor the commandments of the Lord, he found himself in a desperate situation with no apparent solution. Unless God intervened, certain destruction awaited Judah. But notice how Hezekiah responded to hopelessness he faced.

**Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD and spread it before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said: "O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone." (2 Kings 19:14-19)**

Unlike those who came before him, Hezekiah was a righteous king who feared the Lord. Earlier in his reign, he led Judah to tear down pagan altars that offered tribute and worship to false gods. The pressure from Sennacherib, king of Assyria, now forced Hezekiah to depend fully on the one true God's power for deliverance. Already, he had sought the counsel of Isaiah the prophet (19:5-7) and was assured of God's deliverance. Now, Hezekiah put his faith into practice by taking the Assyrian threats to the temple and calling out to the Lord in prayer.

Obviously, Hezekiah asked the Lord for the salvation of Judah (19:19). But note also the strong emphasis on the integrity of God's name. Divided into three parts, his prayer magnified the power of God, stated the problem facing the nation, and then appealed directly to God for help.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### God's Glory

*The glory of God is His manifest work, the way He represents His perfect character through His activity. It also refers to His excellent reputation and is given as one of the reasons we are to praise His name. Another sense of the word is the inherent beauty of God, the unbearable brightness and beauty of His being as He radiates His own attributes and characteristics for all to witness. The Scriptures speak of humanity as having "fallen short" of God's glory (Rom. 3:23) because we have rejected the purpose for which God created us—to glorify Him.*

Angered by the fact that Sennacherib mocked the living God (19:17), Hezekiah desired all the kingdoms of the earth to know there is but one true God (19:19). Contrary to the pagan nations that previously fell to Assyria, Israel's God was not made of wood or stone. The king was eager for the exaltation of his God as much as he was for the deliverance of his people.

## GOD DELIVERS FOR THE SAKE OF HIS NAME AND THE GOOD OF HIS PEOPLE

The response Hezekiah received from the Lord is a reminder that God is eager to hear us when we pray with a kingdom agenda.

**Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Your prayer to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard." (2 Kings 19:20)**

Not only is God willing to hear us when we cry out to Him, He is also willing to intervene on our behalf for the sake of His name.

## TIMELINE

### JOEL

*A prophet who warns God's people about the Day of the Lord.*

### JEREMIAH

*God's calling and presence overcomes obstacles in the mission.*

### THE NEW COVENANT

*God promises to indwell His people.*

**“Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.” And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh. And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place. (2 Kings 19:32-37)**

With their backs against the wall, the only hope for Judah’s victory over Assyria was God’s action on their behalf. Then, just as Isaiah predicted (19:7), Sennacherib fell in defeat as God fought to preserve His people. God eagerly protected those who belonged to Him. The sudden death of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers not only speaks of God’s power, but also shows His relentless determination to take care of His own. Whether it’s the execution of a multitude or the execution of His own Son, God stands ready to do whatever necessary to save those who humbly seek the kingdom of heaven.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Now that Christ has fulfilled the promises God made to David by establishing the eternal throne of His kingdom (Luke 1:30-33), all who are in Christ should anticipate the same allegiance from God that Old Testament Jews enjoyed because of their heroic king. Just as the kingship of David guaranteed the preservation of Israel, so also the kingship of Jesus assures us that we are eternally secure in Him. Because of His sacrificial death on the cross, God the Father gave Christ the Son a name that is above all other names (Phil. 2:9-11) so that God’s magnificent glory will be eternally manifested through Him.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some ways Satan is wreaking havoc in the world today? What does it say about us if we, as children of God, are content and at peace in the world?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What is your first reaction when bad things happen in your life? How will seeing hardship through the lens of God's glory change how you handle life's challenges?** *By focusing upon God's glory in life's challenges, we are reminded that (1) God has a plan and is in control, and (2) God is actively at work for our good.*
- **What do these verses teach you about prayer?** *We pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10) precisely because of our conviction that nothing is more satisfying than making God's name known through the growth of His kingdom.*
- **How should you approach God with your requests?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Admittedly, we don't enjoy being around people who live for themselves while neglecting others. However, God's pursuit of His glory is fundamentally different from the narcissism that plagues so much of humanity. Because no person or thing is more glorious than God, a failure to promote Himself would be idolatrous. Not only that, but like a lighthouse that leads those under its brightness to safety, God intentionally draws attention to Himself because salvation and abundant life are impossible apart from the light of His goodness. There is always a unity between the provision we need and the glory God deserves. When God promotes His glory, it results in the good of His people.

- **Why is the Lord eager to be victorious for His people? What does this tell us about His love for us, and His desire to see His name exalted?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How do we personally benefit when God makes His glory known?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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When our understanding of life's purpose is centered on God rather than ourselves, our focus is free to shift away from receiving gifts from the Lord to simply making His name known. Like Hezekiah, we should seek the Lord's activity in our lives as a testimony to His goodness and grace. Our ambition, above all else, is to bless the name of the Lord forever (Dan. 2:20).

- **Why should the praise of God's name be the ultimate desire of our hearts?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How do we make less of God in our lives when we focus on His gifts rather than on Him alone?** *The created gifts of God, while good, are simply that—created. When we focus on the gifts more than the Giver, we are essentially saying that there is more satisfaction in them than in the God who gave them.*



## HANDS

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Because God's glory is first and foremost, the children of God should live to make God's name known rather than for the advancement of their desires or agendas. God does not exist for us; we exist for Him. Because we are created for God's glory (Isa. 43:7), aligning ourselves to this purpose brings freedom, peace, and joy. When we die to our own agendas and the promotion of our own names, our lives become beacons of glory that point back to the One who is more glorious than any other (Matt. 5:16).

- **What are some ways we can reflect God's glory in the way that we live?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can you seek to make God's name known in your own life this week?** *Answers will vary.*



## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**



# 07

## SESSION SEVEN

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# Hosea's Love for Gomer

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we see how the life and, in particular, the marriage of God's prophet Hosea shows us the great lengths God goes to in order to pursue the people He loves. Despite our unfaithfulness, God loves us still and is willing to take on the personal cost and sacrifice of bringing us to and keeping us in right relationship with Him. Because of His love, God continually goes after unfaithful people like us, and in this pursuit, He provides a model for how we are to pursue others with the good news of His love.

### SCRIPTURE

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Hosea 1:2-9; 2:14-23; 3:1-5

# THE POINT

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**God faithfully pursues His people even when they are unfaithful.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

The way a message is communicated says a great deal about the message itself and the message deliverer. Have your parents ever told you to watch your tone of voice? Have they ever commanded you not to “talk back” to them? Although the content of the message is important, the method of delivery can cause people to listen intently or turn their backs and walk away—away from the deliverer and the words he or she spoke. Even our actions, body language, and facial expressions communicate with those around us. Communicating a clear message is important, but we must also use the appropriate tone, facial expressions, and actions to accompany our words.<sup>1</sup>

- **How do you typically deliver important messages? Do you think your tone of voice often causes people to listen or to shut down?**
- **Have you ever experienced someone delivering a message to you in such a way that you didn’t want to hear them out or you didn’t understand what they were saying? What happened?**

In the Bible, a prophet delivered God’s message to God’s people. God called Hosea to be a prophet, but his method of delivery would not consist of only words—Hosea would actively demonstrate God’s faithfulness to His unfaithful people. God instructed Hosea to marry a prostitute, have children with her, and continue to love and pursue her, no matter what she did or how many times she ran away from him. God actively confronted Israel’s sin through Hosea’s life.

- **How did the way God chose to communicate show love to His people? Do you think any other method would have gotten the point across?**

### Option 2

People say that dogs are extremely loyal. Articles exist to identify the most loyal dogs, including those who found lost children, stayed with wounded owners until help arrived, or lay beneath the casket of a fallen war hero.<sup>2</sup> Despite some stories of dogs that turned on their owners or acted aggressively, for the most part, people believe dogs love unconditionally. No matter how “their humans” might act, dogs seem to love us just the same.<sup>4</sup> Though dogs cannot tell humans what they think, they often show it. Lead the students to discuss their own ideas about loyalty, and what it means to be truly devoted to something or someone. Talk about how, although we may know some of these characteristics, nothing and no one’s loyalty outshines the Lord’s.

- **In what way have you seen the Lord’s faithfulness in the face of your own unfaithfulness?**
- **What are some signs that someone is loyal and devoted in a relationship? How do these signs show up in our relationship with God?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God faithfully pursues His people even when they are unfaithful.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Hosea** - prophet of God who's marriage with Gomer illustrates God's faithfulness to His unfaithful people

## PLOT

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In a time when the marriage relationship is often made light of and seen as a contract that can be easily broken, we catch a glimpse into the persistent faithfulness existing between God and His people. By looking at Hosea's story, we not only see ourselves and the spiritual unfaithfulness we have towards God, but we also see God's unwavering faithfulness to us in the unending pursuit of His love toward sinners.

## TIMELINE

### HOSEA AND GOMER

*God's faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.*

### JONAH

*God goes to great lengths for people to hear the good news of salvation.*

### JOEL

*A prophet who warns God's people about the Day of the Lord.*

## HOSEA PURSUES AN UNFAITHFUL BRIDE

What does the Bible mean when we find reference to a *prophet*? God's prophets, in the Old Testament, are His mouthpieces. They are those who stand before the people and say with heavenly authority, "Thus says the Lord." Typically, the messages of prophets involved needed repentance on the part of people.

In the case of Hosea, the prophetic role involved more than speaking. God's plan for this prophet involved a walking, talking, breathing kind of message. It was this call that God placed on Hosea's life.

**When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel." She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen." When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. And the LORD said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God." (Hos. 1:2-9)**

### GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Hosea was under no pretense about the kind of relationship he was entering into. He knew from the beginning that this marriage was to be filled with infidelity. God's command was shocking, of course, because doing so contradicts any number of commands given by God regarding faithfulness in marriage. But this prophet was not to prophesy against unfaithfulness like the prophet Micah. Instead, he was to take in and embrace a wife with the full knowledge of her history and even her future.

In fact, if we look through this passage, we see a distinct difference in the way the children that would come from this marriage were described. Notice in verse 3, the language used to describe their first son: "she conceived and bore him a son." But then look down to verse 6 and verse 8. In both cases, the language changes: "she conceived and bore."

The shift in language suggests that while the first child was truly the child of Hosea, the second and third children were a result of Gomer's ongoing unfaithfulness. Here, then, we start to see the fullness of God's command to His prophet. He was to marry an unfaithful wife and he would be reminded for years—even decades—of that unfaithfulness while caring and providing for illegitimate children.

When God designed marriage, He instituted a relationship of such intimacy, such sacrifice, and such mutual love, that it would serve as a walking, talking, living, breathing, illustration of the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32).

In commanding Hosea to take an unfaithful wife like Gomer, God was demonstrating the intensely personal relationship He desires with His people. Further, He illustrated just how painful and sacrificial that relationship has always been for Him as the faithful partner.

## HOSEA'S MARRIAGE REPRESENTS GOD'S UNENDING LOVE

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If Hosea, a man, showed this kind of love and faithfulness to his wife while knowing her pattern of unfaithful behavior, then how much more must God love His people? How much more passionately does His affection burn even for those who time and time again walk away from Him?

God, in His love, not only pursued us in the midst of our unfaithfulness as Hosea did with Gomer; God promises His love to us forever. Threaded inseparably into the narrative of Hosea's marriage is God's promise of love for His own people. Just as Hosea was called to continue to pursue and love his wife, so God had committed Himself to His people.

**“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD. “And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’” (Hos. 2:14-23)**

It is not that love is devoid of emotion when it comes to God; far from it. In fact, these verses along with a host of others in both the Old and New Testaments show us the deep affection God has for His people. But God's love is much deeper than that. His love, and all true love, involves willing pursuit and necessary sacrifice for the sake of the one being loved.

It's important to see in these verses that God is the One doing the pursuing. He is leading. He is taking. He is giving. His people are the ones responding to the love God initiated. So it is with us.

It's also important to notice in these verses that there is no time limit to the love God promised. The imagery of eternity is intertwined in this poetic treatment of the love of God: We will be His people forever. We will rest in Him securely forever. He has promised and given us love, and this promise and gift will never be revoked.

- **Take a minute to list the promises God made in this passage. What promises stand out to you? Why is it important to know that God will not withdraw His love from His people?** (p. 49, PSG)

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### God is Gracious

*God's nature is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation: all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).*

## GOMER IS PURCHASED OUT OF SLAVERY

At some point between Hosea 1 and Hosea 3, Gomer left. We don't know exactly why or when she did, or if this was the first time she left. Maybe this was her usual pattern. She would, like so many of us do in our own relationship with God, commit herself to her husband only to find the lure of the old life so strong that she left.

Or perhaps she could never fully believe that the love of her husband was as true, faithful, and sacrificial as it seemed. Maybe she was always waiting for the other shoe to drop, every day wondering if this would be the day when he finally wised up and changed his mind. If so, maybe the wondering became too much for her and it was easier to run than to live with the wonder of faithful love.

Whatever the rest of the story, Gomer had found her way out of the house of Hosea and into slavery.

**And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you." For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and**

## TIMELINE

### JEREMIAH

*God's calling and presence overcomes obstacles in the mission.*

### THE NEW COVENANT

*God promises to indwell His people.*

### THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

*The hardness of heart and the fall of God's people.*

**seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days. (Hos. 3:1-5)**

The imagery is vivid and powerful. Hosea—the abandoned but faithful husband who has every right to turn his back. Gomer—powerless to affect her situation. And then the husband, in love, paying the price to purchase the freedom of the one he loves. This passage gives us a mental picture of several relatable points to the message of the gospel.

**Slavery.** It wasn't just that Gomer was gone; she was enslaved. Because of her lifestyle, Gomer has found herself trapped and powerless to change her own circumstances. Instead, she was at the mercy of others.

**Rescuer.** Hosea had every right to leave his wife to what she deserved, but he did not. The Lord commanded him to “go” to her because there was no way she could come to him, even if she wanted to.

**Price.** Hosea did not buy back Gomer on emotion, sentiment, or good intentions. He didn't stand at a distance and shout about His love for her; instead, Hosea recognized freedom doesn't come cheaply, so He went with His pockets full in order to pay the price so that the one he loved could go free.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Just as Hosea went to Gomer when she was powerless to return to him, so Jesus came to us as the Rescuer we so desperately needed. Through His death and resurrection, He broke the chains of sin and death and brought freedom to the people of God. This freedom came not as a result of our efforts, struggling against the chains that kept us in bondage, but from One who loved us enough to come to us. Though we have been unfaithful, He faithfully gave up His life in our stead.

Not only that, but in an even greater way, there was a high price to be paid for our freedom. As rebellious sinners, God's justice demands death as payment for our rebellion, and that justice must be satisfied. Jesus Himself was the price paid. And because He gave up His own life, we can go free.

This entire process can be summed up in a single word: *Redemption*. To *redeem* something means *to buy it back*. This is what Hosea did for Gomer, and it's what Jesus Christ did for us at the cross.



# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **In what ways have you found sin to be a snare that enslaves, rather than something that frees?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Like Gomer, what are some sins that you keep running back to in your own life?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does the story of Hosea and Gomer teach us about God's character, especially as it relates to our own unfaithfulness to Him?** *Among other things, it teaches us that God is the One who pursues us even when we run away from Him. He loves us, and He demonstrates that love in the active pursuit of rescuing us from sin and ourselves.*
- **What are some ways we can cultivate uncompromising devotion to God in our own lives?** *One way is to continuously remind ourselves of the price God paid for our deliverance, as well as the joy of our salvation.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Like Gomer, you and I are enslaved to the pattern and ways of this world. We are chained by our own sin, and both because of our nature and our choices, are incapable of escaping from those chains. Like Gomer, we are on the slave block, and unless someone intervenes, our eternal destiny is set. We will be chained for all eternity as a result of our sin.

- **List some ways the prophet Hosea (whose name means *Savior*) resembles Jesus and His work.** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does understanding the love of Hosea for Gomer help us grow in gratitude for God has treated us?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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This picture of the love of God stands in stark contrast to what passes for love in our culture. We love sports, movies, pets, food, actors, games, and a host of other things. We throw around the word without thinking about it; it's part of our regular vocabulary. It seems that to us, at least based on the way we use the word, love is a feeling or emotion. According to that mind-set, love is not commitment based, but sits on the shaky foundation of personal preference and taste. With God, we find the true definition of the word *love*. It's a definition forged not with word, but with action, exemplified by the work of Jesus on the cross.

- **How do we, based on our usage of the word in our culture, define *love*?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How is that different than the picture of God's love we see in Scripture?** *In the first place, while the word love is sometimes used as a noun, it is more often used as a verb throughout Scripture.*



## HANDS

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Having been pursued and loved by God, and in light of the great personal cost to Himself, we are called to extend that same pursuit and love to others. We love because we have been loved (1 John 4:11). As in the case of Hosea, this love for others is not emotional attachment, and it's not without cost. To pursue others with the message of the gospel will be a costly endeavor—it will cost us time and the realignment of priorities. But when the cost might seem to be too great, it's helpful for us to call to mind the great cost that God Himself paid for us.

- **Why do you think God asked Hosea to marry this woman? Why was it not sufficient for Hosea to deliver God's message with words alone?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can you use the story of Hosea when sharing the gospel with someone?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #7, which contains a list of common things students pursue in place of God.

### SOURCES

1. Joyce E. A. Russell, "Career coach: The wrong tone can spoil the message," *The Washington Post*, February 7, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/04/AR2011020406095.html>.
2. "The 16 Most Loyal Dogs of All Time," *Huffington Post*, August 27, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/27/most-loyal-dogs-of-all-time\\_n\\_3786302.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/27/most-loyal-dogs-of-all-time_n_3786302.html).
3. Debbie Gisonni, "10 Things Dogs Teach Us About What Matters Most," *Huffington Post*, September 7, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/debbie-gisonni/lessons-from-dogs\\_b\\_5556867.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/debbie-gisonni/lessons-from-dogs_b_5556867.html).

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**

# 08

## SESSION EIGHT

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# Jonah and the Ninevites

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we see how God goes to great lengths to pursue people even when they have no interest in being found. God pursues sinners of all kinds in order to bring them to Himself. Jonah was a prophet who rejected God's call and ran away from his enemies. Unlike Jonah, Jesus heard God's call and ran toward His enemies. While we were still sinners, He died for us, and now He commissions us as His people to pursue others with the good news of His love.

### SCRIPTURE

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Jonah 1:1-5,15-17; 2:7-3:5; 4:1-4

# THE POINT

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**God's saving grace extends to those whom we may consider as enemies.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Have you ever tried to run away from home? There is no more famous story of running away than that of Jonah. Here was a prophet, convinced his own opinion was the correct one, and so opposed to God's direction that he sought to run as far away from the will and reach of God as possible. But this story is less about a man running from God than it is about a God willing to pursue humanity in our disobedience.

While we tend to focus on the prophet when we tell the story of Jonah, the main character in the Book of Jonah is God Himself. While Jonah was vindictive, God was merciful. While Jonah ran away, God pursued. While Jonah was angry, God was forgiving. God was pursuing the wicked Ninevites, and He also pursued the disobedient prophet.

- **Consider a time when you thought about running away from something. Maybe it was a certain situation, a specific person, or maybe you even wanted to run away from home. What made you want to run away? What happened as a result of your decision to stay or run?**
- **What about running from God? Have you ever felt like you were running from God's plan and purposes? Why might we do that? What could we do to embrace God's plan and purposes instead?**

### Option 2

Students most likely wake up early in the morning for school or church, and they probably use an alarm to do so. Ask them what they use for an alarm. Does someone else wake them? Do they set multiple alarms? Does the alarm play a song they love or a sound they find annoying? How many times do they press the snooze button?

Alarms tell us when it's time to go—time to move from sleep to our daily activities, move out of a building if there's a fire, or move toward transportation to get to an appointment on time.

- **What is your general attitude toward alarms? Why?**
- **Have you ever missed an alarm? What happened?**

In the same way, when God speaks, we should move. We should not wait to obey His commands; we should act on His words immediately. As with the alarms, we should get up and move toward the destination He has appointed for us.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God's saving grace extends to those whom we may consider as enemies.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Jonah** - prophet to the Ninevites; spent three days inside a fish

## PLOT

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The story of Jonah is perhaps one of those most well-known and often told stories of the Bible. However, it is probably one of the most misunderstood stories since people often identify Jonah as the main character and focus exclusively on the events surrounding his encounter with the big fish. While Jonah plays a vital role in his own story, the main character of the story is God and His unwavering pursuit of both Jonah and the Ninevites whom Jonah despises.

## TIMELINE

### JONAH

*God goes to great lengths for people to hear the good news of salvation.*

### JOEL

*A prophet who warns God's people about the Day of the Lord.*

### JEREMIAH

*God's calling and presence overcomes obstacles in the mission.*

## GOD PURSUES A DISOBEDIENT PROPHET

Why would someone think they could run from God? God is not like a man—His reach is boundless and His eyes move throughout the earth. Yet Jonah, despite being a prophet, decided that the call of God was so distasteful that he could get away from it if he ran far enough.

Jonah, like Adam and Eve before him, ran and hid. But God was not content to let the issue pass.

**Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. (Jonah 1:1-5)**

This was not the first time Jonah had heard the word of the Lord. God had used Jonah to declare to the northern kingdom of Israel God’s grace and coming blessing (2 Kings 14:25). But this message was different. God was not sending Jonah to the Israelites; He was sending Jonah to their foreign enemies, the Ninevites. And He was not sending Jonah to declare a message of prosperity, but a message of impending judgment.

You would think Jonah would be excited about an assignment like this; after all, everyone in the world knew about the Assyrians’ cruelty. They were the “bullies” of the day. They were known to be brutal in their attacks and extremely oppressive when they conquered other peoples. Nineveh was described as a “great” city in verse 2, and it certainly was. A leading city of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh was surrounded by a wall almost eight miles in length and was large enough to house 120,000 people (Jonah 3:2).

This was a chance for Jonah to get in the face of the enemies of God’s people, an opportunity for him to declare judgment—no doubt a message more than one of the Israelites hoped and even prayed for in their day. Jonah did indeed go like God told him to, but instead of heading straight for Nineveh, he bought a ticket on a ship headed the other direction.

So why did Jonah run? Answer: Jonah knew God well enough to know God was gracious, compassionate, and full of mercy. Furthermore, he knew God was giving the Ninevites forty days of warning, inviting them to repent. Jonah could

see how this was playing out—he would go to Nineveh, he would speak the word of the Lord, the people would repent, and God would forgive them. No judgment. No destruction. And his hatred for the Ninevites bound him to hold back the message of God from them.

Just as God was unwilling to give up on the Ninevites, so He also was unwilling to let Jonah go his own way. God pursued Jonah even as he ran, and the means of that pursuit was a mighty storm. The storm God “hurled” into the sea was so terrible that the hardened sailors suddenly turned very religious. There are no atheists in foxholes—or on ships in a God-sized storm!

Eventually, the crew knew what Jonah knew—the storm was no accident, but was brought on by Jonah’s disobedience. Jonah could have simply acknowledged his disobedience and asked the crew to turn around and row for shore. He had resolved to stop running from God and take on the assignment given to him. Even then, Jonah was too full of pride and hatred to bend his will to that of God. He would rather die.

**So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. (Jonah 1:15-17)**

- **Has God ever called you to go somewhere or do something you found difficult to obey? What did He ask of you? How did you respond?** *(p. 54, PSG)*
- **After reading about Jonah’s response, what do you think you can do to avoid making the same mistake in your own life? How can you commit to obey God immediately, no matter what He asks?** *(p. 54, PSG)*

## **GOD FORGIVES JONAH AND THE NINEVITES**

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Apparently, the belly of a great fish is a fine place to reevaluate your priorities. It served as that kind of environment for Jonah. Part of trusting in God’s perfect fatherhood is recognizing, as a perfect Father, God exercises the right discipline at the right time. Such discipline in our lives is not evidence of His lack of care, but the proof of His love.

Ironically, Jonah found himself in the exact same position as the Ninevites. He was disobedient, living in the middle of God’s discipline, and he needed to repent and ask for forgiveness. He had to, in a sense, preach the message to himself that God had given him for the Ninevites. And when he applied the message to himself, he was thankful for the same character of God that had driven him to such rage days earlier. Jonah 2:7 recorded part of Jonah’s prayer from inside the fish.

**When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice**



**of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!” And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. (Jonah 2:7-10)**

After Jonah’s repentance, it is as if the story starts over again. Jonah was again given the same command to go and preach to Nineveh, but this time God was more explicit in the message. Jonah didn’t have any improvisational freedom in his sermon, he had to say exactly what God told him to say.

**Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. (Jonah 3:1-5)**

There were no flourishes, no clever illustrations. Unlike some of his contemporary prophets, Jonah wasn’t required to illustrate his message through physical actions. Instead, it was a simple pronouncement of God’s judgment.

Miraculously, the message was incredibly effective. Though the text tells that it was a three day walk, which probably meant that it would take Jonah three days to walk from one end of the city to the other preaching his message, it only took one day. At the end of that one day, every citizen in Nineveh had been cut to the core by the proclamation of their destruction and turned back to God. As evidence of their repentance, the king declared a state of extreme fasting. The city turned to God with all their might, even including their animals in their fast.

- **Do you think it was difficult for Jonah to find himself in need of the same repentance God sought from the Ninevites? Why or why not?** (*p. 55, PSG*)
- **Why do you think Jonah’s message penetrated the Ninevites hearts so quickly?** (*p. 55, PSG*)

## **GOD EXPOSES THE SOURCE OF JONAH’S ANGER**

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It seems that Jonah’s repentance didn’t fully take hold. He was in the fish, he expressed his repentance, he faithfully preached the message, and what he thought would happen indeed happened.

You’ve got to give it to Jonah—he was confident in the power of God’s Word and God’s gracious character. But you have to wonder, as the scores of Ninevites were repenting and crying out to God, if Jonah simply stood by with his arms crossed, rolling his eyes because he couldn’t overcome his personal hatred and bias.

## TIMELINE

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### **THE NEW COVENANT**

*God promises to indwell His people.*

### **THE FALL OF JERUSALEM**

*The hardness of heart and the fall of God’s people.*

### **EZEKIEL’S VISION**

*God is capable of raising the dead.*

**But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?” (Jonah 4:1-4)**

Despite all that occurred in the last few days of Jonah’s life, he was still unwilling to confront his own heart issues. Like the Ninevites who were clinging to idols, Jonah was clinging to the idol of his own hatred. He simply couldn’t let it go, and his refusal to do so revealed that though He intellectually recognized the magnitude of God’s gracious compassion, he could not embrace the practice of godly compassion for himself.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Let’s zoom out for a minute here and remind ourselves what we have in the story of Jonah. We have the enemies of God. We have God’s chosen messenger to deliver a message of repentance and forgiveness. Unwilling to bend to God’s will, that messenger runs from the call, only to be swallowed up for three days and three nights. That’s Jonah’s story.

But it’s not our story. Our story is that we were the enemies of God. He appointed another Messenger, Someone better than Jonah, to come and declare His message of repentance and forgiveness. This Messenger bent Himself fully to the will of God, though it cost Him His life. He was also swallowed up for three days and three nights, not by a fish, but by the grave.

Then He emerged victorious. Jesus is the second and better Jonah, and we are the enemies who have been granted forgiveness because of Him.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### God is Merciful

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*Mercy refers to God’s compassion and is often expressed in God withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning that there is nothing humanity can do to earn God’s mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.*

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How has God used discipline in your life to bring you in line with His will?**  
*Answers will vary.*
- **Imagine you were in Jonah's place. How would your perspective change after having been inside the great fish?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why do you think Jonah was so reluctant to speak the Word of the Lord to the Ninevites? When have you felt like Jonah—uneasy about what God was calling you to do?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Do you typically see yourself as Jonah in this story, or as the Ninevites? Why is it important for us to learn from both?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

God's Story of  
Redemption,  
through His Son,  
Jesus Christ.

### YOUR STORY

Where your story  
meets His.

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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The truth is Jonah was right. The Ninevites deserved to be punished for their wickedness. No doubt there are people in your life and in our culture that deserve the righteous judgment of God—just as we do. Jonah, too, deserved to be punished for his disobedience. The sailors even deserved to be swallowed up by the sea for their idolatry. But, as Jonah feared, God is gracious and compassionate. Why do we rejoice in the troubles of others? We love the grace of God as long as it applies to us, but we become disgruntled with a God who loves our enemies.

- **Think about your own life. Who do you know that God wants to reach? Are you running away from or running toward that person?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways you think God wants to use you to influence that person for Him?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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Like Jonah, we must confront the long-held prejudice and hatred in our hearts that might cause us to withhold forgiveness and compassion from others. When we bear ill will toward others, we show that we have not truly understood and experienced the fullness of God's grace given to us.

- **What did God want Jonah to realize with His question about Jonah's anger (Jonah 4:4)?** *In essence, God used this to prompt Jonah to examine the racial bias in his heart. God was not merely the God of the Israelites, but the God and Savior of the entire world.*
- **Have you ever felt angry because of something God did, allowed, or asked you to do? How would you respond if the Lord asked you why you were angry with Him?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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When we are called to speak the Word of God, we might feel inadequate, afraid, or vulnerable as we do it. But the bowing of the mighty city of Nineveh reminds us that God's Word is living, active, and able to cut through to the soul and spirit of mankind. We can speak the Word of God confidently, not because we are great orators, but because of the inherent power present in the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

- **Does it surprise you that Jonah's simple message was so effective? Why or why not?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does this show us about the power of God's Word?** *It shows us, as Paul later said, faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).*

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **LEADER PACK**

For this session, refer students to pack item #8, which contains an artistic poster pertaining to this session.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
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# 09

## SESSION NINE

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# The Warning of Joel

### SESSION SUMMARY

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The prophet Joel warned God's people about the Day of the Lord—a day in which God would judge His enemies, vindicate His people, and restore the world. In light of the coming judgment, Joel called the people of Judah to repentance. As believers who are restored by God's Spirit, we are commissioned to call others to repentance, to spread the good news that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord can be saved.

### SCRIPTURE

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Joel 1:1-14; 2:12-14,18,25-32

# THE POINT

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**Repentance requires grieving over our sin and turning away from our sin and toward God for forgiveness.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Locusts are a species of grasshoppers. Most of the time, locusts are at best a curiosity and at worst, a nuisance. From the curiosity standpoint, you can find the shells they leave behind stuck to tree trunks. From the standpoint of nuisance, they can often sing loudly, especially when there are a lot of them.

But sometimes locusts move beyond curiosity and beyond nuisance. When the conditions are right, locusts breed abundantly. They move in swarms and rapidly destroy crops. They fly great distances and consume all the green vegetation wherever they settle.

From ancient times, farmers have lived with a fear of locusts. Imagine sitting idly by while a swarm of insects thick enough to darken the sun descends upon the source of your livelihood, only to leave it and your life devastated because of their appetite. This kind of nightmare has led to scientific monitoring of locusts. Societies take extreme measures to avoid the destruction a plague like this can cause.

There were no such monitoring stations or preventative measures during the days of Joel. And the land was being consumed before the eyes of Judah. But the prophet Joel helps us see that the locusts were more than an unfortunate circumstance; the swarming insects were the instruments of judgment in the hand of God. As the people sat by and watched their land be consumed, the prophet Joel pointed the people not only to their own sin, but also to the fact that their current situation was only a shadow of the relentless judgment of God.

But even then, in the dark days of plague and famine, there was hope of restoration. God reminded His people, both then and now, that the Day of the Lord is a day of judgment, as well as a day of vindication and redemption for those who have repented and trusted in Him.

- **Share of a time in your life when your hope in God helped you through a difficult season.**

### Option 2

Place students into groups of three to four, and ask them to discuss the following questions.

- **What are the signs that someone has a broken heart?**
- **What do people turn to in order to heal a broken heart?**

Joel told the Israelites not to simply mourn outwardly by symbolically tearing their clothing, but to mourn inwardly by tearing their hearts. In other words, he wanted them to allow their hearts to be broken over their sin. In the same way, we must see our sin, let our hearts be broken over the way we have offended God, and then we must turn toward Him.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Repentance requires grieving over our sin and turning away from our sin and toward God for forgiveness.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joel** - prophet whose preaching ministry produced the book of Joel.

## PLOT

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Our journey continues as we look at the ministry of the prophet Joel, who warned God's people about the Day of the Lord—a day in which God would judge His enemies, vindicate His people, and restore the world. In light of the coming judgment, Joel called the people of Judah to repentance.



## TIMELINE

### JOEL

*A prophet who warns God's people about the Day of the Lord.*

### JEREMIAH

*God's calling and presence overcomes obstacles in the mission.*

### THE NEW COVENANT

*God promises to indwell His people.*

## GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO GRIEVE OVER THEIR SIN

We don't know much about the prophet Joel, but we do know that his message from the Lord was a sober reminder about the deplorable nature of sin. In the days of Joel, an unprecedented disaster had overtaken the land of Judah, and Joel wanted to make sure no one attributed this disaster to bad luck or happenstance. This was judgment from God.

**The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation. What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. (Joel 1:1-4)**

The scary side of God's involvement in life is that terrible things do sometimes happen as a result of His judgment. The people in the days of Joel couldn't credit their situation to coincidence. The same God who feeds the birds is, in this case, the God who oversaw the swarm of locusts. In light of God's involvement, Joel called the people to recognize the truth of what they were experiencing. The proper response to that recognition was to grieve over their sin, which brought the judgment of God.

**Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white. Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests mourn, the ministers of the LORD. The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes. Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil; wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man. Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain**

**offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD. (Joel 1:5-14)**

Joel gave his people a strong dose of reality. The locust swarm was meant as a wake-up call for people to recognize their sin and return to the Lord. The beginning of a return to God involves proper grief over sin.

- **Does it surprise you that God sent the locusts as a warning to His own people? Where else in the Bible did He use locusts to send a message?**  
(p. 60, PSG)

## **GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO RETURN TO HIM IN REPENTANCE**

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We often think *repent* means *stop*. Whatever sin you're doing, grit your teeth and quit doing it—whether it's coarse joking, cheating your way through school, or behaving inappropriately in your physical relationships with others. But this interpretation of repentance misses the love that comes with the biblical picture. To *repent* is to *turn*, not to stop.

Turning is different than stopping, bigger than stopping. You can stop and still be facing the same direction, sitting motionless. And though stopping sinful behavior is important, it's really only the midway point in the fullness of true repentance. Repenting isn't just about stopping, because it's not enough to stop. Repentance is about turning and choosing a better action than the one you were caught up in. In other words, repentance isn't just walking away from something; it's walking toward something.

In the days of Joel, God called His people to not only stop in their sin, but to turn to the only true Source of joy and satisfaction.

**“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? (Joel 2:12-14)**

In this passage in Joel, we see two key aspects of what it means to truly turn away from sin and turn toward God:

First, repentance begins in the heart and is expressed in action. You can see the clear emphasis on the heart in these verses. Joel reminded the people to turn to God their whole heart, and to make sure that their hearts were torn and not just their clothes. The physical signs of repentance can be manufactured. We can

make a simple choice of the will to *appear* grieved with our sin. At the same time, true repentance with the whole heart always results in action. From the opposite perspective, the Bible emphasizes (notably in the Book of James) that true faith always results in action.

Second, repentance is received by a gracious and compassionate God. There is always an element of risk when we go to someone we have wronged in a humble manner, admitting our fault. Why? Because we don't know how they'll respond. They might receive us warmly, but they also might snicker at our actions. They might want reconciliation or they might hold a grudge. The amazing news in this passage is that there is no such risk when we return to God.

When we come to God in repentance, we don't have to wonder about His response. He will not hold back His forgiveness and His love. He is not interested in putting us on "spiritual probation" until we prove ourselves worthy of His mercy. Rather, it's His character to readily and freely extend that mercy and grace to all who come to Him.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Repentance

*Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation, and includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration, helping us to see what takes place from the human side of conversion.*

## GOD PROMISES TO RESTORE HIS PEOPLE BY HIS SPIRIT

Following God's call to repentance in Joel, the prophet's message turns a corner. Starting in Joel 2:18, the text begins to look forward to the promised restoration of God's people:

**Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. (Joel 2:18)**

Though the text doesn't tell us exactly what happened, the change in the mood of the rest of the Book of Joel is so dramatic that some scholars believe the people got the message. The people repented, and they began to see the compassion of the Lord played out in their land. As chapter 2 continues, we see that not only was there an immediate fulfillment to God's promise of restoration, but the text also points forward to an even greater and more lasting restoration by the Spirit of God.

## TIMELINE

### THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

*The hardness of heart and the fall of God's people.*

### EZEKIEL'S VISION

*God is capable of raising the dead.*

*Beginning Winter 2016-17*

### FAITHFUL IN EXILE

*When God's people pursue holiness, others take notice.*

**I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls." (Joel 2:25-32)**

## **CHRIST CONNECTION**

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As we look forward to the Day of the Lord in our time, we must remind ourselves that God's patience with the sin of man will not last forever. The day is coming when we will be held accountable for what we have done with the gospel message of Jesus Christ. So will those around us.

Though it might not be popular to talk about God's judgment in our day and time, it is an inescapable reality. We cannot be the kind of Christians who love to talk about God's love and harbor some embarrassment when it comes to discussing the reality of His coming judgment of sin. Let us not be the people who drink deeply of the gift of the Holy Spirit in our day and yet greedily withhold the message of escape from those around us. The way of escape during the Day of the Lord is available, and that is why we are active in sharing the gospel message with those around us.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What does it mean to grieve over sin?** *In part, it means to be broken by the reality of sin to the point that a change in behavior follows. If one is truly broken over the sin of lying to one's parents or cheating in school, that person will not only feel the weight of the sin within his or her heart, but their actions will also demonstrate repentance.*
- **What is the difference between grieving over the effects of sin and grieving over sin itself?** *Grieving over the effects simply means one is upset about the consequences that sin has brought, as opposed to grieving over the presence of sin and disobedience to God in the first place.*
- **What are some of the actions that were to accompany the emotional aspect of grief from the people? What actions represent our grief over our sin today?** *They tore their clothes, they assembled at the temple and cried out to God, and so forth.*
- **When it comes to repentance, why is it important that both attitude and action go together?** *For us, the act of repentance might not mean tearing our clothes or going without food, but it will mean something. It will mean turning from old habits and attitudes; it will mean actively seeking the forgiveness of those we have wronged; and it will mean a changed lifestyle that falls in line with what has happened deeply in our hearts.*

### HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

### YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Joel's words in Joel 1:1-14 indicate that God is not passive in His rule over creation. Rather, He is actively involved in the most intimate details of life. Jesus would later express the positive side of this truth when He commanded His followers not to worry in Matthew 6:25-26. The reason believers can be free from anxiety is not about our attitude or personality; it's about the fact that we know God is intimately involved in all the details of life.

- **What are some details of life where you have seen God at work?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How should the truth of God's involvement in the details of life help us when we may not "feel" His presence?** *All Christians go through seasons where they may not sense God's presence or nearness. In times like these Christians need to recall the fact that our emotions are not always right and can lead us into wrong patterns of thinking, especially in light of the biblical truth that God is always near whether we "feel" Him or not.*



## HEART

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Like the people of Joel's day, our sin has practical and tragic consequences. However, there is a difference between grieving over the effects of our sin and over our sin itself. The former is meant to move us to the latter, where our greatest grief over our sin is not because of what's it's done to our lives, but because of what it's done to the heart and glory of God.

- **How do you think God feels about the sin in our lives?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways does the sin in our lives communicate to others what we truly love and cherish?** *Because our hearts are always tied to what we treasure, we only need to look to the things or people in our lives we treasure in order to know where our deepest devotion lies.*



## HANDS

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God pursues people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, and is ready to receive them as they come to see His gracious character fully expressed in the message of the gospel. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a once and for all declaration of the grace and mercy of God. Demonstrated in His sacrifice of His own Son, God invites all who are willing to repent to turn to Him and find Him waiting with open arms.

- **What are some practical and appropriate ways you can present the reality of God's judgment to those around you?** *Whatever suggestions students come up with, it is important to remind them that the tone in which we speak to others and the motivation behind our words, is just as important as the truth we have to say.*
- **Why do you think many Christians find it challenging to talk about the judgment of God?** *Answers will vary.*

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**



# 10

## SESSION TEN

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# The Calling of Jeremiah

### SESSION SUMMARY

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Even before he was born, Jeremiah was called to be God's prophet. Because his prophetic message was contrary to what the people wanted to hear, Jeremiah faced opposition and persecution. Nevertheless, Jeremiah remained faithful to God's call despite the obstacles. In Jeremiah's grief, we see a picture of the tender heart of God, most fully expressed in Jesus' weeping for the unrepentant people of Jerusalem. From Jeremiah, we also learn that the God who calls us to deliver His message is the God who will empower us for His mission.

### SCRIPTURE

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Jeremiah 1:4-10



# THE POINT

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**God equips those He has chosen to minister in His name.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Imagine that a few of your close friends are having a birthday party, and the only thing they want is a certain kind of cake. Because you love those people, you want to give them this gift. The problem is that you don't know a spatula from a measuring spoon. You've never melted butter, measured flour, or melted chocolate for icing. In fact, the only thing you have as an asset to your cause is a picture of a perfectly formed and created birthday cake. You have to move from *Step 0* to the final product all on your own.

Or imagine having never played baseball and being told that you have to step onto the field that day as the starting shortstop. Or being scheduled to give a concert before a crowd, playing a classical piano piece without ever having learned how to play the piano.

To do these tasks and a host of others, we not only need to see what the task is, we also need to be properly prepared in order to perform it. We need the necessary training, the right materials, and the right equipment in order to do what we have been called upon to do.

Some of us feel the same sort of intimidation when considering what it means to follow God's will for our lives. We have been called to be salt and light, to love the world without being corrupted by the world, to be couriers of the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever our feet fall. It's the greatest task in the universe, and because of this, we might feel unequipped for such a mighty cause.

Jeremiah felt that way, too. But God's prophet learned, as we will, that God does not leave His people unequipped. Instead, God equips them to minister in His name.

- **When have you felt unequipped to do something you had been asked to do? How did you respond?**

### Option 2

Being "chosen" sometimes carries a negative connotation. Think of children choosing people to be on their teams at recess. Those who are chosen first likely feel like they know their place and their purpose. What about those who are chosen last? Thankfully, we do not have to worry about this with God. All believers are chosen by God to be a part of His purpose, each using their God-given skills and talents for His glory.

- **How does knowing that God has a purpose for your life encourage you as a believer?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God equips those He has chosen to minister in His name.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Jeremiah** - prophet who constantly proclaimed God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, and yet he was also a prophet of hope

## PLOT

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The next prophet on our list is Jeremiah. He was called to be God's prophet, even before He was born. Because his prophetic message was contrary to what the people wanted to hear, Jeremiah faced opposition and persecution. Nevertheless, Jeremiah remained faithful to God's call despite the obstacles. From Jeremiah, we learn that the God who calls us to deliver His message is the God who will empower us for His mission.

## TIMELINE

### **JEREMIAH**

*God's calling and presence overcomes obstacles in the mission.*

### **THE NEW COVENANT**

*God promises to indwell His people.*

### **THE FALL OF JERUSALEM**

*The hardness of heart and the fall of God's people.*

## GOD'S PLAN FOR JEREMIAH PRECEDED HIS BIRTH

Prior to Jeremiah's birth, Judah found itself wedged between two world superpowers. The tiny kingdom was set between Egypt and Assyria, and for the last hundred years or so Assyria had brought the entire region into their empire. Any attempt at rebellion had been squelched. The northern nation of Israel had tried to rebel, but was overrun and the people were deported. Israel's existence as a kingdom was ended by the bully on the block.

In Judah, King Josiah had come to power at the age of eight. When he was twenty years old, Josiah began a sweeping reform of the nation, calling all of his people to return to the Lord and destroy their idols. It was during this period of spiritual awakening that Jeremiah was called to prophesy and preach.

**Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1:4-5)**

These two short verses provide powerful insight into the character and power of God. Sometimes, even as Christians, we tend to think of ourselves as victims of circumstance. But if we really believe what the Bible says about God, then we must accept that God actively forms and calls us to fulfill His will. Let's break this down.

First, God actively forms us. God reminded Jeremiah that he was intentionally designed for this purpose—set apart to be God's prophet. And God's intentional formation was not specific to Jeremiah, although He specifically intended Jeremiah to be a prophet in that particular time and place. He is still actively involved in the formation of every man, woman, and child.

Second, God actively calls. God formed Jeremiah in the womb. That means He intentionally gave Jeremiah the physical and emotional capacity he would need for his prophetic mission. God doesn't form us in the womb, and then leave us to live our lives as we see fit. He also actively calls us, just as He called Jeremiah.

Long before Jeremiah could walk, talk, or fully and completely formulate his thoughts, God set him apart as a prophet to the nations. Before giving Jeremiah this task, God reminded him that his days were planned from the beginning. God constructed Jeremiah for a purpose, and sent him on a mission planned well before Jeremiah's time.

- **God actively formed you and called you to a specific purpose to fulfill His plan for the world. What does this reveal to you about God's character? Your purpose in life?** (p. 66, PSG)

## GOD PROMISED TO BE WITH JEREMIAH

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Despite the truth of God's formation and God's call, Jeremiah was still hesitant to take on his mission. He wasn't the first reluctant messenger of the Lord, and he certainly wouldn't be the last. However, as is always the case, Jeremiah's focus was on the wrong thing when he protested.

**Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD." (Jer. 1:6-8)**

Do you see where Jeremiah's focus was? In that single verse, he used the pronoun *I* three different times. Jeremiah was focused on himself—his own shortcomings, limited abilities, and inexperience. It's not unlike Moses, who also protested to God's mission, claiming that he could not speak clearly and the Israelites wouldn't listen to him.

God's response to Moses, and here to Jeremiah, is not so much a counter to the objections. God never denied that Jeremiah didn't know how to speak, and He did not encourage Jeremiah by saying, "You're more mature than you think you are." Instead, God refocused Jeremiah's gaze to where it should be in the first place: on God.

Jeremiah was making false assumptions—God's call wasn't about his readiness or capabilities. Instead, it was about whether God was ready and capable. And the Lord was.

Similarly, God's call is not a matter of who we are or our abilities; it's a matter of the Lord's presence. God's abiding presence helps us overcome obstacles to our mission.

We should stop here for some clarity though. Just because God will be with us as He was with Jeremiah, doesn't mean that we will be "successful" in our mission. Then again, that depends on how we define success.

In Jeremiah's case, he went on a preaching tour across the land to further the reforms of Josiah. He was met with opposition and was branded as a traitor by his own people. The new covenant Josiah had made with God on behalf of the people was broken almost as soon as it was instituted.

## GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Things got even worse for Jeremiah. After Josiah was killed in a battle with Egypt, Jeremiah continued to preach the need for repentance and predicted the coming fall of the nation and exile of the people. He even appeared before the people wearing an ox yoke. His message was rejected time and time again, but the prophet persisted. In fact, his message was so emotional to him personally that he often wept as he delivered it, causing him to be remembered throughout history as “the weeping prophet.”

On the surface level, this is not the kind of mission we would deem to be successful by any stretch. However, success in the eyes of God is measured less by results and more by faithfulness. When we are faithful to say what God has called us to say to whom God has called us to say it, then the mission is successful. We have been faithful to the Lord.

- **How do you typically think of success? How does your view differ from God's view of success?** (p. 67, PSG)
- **What are some steps you can take to better align your definition of success with what it means to be successful in God's eyes?** (p. 67, PSG)

## GOD EQUIPPED JEREMIAH WITH A MESSAGE

Jeremiah was intentionally formed and commissioned. He was sent out, and the presence of God went with Him. And then God gave him a message.

**Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”**  
(Jer. 1:9-10)

What an amazing thing to be able to say, “Thus says the Lord.” Jeremiah was given the very word of God to speak throughout the land, and that word came with power. Jeremiah's message would not be empty rhetoric, but instead would be powerful because of the One who gave it. No matter what else might come in his life in the future, the weeping prophet would know that he was speaking and could stand on the very word of God.

Jeremiah was not the only one who had such an experience. The Old Testament is filled with accounts of God's prophets being given specific messages from the Lord for the people; they were His mouthpiece to uproot and tear down, destroy and demolish, build and plant. Just like Jeremiah, these messengers of God were equipped not to speak their own opinions, but to authoritatively deliver the word of God to their culture.

## TIMELINE

### EZEKIEL'S VISION

*God is capable of raising the dead.*

*Beginning Winter 2016-17*

### FAITHFUL IN EXILE

*When God's people pursue holiness, others take notice.*

### TESTED BY FIRE

*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trust God for protection.*

The Bible is the living, active, and unchanging Word of God. God has not only commanded us to share the gospel to the ends of the earth; He has provided the message for us. Just as Jeremiah had the proclamation of God on his lips, we should be so familiar with the Word of God that it influences our language in regular conversation. But in order for that to happen, we must know the Word, and we must speak the Word.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Jeremiah reminds us of another prophet in another time, One who felt even more deeply for the people He was charged to speak to. He, too, wept over the lack of repentance and understanding in His people, longing for them with all His heart to return to God. Jesus Himself showed us the depth of the heart of God as He lamented over the same people God pursued in the days of Jeremiah: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matt. 23:37-38).

If we want to follow Jesus, then we must be faithful to God’s call, regardless of the perceived results. And we must pray for the heart of God as we compassionately reach to those around us with the message of the gospel.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Evangelism

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*It is the duty and privilege of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.*

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How often do you think about the fact that God has a plan and purpose for your life? How would doing so more often change the way you approach your daily activities?** *Answers will vary.*
- **The fact that Jeremiah was known as “the weeping prophet” and Jesus’ wept over the state of Jerusalem should tell us something about the way we view those who don’t know God. In what ways does this affect your view of others? How will your thoughts and actions toward them change after this study?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it important to have your focus fixed on God instead of yourself as you attempt to live on mission for Him? What happens if our focus is misplaced?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What kinds of obstacles do you see in your way to being a messenger of the gospel? How does God’s abiding presence answer those hesitations?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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These passages together remind us that we all are more than jumble of cells and tissue. If God is involved at that specific level, then there is inherent value in every human life. What's more, we should have the same response when we look at ourselves, those around us, and the unborn. The very essence of human existence, as intricate and specialized as our lives are, is a signpost pointing us to the reality and glory of God.

- **What are some signs that might tell us that we have failed to properly recognize God's activity in all of humanity?** *Answers might include things like racism, prejudice toward others, abortion, and so forth.*
- **How does the way we look at ourselves and others change when we recognize that God has truly formed us?** *When we fully realize this truth, we begin to see and treat people with the inherent value, dignity, and respect they have by virtue of being created in God's image.*



## HEART

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Never before has the Word of God been so accessible, and yet we are finding more and more that we do not know what it actually says. We must, if we want to follow Jesus, be people of the Word. We must treat it with care, love it, cherish it, and commit it to memory. When we do we will find that the Word of God finds its place in us, and having been established in us, it will naturally come out.

- **What habits in your life are you cultivating in order to grow your love and knowledge of God's Word?** *Answers might include things like Scripture memorization, consistent Bible study, and so forth.*
- **What are some distractions in your life that might hinder you from committing to these habits?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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We start with knowing God's Word, but then we must make the active choice to speak God's Word. Over time, choices like this become easier, but we have to start somewhere. We have to choose to actively speak the Word of God, though it might not be well-received or popular.

God's Word trumps our opinions. It trumps our agenda. It trumps our priorities. When we make the choice to start proclaiming God's Word in the various arenas He has given us to influence.

- **What are some obstacles that keep you from speaking God's truth to others more often?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the story of Jeremiah's calling encourage you to be more bold and confident in your task of speaking the truth to others?** *God offers us His presence, just as He offered it to Jeremiah.*



## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **LEADER PACK**

For this session, refer students to pack item #9, which contains an informational chart of the kings and prophets and the time periods in which they served. This is a great resource to point out the sequence of historical events from these sessions, showing both the kings involved and the prophets that overlapped with their reigns.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

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# 11

## SESSION ELEVEN

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# Jeremiah Prophesies a New Covenant

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we see that the heart of humanity is desperately wicked and in need of replacement. Because no one is able to perfectly obey the law, God promised a new covenant, one not written on stone or parchment, but written instead on the hearts of His people. This is a promise concerning Jesus' second coming, fulfilled in the gospel. One of the most beautiful things about this gospel message is that God not only writes His law on our hearts, but also gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer, helping us to walk in His ways.

### SCRIPTURE

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Jeremiah 17:1-10; 31:31-34

# THE POINT

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**God promises to write His law on our hearts and send the Holy Spirit to dwell within us.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Did you ever argue with your parents over eating your vegetables? You know, those delicious green beans, carrots, broccoli? If your family is like most, vegetable eating became a test of the wills—a contest to see who would break first. Most of the time, parents command their children to eat their vegetables, and somehow the kids manage to choke a down a few bites. However, imagine that one night at the dinner table, your parents didn't say, "Eat your vegetables." Instead, imagine that they told you, "Love your vegetables."

That changes the conversation, doesn't it? It's because if you parents said that, it would mean they have given you a command that you were incapable of obeying. In order to obey, it wouldn't be enough for you to force yourself to swallow a few bites; you would need something much deeper to change in you. You would need a new set of taste buds.

In a similar way, this is what happens in the gospel. God doesn't simply command us to love Him with all our heart, mind and strength. He actually gives us the new heart capable of loving Him completely. Jeremiah prophesied about the day when this would become a reality.

- **What is the difference between commanding someone to obey outwardly and commanding someone to obey inwardly?**
- **Why does your attitude and desire for obedience matter to God?**

### Option 2

Engraving is an intricate process, requiring several tools and techniques. The *burin* is the tool used to engrave a design onto a metal plate (usually copper). This tool's point was diamond shaped and could be used to create the outline or the tiniest details, formed through hatch marks. The burin and copper plate were typically used for printing pictures or money.<sup>1</sup> Engraving involves a strong, sharp object cutting through the chosen material to produce a desired result. God told Jeremiah that the people's sins were "engraved" on their hearts. In later verses, God promised to "write" His new covenant on their hearts. He would removed what had been etched into their hearts, and rewrite their desires, their thoughts, their will—their hearts would be wiped clean in the new covenant, and receive a new tenant. Instead of sin being deeply ingrained in their system, the Holy Spirit would be sent to dwell within them, enabling them to live out the law God wrote on their hearts.

- **How difficult and painful do you think it would be to allow God to remove the engraved sin from your heart, and replace that with something new?**
- **How should knowing the Spirit lives in you change your attitude? Your actions?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

---

**God promises to write His law on our hearts and send the Holy Spirit to dwell within us.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Jeremiah** - prophet who constantly proclaimed God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, and yet he was also a prophet of hope

## PLOT

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As we continue looking into the life and ministry of Jeremiah, we see God giving him a glimpse into a new covenant God would establish with His people. Because no one is able to perfectly obey the law, God promised a new covenant; one not written on stone or parchment, but written on the hearts of His people. Through this new covenant, God would not only write His law on our hearts, but also give the gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell every believer, helping them to walk in His ways.

## TIMELINE

### THE NEW COVENANT

*God promises to indwell His people.*

### THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

*The hardness of heart and the fall of God's people.*

### EZEKIEL'S VISION

*God is capable of raising the dead.*

## THE PROBLEM WITH THE HUMAN HEART

Jeremiah prophesied during a time of historical intrigue. Assyria and Egypt jockeyed for position in the region while Judah was a blip on the radar. Though the people perceived their greatest threat to be from outside their nation, Jeremiah revealed that what they really had to fear was far closer—it was the sin within their own hearts.

**“The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars, while their children remember their altars and their Asherim, beside every green tree and on the high hills, on the mountains in the open country. Your wealth and all your treasures I will give for spoil as the price of your high places for sin throughout all your territory. You shall loosen your hand from your heritage that I gave to you, and I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.” (Jer. 17:1-4)**

The word of the Lord was bleak. These words served as a reminder then and now of how desperate our situation truly is. Like the people of Judah, we are tempted to look outside ourselves for danger. We look at the culture, we look at shifting values, we look at enemies across the globe; however, we should first and foremost look at ourselves, for our sin is “engraved on the tablet” of our hearts, and it has been this way since the garden in Genesis 3.

Looking back to the beginning of the Bible’s storyline, we recall that in that garden, everything was good and right. Then, a deceiver corrupted the word of God. Humanity believed the lie and chose to live outside the loving rule of its Creator. And suddenly, earth was radically changed. Sin had entered the world, and the effect was devastating.

Let’s not miss the fact that sin isn’t so much an action as it is a condition. It’s true, whenever we violate God’s revealed will we sin, but we do this because it’s in our nature. Put simply—we don’t become sinners when we sin; we sin because we are sinners. That’s our heritage. It’s the spiritual DNA we inherited from the parents of the human race.

**Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the**

**stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? “I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.” (Jer. 17:5-10)**

First, if our hearts are engraved with sin, then we have an amazing propensity toward self-deception. We lie to ourselves over and over again. Far from being able to trust our feelings, we must embrace the fact that our feelings will lie to us. So, we cannot obey only when we feel like it, pray only when we feel like it, or act lovingly only when we feel like it. Because our hearts are engraved with sin, we cannot trust our feelings.

Instead, we need a higher form of truth than our own. We need something outside ourselves, something stable and trustworthy, to tell us what’s right and good. Instead of trusting ourselves, we must place our trust in the unchanging Word of God. God’s Word tells us the truth, even about ourselves, and His Word doesn’t shy away from telling us the truth even when it’s uncomfortable.

Second, because our hearts are engraved with sin, the message of our salvation cannot be primarily focused on our behavior. Any message that fails to deal with the core issue of the heart makes as much of a difference as placing a Band-Aid on internal bleeding. Our true, core issue is one of the heart, and therefore the gospel must meet us at the level of the heart if it is truly going to be a message of good news.

- **Think of a time when trusting your feelings didn't turn out well. What happened? In the future, how could you instead rely on the truth of God's Word in a similar situation?** (*p. 72, PSG*)

## THE PROMISE OF A HEART INDWELLED BY GOD

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Perhaps one of the reasons the people rejected Jeremiah’s message was because they wanted to hear a different kind of good news than what he delivered. No doubt the people in Jeremiah’s day wanted to hear a message about outward prosperity, peace with the warring nations around them, and stability in their lives.

We are not unlike them. We look to God less like the Sovereign Creator of the Universe, and more like a cosmic butler who exists to make our lives more comfortable. We focus our prayers on the relief of physical and emotional discomfort from our lives, asking God to give us things that we believe would make our lives more enjoyable. We are still asking for peace, stability, and prosperity.

Jeremiah’s message from the Lord might not have met the people’s expectations in terms of the physical, but it cuts straight to the heart of the matter. Because our problem is far worse than we dare to imagine, the message is better than we could have dreamed.

**“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:31-33)**

This new covenant would be within God’s people. Many people today think of believing the gospel as a choice between going to heaven and going to hell. They know they don’t want to go to hell, so they choose to trust in Christ in order to be saved and live eternally in heaven instead.

While it’s true that trusting in Christ for forgiveness and righteousness is indeed the only way to God, if that’s all we think of when we hear the gospel we underestimate its implications. The gospel message is this: Because our hearts are fully and completely corrupted by sin, we need a new heart that is turned toward God.

- **What characterizes the new covenant God made with us through Jesus Christ? Why is this so important?** (p. 73, PSG)
- **Have you ever been tempted to follow God simply because of the desire for outward prosperity and peace or to go to heaven? How is it possible for your heart to be redirected toward a deep love for God?** (p. 73, PSG)

## THE PRIVILEGE OF A HEART THAT KNOWS GOD

This new covenant meets us at our deepest need because our hearts are engraved with sin—it offers the promise of a new heart indwelt by God. This new covenant gives us the amazing privilege of living in fellowship with our Creator. Through this promise, we have the privilege of a heart that truly knows God.

**And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jer. 31:34)**

From God’s perspective, how fully known are we? He knows the number of hairs on our heads. He knows our deepest thoughts and motivations, and they are laid bare before Him. He knows us, in fact, better than we know ourselves. He knows our past, present, and future. God knows us completely. Fully. Without exception.

### TIMELINE

*Beginning Winter 2016-17*

#### **FAITHFUL IN EXILE**

*When God’s people pursue holiness, others take notice.*

#### **TESTED BY FIRE**

*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trust God for protection.*

#### **WALL OF HANDWRITING**

*Warning of God’s judgment and the need to repent.*

That's how well we will know God in heaven. We will see Him face to face. No matter how hard we seek after the Lord here on earth, we will always see a diluted image of Him. The image will always be in some way distorted by our humanity. But in heaven? No distortions. We will experience perfect and complete intimacy with God Almighty. The only way we can get there is through the gospel.

Because the gospel has solved our problem of a heart engraved with sin and given us the promise of a heart indwelled by God, we can live in the privilege of a heart that knows God.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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We were created to live in intimate fellowship with God. We see this in the first days of creation before the world was broken by sin, when God created man in His own image. Part of being made in the image of God means having the capacity to relate to God in a way unlike the rest of creation. These first humans were able to live in complete, unbroken fellowship with their Creator.

Jesus knew the greatest end of mankind is to know and enjoy God forever. He clearly summarized this truth in John 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." For Jesus, the very essence of eternal life is the knowledge of God, only accessible by men and women through the gospel.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the new covenant we have been waiting for. As Jeremiah would prophesy, the new covenant would actually meet us at the heart level, doing for us what we would never do for ourselves. In this new covenant, the covenant of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God would give us a new heart not engraved with sin, but indwelled by Him.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian

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*The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins in the work of salvation in bringing a person to faith in Christ, and is continued through the work of sanctification in helping the Christian to become progressively more like Christ throughout the course of his or her life. He also empowers and indwells believers, intercedes on their behalf, and equips them with special gifts for the service of God's Kingdom. He is the Comforter to the believer and aids us in properly interpreting the Bible.*



# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How important would you say it is to you to know God right now? What are some ways you could cultivate a greater desire to know God personally?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways do you often think of your relationship with God? Are you ever tempted to think of Him as no more than a cosmic butler, answering to our wishes and desires? How can you guard against this in your own life?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the new covenant benefit us? What does it do to our hearts?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What do you think it means that God will forgive us and no longer remember our sin?** *It means that God will no longer hold our forgiven sins against us given that the righteousness of Jesus now covers us.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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God's plan was not new to God, but it was new to the people. For generations, the people had a history of trying and failing, never being able to live up to the written code of God's covenant. God was merciful time and time again, pursuing them to bring them back to Him. Even so, the old covenant only imposed the law, while doing nothing to empower the people to keep it. However, in the new covenant, God would not only provide the knowledge of His will, He would also write it within the new hearts He gave to His people.

- **What are some the implications of God residing within you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does knowing you have a new heart change the way you approach obedience to God?** *In short, because we are new creations in Christ we should intentionally live in light of that truth.*



## HEART

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This new covenant isn't written on tablets or paper, but in our hearts. Paul commented on this reality in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. In verse 17, he wrote "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." When we believe the message of the gospel, the old person we once were dies, and we are spiritually resurrected with Christ. Our new self, with a new heart, has new desires, new tastes, and most importantly, a new Master. No longer are we imprisoned by sin; instead, God indwells our hearts through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

- **Worldly wisdom will tell people "trust your heart" or "believe in yourself." How do the passages in this session challenge this way of thinking?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it important for us to understand we don't only commit sins, but are sinful in nature? How does this knowledge impact the way you understand the effects of the gospel?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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Knowing God is a two-sided coin. The first side of the coin is our personal relationship with God—a return to intimacy with God as seen in the garden. The other side of the coin is the desire to make God known. This is also part of our return to God's original intent for humanity. Adam and Eve not only knew God, they were also given the job of reflecting God and making much of Him in everything they did. Like them, we are called to spread the glory of God throughout the earth, making the gospel of Jesus known to everyone around us.

- **How has this session encouraged and challenged you when it comes to your own relationship to God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How has this session encouraged and challenged you when it comes to reflecting God to those around you?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #10, which contains an informational chart of the different covenants we have seen throughout the Old Testament.

### SOURCES

1. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Engraving," accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/art/engraving>.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [llifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://llifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at  
**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit  
**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**



# 12

## SESSION TWELVE

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# The Fall of Jerusalem

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will study one of the most important events in the Old Testament era—the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of God’s people. Due to the hard-heartedness of the people and their leaders, including the despising of God’s Word, God displayed His justice and wrath through His punishment of His people. Even in this display of God’s justice, we see how God preserves a remnant of people who will carry the hope of His promise to make all things new through a Messiah.

### SCRIPTURE

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2 Chronicles 36:11-21; Jeremiah 38:14-18,24-28

# THE POINT

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**God patiently pursues sinners, but those who harden their hearts will one day face judgment.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

The word *pursue* is commonly used to describe the desire to go after something like a college degree, a significant other, or true happiness. So, we have to shift our thinking concerning pursuit as it pertains God—He persistently seeks after the wayward heart. This is what it means that God pursues us. God is patient with sinners (2 Pet. 3:9), but that does not mean He is inactive in their lives.

With Israel, God’s pursuit involved forgiveness, rescue, faithfulness, provision, warning, and judgment. He pursues us out of His love, grace, and mercy. He is faithful to keep His promise to forgive us, and provided salvation through His Son, Jesus. However, like Israel, many in our day also harden their hearts to God’s pursuit. Those who fail to heed His warnings will face judgement.

- **How encouraging is it to know that God doesn’t leave us to ourselves but pursues us with His love and salvation?**

### Option 2

Did you ever play with Play-doh® as a child? When you open a new container of the doh, it is soft and you can form it into almost any shape. There are even molds that allow you to shape your Play-doh like a hamburger, or even ice cream. Unfortunately, if you leave the doh outside of the container for an extended period of time, it will dry up and become hard and breakable. When this happens, you can no longer shape the Play-doh into anything specific—it’s just there, hardened into whatever shape you left it in as it dried.

King Zedekiah and his people’s hearts were much like the dried up version of Play-doh. God sent prophet after prophet to warn them of what would happen if they failed to turn from their wicked ways and turn back to God. Still, they did not listen. And their hearts were hardened, left out of God’s influence for far too long. God finally pronounced His judgement on Israel’s dried up state: They would be captured and enslaved—the walls of their city broken.

- **Have you ever felt spiritually “dried up”? What changed? What steps can you take to prevent this from happening in the future?**
- **Think of a situation in which you knew God was calling you to turn away from sin and turn back to Him, but you did not listen. What happened? How did that situation affect your relationship with God?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God patiently pursues sinners, but those who harden their hearts will one day face judgment.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Jeremiah** - prophet who constantly proclaimed God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, and yet he was also a prophet of hope
- **Zedekiah** - last king of Judah before its destruction by Babylon

## PLOT

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We reach a point in the Old Testament story that happens to be one of the most important events in the Old Testament era—the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of God's people. Due to the hard-heartedness of the people and their leaders, including the despising of God's Word, God displayed His justice and wrath through His punishment of His people. Even in this display of God's justice, we see how God preserved a remnant of people who would carry the hope of His promise to make all things new through a Messiah.

## TIMELINE

### THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

*The hardness of heart and the fall of God's people.*

### EZEKIEL'S VISION

*God is capable of raising the dead.*

*Beginning Winter 2016-17*

### FAITHFUL IN EXILE

*When God's people pursue holiness, others take notice.*

## ZEDEKIAH RULED WITH A HARDENED HEART

King Josiah is the one bright spot in the final kings of Israel. He was the last ruler who dedicated himself to the rule and reign of God, and he tried every way he knew to encourage the people to return to their spiritual heritage. Unfortunately, after his death came a string of kings marked by war and exile. Eventually, the death blow fell on the nation of Israel.

Power shifted for several years between Egypt and Babylon, and as it did, the various kings of Judah shifted their allegiance between each of those foreign kingdoms. Kings came and went, none reigning with any integrity or longevity until Zedekiah was installed on the throne by the Babylonians. He was intended to be a puppet ruler, but he was weak-willed. Eventually Zedekiah succumbed to the nationalism of Judah and listened to the nobles and advisors around him who told him he could rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of mighty Babylon.

**Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel. All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that he had made holy in Jerusalem. (2 Chron. 36:11-14)**

The final downfall of Israel had been set in motion through the hardened heart of their ruler, which was a reflection of the hardened hearts of the people. This text tells us the true source of Zedekiah's actions: He was not acting out of a sense of national pride or noble desire for independence. Instead, he was living out the natural way of his hardened heart.

All spiritual downfalls begin this way. Our decline is a progression rather than a free-fall. And the first step of descent is a heart that is hardened to the will of God. In the hardness of Zedekiah's heart, we can see some of the warning signs that should have alerted him to the impending downfall. If we watch for these kinds of signs in our own lives, they might alert us to our own hearts potentially growing hard to God's will.

One of the sure signs of the hardening of one's heart is pride. In this text we see Zedekiah's pride running out of control, symptomatic of his hardness of heart. In retrospect, we can look at the situation he found himself in. He was a puppet king installed by the Babylonians. His army was not large enough to counter the Egyptians, much less the Babylonians.

- Have you ever witnessed someone who had hardened their heart toward the will of God? What happened? (*p. 78, PSG*)
- Have you ever noticed yourself taking this same path? How can you guard yourself from this in the future? (*p. 78, PSG*)

## ZEDEKIAH REJECTED THE WORD OF THE LORD

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Despite his hardness of heart, Zedekiah still had the sense to speak to Jeremiah the prophet of God. At this point, he evidently realized God might have something to say about the trajectory of the nation. But when he approached God's prophet, he received a message of judgment.

**King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and received him at the third entrance of the temple of the LORD. The king said to Jeremiah, "I will ask you a question; hide nothing from me." Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I tell you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me." Then King Zedekiah swore secretly to Jeremiah, "As the LORD lives, who made our souls, I will not put you to death or deliver you into the hand of these men who seek your life." Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If you will surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. But if you do not surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand." (Jer. 38:14-18)**

In this passage, we see God's righteous judgment coming to bear on His own people. We also see His great mercy, because even here God offered Zedekiah a way to prevent even greater judgment and destruction. In that, we see God's incredible patience. God had offered opportunity after opportunity for the rulers and the people to return to Him. There is another characteristic of God that we see displayed in these verses though—His absolute honesty.

God tells us the truth in His Word. And He will tell us the truth even if we don't want to hear it. The honesty of God is a mercy to us because we have an amazing aptitude for self-deception. We cannot trust our own hearts.

Jeremiah told the king the truth, but the question remained: How would Zedekiah respond to God's truth? Would he persist in his hard-heartedness, or would he return humbly to the Lord, accepting the word of God from the prophet? The response to God's Word is the next progression in spiritual downfall. If spiritual downfall begins with hard-heartedness, the next step on this downward spiral is our reaction to God's Word. When God's Word calls us to repentance, we can either humbly accept what He says or ignore His Word and continue on our own path. The latter was the path that Zedekiah chose both for himself and the nation under his care.



Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “Let no one know of these words, and you shall not die. If the officials hear that I have spoken with you and come to you and say to you, ‘Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you; hide nothing from us and we will not put you to death,’ then you shall say to them, ‘I made a humble plea to the king that he would not send me back to the house of Jonathan to die there.’” Then all the officials came to Jeremiah and asked him, and he answered them as the king had instructed him. So they stopped speaking with him, for the conversation had not been overheard. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken. (Jer. 38:24-28)

The end had finally come. Jeremiah had been a faithful prophet though the word of the Lord was despised. This prophet, who often spoke God’s Word through tears, bore witness to the siege of the city and the eventual destruction. The text makes it clear—Jeremiah was there when it finally happened. He saw the judgment of God come to pass.

## JUDGMENT CAME AGAINST THE PEOPLE'S HARDENED HEARTS

No doubt the weeping prophet’s reaction was different than Jonah. Jonah, who so earnestly desired God’s judgment to come on Ninevah that he said he would rather die than see the Ninevites come to repentance, shed no tears over God’s judgment. But Jeremiah embodied the heart of the Lord. Time and time again, even up to the end with Zedekiah, Jeremiah offered a way to postpone the wrath of God. He called out for the people to return to the Lord up to the end.

**The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy. Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. (2 Chron. 36:15-21)**

## TIMELINE

### TESTED BY FIRE

*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trust God for protection.*

### WALL OF HANDWRITING

*Warning of God's judgment and the need to repent.*

### A FUTURE KING

*Isaiah tells of a future king coming from the line of David.*

The people of Judah never thought the end would come. Day after day, the sun kept coming up and going down, and life went on as normal. The voices of the prophets, constantly warning about the judgment of God, faded to the background. Similarly, people during Peter's day looked around at their lives and failed to see evidence of God's judgment. Though Peter promised Jesus would return, the people of the day saw no evidence of that second coming and continued to live as if it would never happen.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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The spiritual downfall of the people brought about the wrath of God. Even so, Jeremiah's tears stand as a reminder that God takes no pleasure in exercising His righteous judgment. In the New Testament, Peter reminded us: "But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

There is a day of judgment coming, and we should be prepared. The long awaited return of Jesus, like the long promised judgment of Judah, is because of God's patience. Not His indifference. God desires all to come to repentance, then as now, and every day that continues on in life as we know it is a tangible example of that gracious patience. It's an opportunity for one more to hear and believe the gospel of Jesus and flee to Him to escape the coming wrath.

Let us, then, take seriously the warning from the Book of Hebrews which reminds us of the reality of spiritual downfall and emphasizes the urgency before us: "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13).

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Sin as Transgression

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*The word transgression means to cross over or to pass by, and is often used in reference to transgressing God's explicit commands. When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is disobeyed, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is law-breaking.*

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **In your own words, what is hardness of heart? What are some of the ways you can identify if your heart is becoming hardened?** *To the second question, answers might include: lack of conviction over sin, desensitized to the ongoing presence of sin, and so forth.*
- **How does our response to God's Word serve as an indicator to the condition of our hearts?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways does it motivate you to know God desires none to perish? How does it change the way we see the judgment of God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways should believers today be like Jeremiah—weeping over the state of our world while delivering God's message to people? In what ways are believers today different from Jeremiah?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Lack of repentance walks hand in hand with pride. Zedekiah had every opportunity to *repent*, or *return to the Lord*. He could have listened to the council of Jeremiah, humbly acknowledged the Word of the Lord, and demonstrated that acknowledgment by turning away from his own wisdom and coming back to the Lord. However, Zedekiah was convinced his way was right, and he felt no need to turn away from it.

- **Why do you think pride comes along with hardness of heart?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some of the active ways we can help each other fight against pride?** *One way is to lovingly call out instances of where we see pride surface in each other's lives.*



## HEART

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In both the previous session and this one, we clearly see that the heart is deceitful. Because of this, diagnosing what's truly happening inside you is an incredibly difficult thing. For this reason, David prayed and asked the Lord to diagnose his heart for him: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24).

- **When has God revealed to you some uncomfortable truth through His Word?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How did you respond? What do you think your response communicated about the condition of your heart?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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Another sign of hardness of heart in these verses is the lack of distinction between God's people and the rest of the nations. From the beginning God planned for the people of Israel be a people of distinction on the earth. They alone would shine forth His glory as a kingdom of priests set apart specifically for the Lord. But in the days of Zedekiah, "All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful" (2 Chron. 36:14a). In other words, they abandoned their distinction as God's people and began to follow the ways of everyone around them instead.

- **Why do you think God desires His people to be distinct and set apart from the world in the way that they live?** *One reason is because living differently (part of what it means to be holy) from the world reflects the character of the God we serve.*
- **What are some ways God has called us to be distinct from the world around us?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

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# 13

## SESSION THIRTEEN

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# Ezekiel's Vision

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we encounter a scene from Ezekiel that is full of both despair and hope. The Lord brought His prophet to a valley full of dry bones to show him the hopelessness of life in exile, but also the power of God to raise the dead and restore His people. The vision gave hope to the people in Ezekiel's day that God would bring them back to their land. It also gives us hope by reminding us that the Word of God has resurrection power that makes us alive and restores our relationship to God.

### SCRIPTURE

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Ezekiel 37:1-14

# THE POINT

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**God's Word is capable of bringing life where there is none.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

What is the most desolate place you've ever been? Was it a desert? Maybe somewhere during a blizzard? What place have you seen where you wonder if anything at all could possibly survive?

The Atacama Desert, which spans the countries of Chile, Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina in South America, is one such place. Within the 600 mile stretch, some areas have no record of ever having rainfall. There is no thriving wildlife. There are no lush forests. There are few signs of anything living at all. Absolute desolation. If anything stayed there for very long, you can bet that living thing would soon join the landscape as it was also claimed by the unforgiving environment.<sup>1</sup>

Can you imagine spending much time in a place like that? If you can get a picture of that in your mind, then you're moving toward an accurate mental image of the scene in the prophet Ezekiel's vision, recorded in Ezekiel 37.

The Book of Ezekiel is filled with strange visions recorded by the prophet. The visions of Ezekiel were meant to shed light on the past, and also point toward the future of God's people. It was this look into the future that the people of Ezekiel's day desperately needed. That's because the prophetic message of Ezekiel is split in half by one of the most pivotal occurrences in the history of the Jewish people.

As we saw in the previous session, in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land and laid waste to Jerusalem and the temple of God. He then deported some 10,000 Jews to live in Babylon. Life, at least in the view of many Israelites, seemed to be over. It was like living in a valley of dry bones, with no hope of life and a future. This was the vision God gave to Ezekiel in Ezekiel 37.

- **What is the most desolate place you've ever visited? Why do you think God chose this setting for Ezekiel's vision?**

### Option 2

Did you know that a cactus being prickly actually helps it conserve water? Many plants quickly lose their water supply through their leaves. The water simply evaporates. However, cacti absorb large quantities of water in a short amount of time, thanks to a complex root system that lies only an inch below the ground. Conserving water is vital for these desert plants, and being prickly also keeps animals from stealing their water supply. Cacti store up plenty of water when it rains, so they have access to it throughout the driest parts of the season.<sup>1</sup> The desert may seem void of life, but it isn't. In the same way, we should store God's Word within us to bring life to us when we're spiritually dry.

- **Why is it important to constantly be in God's Word? How does this help us in tough times?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God's Word is capable of bringing life where there is none.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Ezekiel** - prophet of God who's name means "God will strengthen"

## PLOT

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As we approach the final session in this volume, we encounter a scene from the prophet Ezekiel that is full of both despair and hope. The Lord brought His prophet to a valley full of dry bones to show him the hopelessness of life in exile, but also the power of God to raise the dead and restore His people. The vision gave hope to the people in Ezekiel's day that God would bring them back to their land. It also gives us hope by reminding us the Word of God has resurrection power, which makes us alive and restores our relationship to God.



## TIMELINE

### EZEKIEL'S VISION

*God is capable of raising the dead.*

*Beginning Winter 2016-17*

### FAITHFUL IN EXILE

*When God's people pursue holiness, others take notice.*

### TESTED BY FIRE

*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trust God for protection.*

## EZEKIEL HAS A VISION

The warnings had been there. The people had fallen into continuous and unrepentant idolatry. Prophets like Habbakuk, Isaiah, and Jeremiah had talked about the danger that was coming. Rulers had tried earnestly to turn back the people's minds and hearts to God. Rulers like Hezekiah and Josiah sought to purge the land of idolatry, but in the end, the idolatry won out.

In the year 586 B.C., the Babylonians came and ransacked God's chosen people. They destroyed the temple and took captive the Jews. The land was gone. The temple was gone. The priesthood was gone. The monarchy was gone. Every mark of favor that the Lord had given to His people was removed.

Into this dire situation, God called Ezekiel to prophesy. Ezekiel was 30 years old, and only five years had passed from the time Ezekiel was deported to Babylon along with the rest of his people. The setting of the vision recorded in Ezekiel 37 is vividly descriptive of the state of the people during that time.

**The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know." (Ezek. 37:1-3)**

This valley was a picture of death and desolation. Not only was it filled with bones—these bones were dry, completely devoid of life of any kind. We could not imagine a more hopeless scene.

To the people of God living in exile, with their former way of life destroyed, the scene was an eerily accurate representation of their current existence. Like this valley, the physical and spiritual life of God's people was dry, empty, and lacking substance. For years, the people's commitment to the Lord had been in decay. In a sense, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem was simply the inevitable end to generations of idolatry. Their city, their homeland, and their temple now resembled the state of their hearts.

The Lord asked Ezekiel a simple question when confronted with this scene: "Can these bones live?" When Ezekiel saw the picture of death, he knew the only way the bones could live was if God did something miraculous. No matter how much those bones might have wanted to live, they were powerless to change their situation. Can these dry bones live? You alone know, Lord. And you alone can do it.

- **Imagine you were Ezekiel. How would you respond to such a vision? How would you look at God, God’s people, and your mission differently?** (p. 84, PSG)

## **GOD'S WORD IS CAPABLE OF BRINGING LIFE WHERE THERE IS ONLY DEATH**

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The people of Israel were living in the middle of physical and spiritual desolation. But even in the atmosphere of death, God can bring life.

**Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. (Ezek. 37:4-10)**

It is significant that life came into the valley as a result of the Word of the Lord. God’s Word is filled with power, and it always has been. At the very beginning of time, it was the Word of God that brought something out of nothing. Everything—that is everything we see—is a result of God’s creative word.

Ezekiel’s people had failed to heed the word of God when it came to them through the prophets. Because of their failure to listen and obey, they found themselves in exile. Even the pagan nation of Babylon, though they might not have recognized it, only had the power they possessed because God allowed it to be so.

Here, though, Ezekiel saw the power of God’s Word to restore life. At the command of God, Ezekiel began to prophesy. First there was the noise. Only a slight rumble at first, but the rumble grew to a roar. There was the clacking of bone on bone as these once-dry bones suddenly began to form into recognizable shapes. Then there was the sound of skin covering the newly formed skeletons. And then came the breath of life, blowing like the wind into the valley.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Resurrection

*Both the Old and New Testament teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and will take place at the future return of Christ. Because Christ was the first fruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Rom. 8:22-23; Phil. 3:20-21). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.*

## GOD PROMISES TO DO THE SAME FOR HIS PEOPLE

Before Ezekiel's very eyes, the scene was completely transformed. It had gone from desolation to populated. It had gone from the embodiment of death to teeming with life. The valley once full of dry bones had been transformed into a vast army, a people whose resurrection was clear evidence of God's love and power. So would it be with the house of Israel, currently exiled into a foreign nation.

**Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord." (Ezek. 37:11-14)**

One of the things this vision told the people is that God keeps His promises. He had promised that someday His patience would run out. Centuries earlier, recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, He had promised that if His people fell into idolatry, then He would act: "Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and fail with longing for them all day long, but you shall be helpless. A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually" (Deut.28:32-33).

In a strange way, the exile was not just evidence of God's judgment; it was evidence of His faithfulness. If God had not kept His promise of judgment, then perhaps He would not keep His other promises either. But because God kept His word, doing exactly what He said He would do, the people could look to this vision, at this time, and know that God still keeps His promises. Here, He promised that this exile was not the end.

## TIMELINE

### WALL OF HANDWRITING

*Warning of God's judgment and the need to repent.*

### A FUTURE KING

*Isaiah tells of a future king coming from the line of David.*

### DANIEL IS DELIVERED

*God protects Daniel in the lion's den.*

He had not abandoned them. In fact, He would bring them back. There is no promise for ease, comfort, or even that the exile would be short-lived. However, there is a promise that after a time, the dry bones would live again, and they would live in the land God had promised to their father Abraham. If God was powerful enough to bring about judgment and powerful enough to bring dry bones to life, then He was certainly powerful enough to bring them back again in restoration.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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God raised up the Assyrian and Babylonian armies because Israel and Judah had refused to obey God in faithfulness. They had turned to the gods of pagan nations and had spurned the prophets' warnings. But even in the midst of the exile—God's discipline of His people—we see God faithful to keep a remnant of Abraham's children. He continued to be faithful to His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. He was faithful to His covenant with David.

God the Pursuer would even enter the valley of dry bones—the valley of death and spiritual desolation—and bring new life to His chosen people. By sending His Son to the valley of death, God made the way for an army of people to be raised to new life, commissioned with His gospel, and empowered for His mission. The kingdom of resurrection power would triumph even over the grave.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What kinds of questions do you think the people of Israel were asking about God? How would this vision have given Ezekiel's people hope?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways does God's promise to restore Israel give us confidence in His faithfulness? What does the Lord's promise here show us about the nature and character of God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Share about a time when God's Word brought spiritual awakening in your own life.** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does it encourage you to know that even when we are spiritually dead, God still pursues us with the life that only He can bring?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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This valley of desolation represents Israel in exile. It also reminds us of what our hearts are like before we trust in Christ. We are in exile from God our Creator, dead in our sin, separated from God. “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph. 2:1-3).

- **What is the value of recognizing the danger you were once in before you become a Christian?** *If people don't recognize their situation apart from God, they will never fully cherish the salvation and forgiveness that God freely offers.*
- **How does acknowledging that danger change the way you look at the gospel?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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The hope of restoration does not belong only to the exiles living in Babylon. We claim the same hope of experiencing restoration, the restoration that comes through Jesus Christ. How are we made alive? In the New Testament, Paul reminded us that it's through hearing and believing the Word of God that we are spiritually resurrected, saying “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). When we hear the Word of the gospel spoken, something begins to happen inside of us. Our hearts, hardened because of our sin, suddenly begin to soften until we are also standing anew before God.

- **How does it change your perspective on the gospel when you see yourself as coming alive at the Word of God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some of the implications of this truth when it comes to our own attitudes and approaches to being in God's Word?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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God's Word is powerful enough to bring life out of death. Notice God didn't speak directly to the bones; instead, He commanded Ezekiel to do it. Ezekiel, then, became the mechanism that God used to bring life from death. In turn, the prophet had the amazing privilege of seeing this transformation happen before his very eyes. Likewise, we can have a similar experience when we freely share the good news of the gospel. Like the prophet speaking over a valley of dry bones, we have been commanded to speak the words of life to those dead in sin.

- **Why is it important that Ezekiel spoke the Word of God over the dry bones before they came to life?** *It illustrates the important role the Word has in bringing us to faith.*
- **How does this story motivate you to become better equipped in sharing the Word of God with others?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #11, which contains an artistic poster of Ezekiel's vision.

### SOURCES

1. Preet J. Vesilind, "The Driest Place on Earth," *National Geographic*, accessed on March 24, 2016, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0308/feature3/>.
2. "How Plants Survive in The Desert," *A Moment of Science*, May 15, 2006, <http://indianapublicmedia.org/amomentofscience/how-plants-survive-in-the-desert/>.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at  
**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit  
**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**

# STUDY PLAN

## YEAR 1

### Fall 2015

God the Creator (Genesis 1-11)  
God the Covenant-Maker  
(Genesis 12-50)

### Winter 2016

God the Redeemer  
(Exodus)  
God the Lawgiver  
(Exodus, Leviticus,  
Deuteronomy)

### Spring 2016

God the Savior  
(Numbers, Joshua)  
God the Judge (Judges,  
Ruth, 1 Samuel)

### Summer 2016

God the King (1-2 Samuel)  
God All Wise (1 Kings, Job,  
Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs)

## YEAR 2

### Fall 2016

God the Revealer  
(1-2 Kings, Isaiah)  
God the Pursuer (Major  
and Minor Prophets,  
1-2 Chronicles)

### Winter 2017

God the Sustainer  
(Daniel, Ezra)  
God the Provider (Esther,  
Nehemiah, Malachi)

### Spring 2017

God the Son (Gospels)  
God Among Us (Gospels)

### Summer 2017

Jesus the Storyteller  
(Synoptic Gospels)  
Jesus the Miracle-Worker  
(Gospels)

## YEAR 3

### Fall 2017

Jesus the Savior (Gospels)  
Jesus the Risen King  
(Gospels, Acts)

### Winter 2018

The Spirit Who  
Empowers (Acts)  
The God Who Sends (Acts)

### Spring 2018

The God Who Directs His  
People (Epistles)  
The God Who Changes  
Us (Epistles)

### Summer 2018

God's Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)  
The God Who Makes All  
Things New (Epistles,  
Revelation)