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UNIT 1



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HOW TO USE

01

SESSION ONE

Elijah Faces the Prophets of Baal

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 18:17-39

THE POINT

Pursuing false gods leads to enslavement, but admission 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 point where God revealed His character to His people in a number of ways to reveal Himself. In the events we will study and the pictures you will see the characteristics of our loving and powerful God are

INTRO

The first page of each session contains a brief overview of what to expect in the His Story section. This will include the Scripture passage(s), the main point, key figures, as well as a basic plot that sets the scene for the Bible study.

HIS STORY

ELIJAH CONFRONTS THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Today's society has become so skeptical that we think intelligent people constantly question everything. Our society's intellectual questing 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.

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 god"?

1 Kings 18:17-24
When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is that you, you destroyer of Israel?" He replied, "I have not destroyed Israel! But you and your father's house have, because you have abandoned the Lord's commands and followed the Baals. Now summon all Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab summoned all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. Then Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him. But if Baal, follow him." But the people didn't answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I am the only remaining prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. Let two bulls be given to us. They are to choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood but not light the fire. Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of Yahweh. The God who answers with fire, He is God." All the people answered, "That sounds good."

1 Kings 18:25-29

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Since you are so numerous, choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first. Then call on the name of your god but don't light the fire." So they took the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "Baal, answer us!" But there was no sound, no one answered. Then they danced, hobnobbing around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah mocked them, He said, "Shout loudly for he's a god! Maybe he's thinking it over; maybe he has wandered away; or maybe he's on the road. Perhaps he's sleeping and will wake up!" They shouted loudly, and cut themselves with knives and spears, according to their custom, until blood gushed over them. All afternoon they kept on shouting until the offering of the evening sacrifice, but there was no sound no one answered, no one paid attention.

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.

THE CRIES FROM PROPHETS OF BAAL GO UNANSWERED

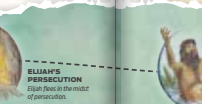
The test of the true God was on by Elijah and accepted by King Ahab and the people of Israel. And so, the contest takes place on Mount Carmel, a noted high place for Baal worship. The sacrificial bulls were chosen, the altars built, and the contest commenced.

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 "Baal, answer us!" Note how much time and effort the human worshippers used in their attempt to appease the attention of the false god.

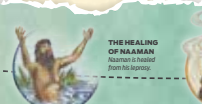


ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL
God makes it known that He alone is God.

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ELIJAH'S RESURRECTION
Elijah rises 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.

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HIS STORY

Intended for group and personal use, the His Story section follows the storyline of the Bible, focusing on what God has done in redemptive history throughout the pages of Scripture. These pages also feature questions to engage with, Essential Doctrines to learn, and a visually helpful timeline to follow throughout the study. In addition, there is a Christ Connection section at the end, helping you to connect the dots between Jesus and the biblical storyline for each session.

THIS STUDY

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: "Wilt thou flabby dancing, no walling 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 so that this people will know that You, Yahweh, 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.

CHRIST CONNECTION
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 blinds 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 helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person—although for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!"

1 Kings 18:30-35
Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near me." So all the people approached him. Then he repaired the couch-altar that had been torn down. Elijah took 12 stones—according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Israel will be your name"—and he built an altar with the stones in the name of Yahweh. Then he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold about four gallons. Next, he arranged the wood, cut up the bull, and placed it on the wood. He said, "Fill four water pots with water and pour it on the offering to be burned and on the wood." Then he said, "At second time" and they did it a second time. And then he said, "At third time" and they did it a third time. So the water ran all around the altar. He even filled the trench with water.

ISAIAH'S PROPHECY
Elijah prophesied about the Suffering Servant.

GOD RESCUES ISRAEL
God spares Israel from the Akkadian army.

12 Session 1

YOUR STORY

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?**
- ▶ **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 about our motivation should be today when we stand for truth?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **How has this session challenged you personally?**

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

YOUR STORY

Intended for group and/or personal use, the Your Story section is designed to connect what God has done in the past to the present. As you discuss and answer these questions, you'll begin to realize that what God was doing in the lives of these biblical characters easily connects with life today.

YOUR MISSION

Also intended for group and/or personal use, 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 this day forward. It is intended to show that every session goes beyond mere Bible study to a calling to be on mission with God in this world.

YOUR MISSION

HEAD

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: isotopic causes, sports, celebrities, politics, money, possessions, fashion, and so on. Though the modern Western mind sometimes rebukes *idolatry* 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?
- What are some "altars" you have established in your own life that have caused you to neglect your relationship to God?

HEART

As we see with Elijah and the people of his day, the real problem 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 delivering those to us in a lasting sense. And when we do that, we end up worshipping 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?
- How can we show others that loyalty and faithfulness to God are better than these worldly loyalties?

HANDS

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)?
- Can you think of why these things take so much of our time and effort?

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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.

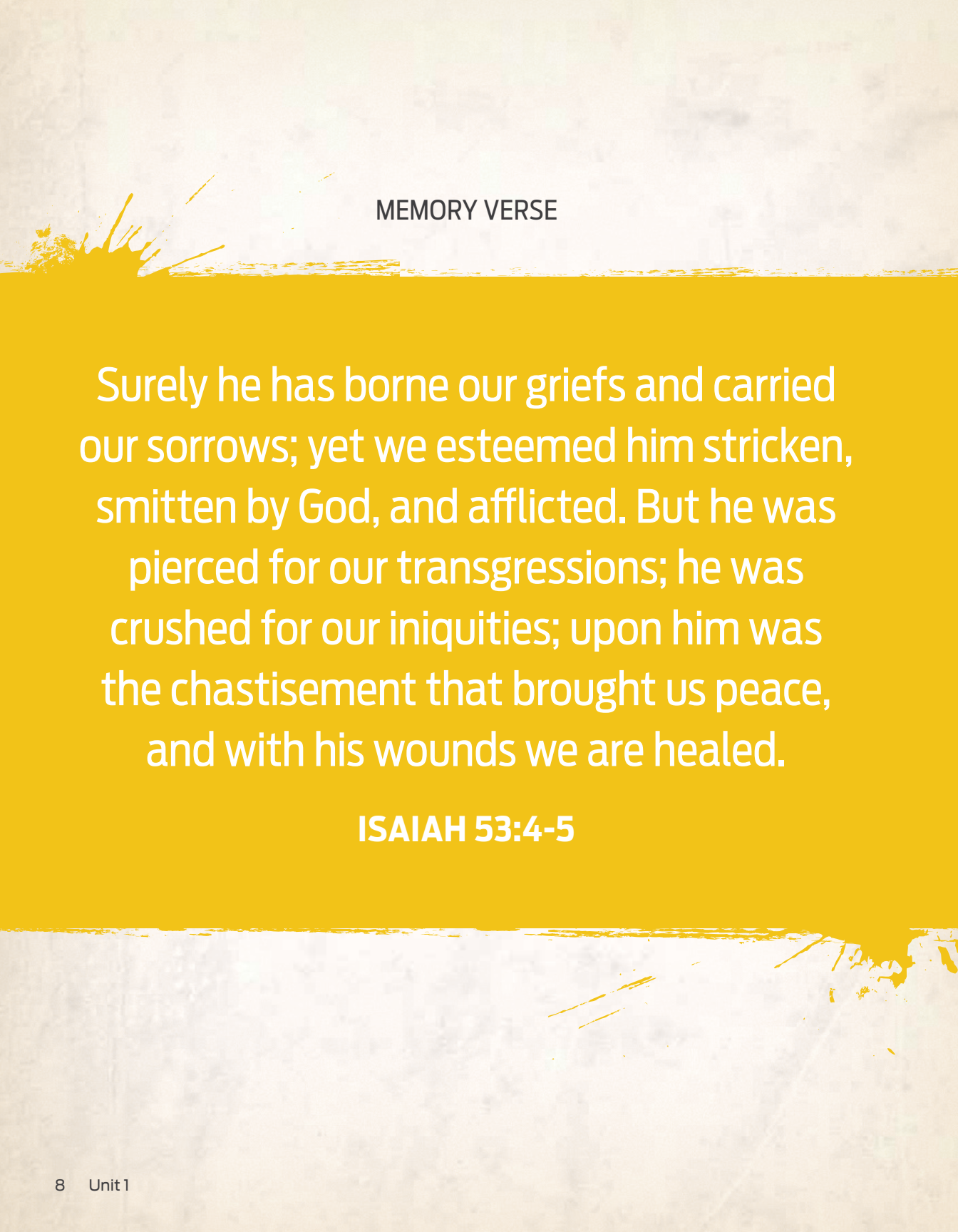
Many of you will likely recognize familiar names such as Elijah, Isaiah, and Jonah. You will probably also be able to recall a story or two about each of these characters; maybe you remember reading about Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel or Jonah's reluctance to preach to 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!

UNIT 1

God the Revealer

1-2 KINGS, ISAIAH



MEMORY VERSE

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.

ISAIAH 53:4-5

01

SESSION ONE

Elijah Faces the Prophets of Baal

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 18:17-39

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.

HIS STORY

ELIJAH CONFRONTS THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

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.

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.

1 Kings 18:17-24

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."

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



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.

1 Kings 18:25-29

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.

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.

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.

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.



THE HEALING OF NAAMAN

Naaman is healed from his leprosy.



ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Isaiah encounters God and is forever changed.

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.

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.

1 Kings 18:30-35

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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

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."



ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.



GOD RESCUES JUDAH

God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.

YOUR STORY

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?**

▶ **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?**

▶ **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?**

▶ **How has this session challenged you personally?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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?
- What are some “altars” you have established in your own life that have caused you to neglect your relationship to God?



HEART

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?
- How can we show others that loyalty and faithfulness to God are better than these worldly loyalties?



HANDS

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)?
- Can you think of why these things take so much of our time and effort?

02

SESSION TWO

Elijah Flees for His Life

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 19:1-18

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **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

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.

HIS STORY

ELIJAH RETREATS OUT OF FEAR FOR HIS LIFE

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.

1 Kings 19:1-9a

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.

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



ELIJAH'S PERSECUTION

Elijah flees in the midst of persecution.



THE HEALING OF NAAMAN

Naaman is healed from his leprosy.

1 Kings 19:9b-14

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."

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.

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.

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.



ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Isaiah encounters God and is forever changed..



ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God is Immanent

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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.

1 Kings 19:15-18

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."



GOD RESCUES JUDAH

God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.



HOSEA AND GOMER

God's faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.

YOUR STORY

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?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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 our own lives?
- How can the student ministry you are a part of encourage one another by pointing to God’s work in these smaller ways?



HEART

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?
- What are some biblical and healthy ways we can respond to these moments?



HANDS

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?
- What are some ways God has worked through others in difficult times to minister to you?

03

SESSION THREE

The Healing of Naaman

SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 5:1-19

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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.

HIS STORY

NAAMAN RECOGNIZES HE HAS A SERIOUS DISEASE

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.

2 Kings 5:1-4

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."



THE HEALING OF NAAMAN
Naaman is healed from his leprosy.



ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Isaiah encounters God and is forever changed.

2 Kings 5:10-14

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.

NAAMAN RESPONDS TO GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS

The focus of this story is not the supernatural ability of Elisha. That's obvious in the prophet's 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.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Guilt and Shame

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.



ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.



GOD RESCUES JUDAH

God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.

NAAMAN PRAISES GOD FOR HEALING

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?**
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2 Kings 5:15-19a

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."

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.



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.

YOUR STORY

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?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **How has the story of Naaman challenged you when thinking about your own sin and pride?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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?
- When we look to these "other waters," what does that tell us about how we actually view the sacrifice of Christ?



HEART

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?
- How can you avoid living life hypocritically?



HANDS

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?
- What does this teach us about being used by God in our own lives?

04

SESSION FOUR

Isaiah Encounters God

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 6:1-8

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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.

HIS STORY

ISAIAH ENCOUNTERS GOD IN THE TEMPLE

In 2 Chronicles 26, we read Isaiah chronicled Uzziah's reign. It is likely that 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.

Isaiah 6:1-4

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.

- 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?
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ISAIAH RECOGNIZES HIS SIN IN LIGHT OF GOD'S HOLINESS

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.

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.



ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Isaiah encounters God and is forever changed.



ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.

Isaiah 6:5

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!"

Isaiah 6:6-8

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."

ISAIAH RECEIVES GRACE AND IS SENT ON MISSION

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.



GOD RESCUES JUDAH

God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.



HOSEA AND GOMER

God's faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God is Holy

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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.



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.

YOUR STORY

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?**

▶ **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?**

▶ **As with Isaiah, why is it important to not only recognize our own sinfulness, but to also confess and admit that sinfulness before God?**

▶ **When Isaiah encountered God, it changed His life forever. Share the ways your own encounter and relationship with God has changed you.**

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
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YOUR STORY

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YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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?
- 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?



HEART

The uncleanness Isaiah experienced was not something 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?
- How can you be more mindful about pursuing a heart like God’s in the weeks ahead?



HANDS

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?
- Give an example of this happening in your own life.

SESSION FIVE

05

Isaiah Prophecies About a Suffering Servant

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **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

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.

HIS STORY

Isaiah 52:13-15

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.

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.

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.”

Isaiah 53:1-3

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.



ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.



GOD RESCUES JUDAH

God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.

Isaiah 53:4-9

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.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT IS A SUBSTITUTE

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.

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.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Substitute

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.



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.

Isaiah 53:10-12

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.

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.

- **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?**

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.



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.

YOUR STORY

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?**

▶ **In what ways have we gone astray like sheep in our own lives?**

▶ **After having gone through this session, how would you answer someone who asks you why we need a substitute for our sins?**

▶ **What is something new this session taught you regarding God and His desire to rescue His people?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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?
- How do these “re-creations” distract us from the primary work that Jesus came to do?



HEART

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?
- How can this session encourage you in your own faith, especially if you have had doubts about your own salvation?



HANDS

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?
- 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?

06

SESSION SIX

Hezekiah Prays for His People

SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 19:8-20,32-37

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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.

HIS STORY

ASSYRIA THREATENS TO DESTROY

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.

2 Kings 19:8-13

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?'"

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

God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.



HOSEA AND GOMER

God's faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.

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.

HEZEKIAH PRAYS THAT GOD WOULD DELIVER AND EXALT HIS NAME

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.

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.

2 Kings 19:14-19

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.”



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.

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

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.

2 Kings 19:32-37

"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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.



JEREMIAH

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



THE NEW COVENANT

God promises to indwell His people.

YOUR STORY

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?**

▶ **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?**

▶ **What do these verses teach you about prayer?**

▶ **How should you approach God with your requests?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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?
- How do we personally benefit when God makes His glory known?



HEART

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?
- How do we make less of God in our lives when we focus on His gifts rather than on Him alone?



HANDS

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?
- How can you seek to make God's name known in your own life this week?

UNIT 2

God the Pursuer

MAJOR AND MINOR PROPHETS, 2 CHRONICLES

MEMORY VERSE

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. 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."

JEREMIAH 31:33-34

07

SESSION SEVEN

Hosea's Love for Gomer

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

God faithfully pursues His people even when they are unfaithful.

CHARACTERS

- **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

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.

HIS STORY

HOSEA PURSUES AN UNFAITHFUL BRIDE

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.

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).

Hosea 1:2-9

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."



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.

Hosea 2:14-23

“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.’”

HOSEA’S MARRIAGE REPRESENTS GOD’S UNENDING LOVE

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.

- **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?**



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.

GOMER IS PURCHASED OUT OF SLAVERY

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

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.

Hosea 3:1-5

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 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.



THE NEW COVENANT
God promises to indwell His people.



THE FALL OF JERUSALEM
The hardness of heart and the fall of God's people.

YOUR STORY

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?**

▶ **Like Gomer, what are some sins that you keep running back to in your own life?**

▶ **What does the story of Hosea and Gomer teach us about God's character, especially as it relates to our own unfaithfulness to Him?**

▶ **What are some ways we can cultivate uncompromising devotion to God in our own lives?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION

HEAD

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.
- How does understanding the love of Hosea for Gomer help us grow in gratitude for the way God has treated us?

HEART

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?
- How is that different than the picture of God's love we see in Scripture?

HANDS

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?
- How can you use the story of Hosea when sharing the gospel with someone?

08

SESSION EIGHT

Jonah And The Ninevites

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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.

HIS STORY

Jonah 1:1-5

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.

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.

- **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?**
 - **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?**
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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.

GOD FORGIVES JONAH AND THE NINEVITES

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.

Jonah 2:7-10

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.

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.

- **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?**
- **Why do you think Jonah's message penetrated the Ninevites hearts so quickly?**

Jonah 3:1-5

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.



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



THE NEW COVENANT
God promises to indwell His people.

GOD EXPOSES THE SOURCE OF JONAH'S ANGER

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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

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, too, was 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

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.

Jonah 4:1-4

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?"



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.

YOUR STORY

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?**

▶ **Imagine you were in Jonah's place. How would your perspective change after having been inside the great fish?**

▶ **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?**

▶ **Do you typically see yourself as Jonah in this story, or as the Ninevites? Why is it important for us to learn from both?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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?
- What are some ways you think God wants to use you to influence that person for Him?



HEART

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)?
- 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?



HANDS

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?
- What does this show us about the power of God's Word?

09

SESSION NINE

The Warning of Joel

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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.

HIS STORY

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.

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.

Joel 1:1-4

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.

- 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?



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 CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO RETURN TO HIM IN REPENTANCE

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.

GOD PROMISES TO RESTORE HIS PEOPLE BY HIS SPIRIT

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.

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.

Joel 2:12-14

"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?



THE NEW COVENANT

God promises to indwell His people.



THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

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

Joel 2:25-32

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."

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.



EZEKIEL'S VISION
God is capable of raising the dead.



FAITHFUL IN EXILE
When God's people pursue holiness, others take notice.

**Beginning Winter 2016-17*

YOUR STORY

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?**

▶ **What is the difference between grieving over the effects of sin and grieving over sin itself?**

▶ **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?**

▶ **When it comes to repentance, why is it important that both attitude and action go together?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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?
- How should the truth of God's involvement in the details of life help us when we may not "feel" His presence?



HEART

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?
- In what ways does the sin in our lives communicate to others what we truly love and cherish?



HANDS

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?
- Why do you think many Christians find it challenging to talk about the judgment of God?

10

SESSION TEN

The Calling of Jeremiah

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 1:4-10

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **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

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.

HIS STORY

Jeremiah 1:4-5

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."

GOD'S PLAN FOR JEREMIAH PRECEDED HIS BIRTH

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.

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?**



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



THE NEW COVENANT
God promises to indwell His people.

Jeremiah 1:6-8

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."

GOD PROMISED TO BE WITH JEREMIAH

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.

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.

- How do you typically think of success? How does your view differ from God's view of success?
- 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?

GOD EQUIPPED JEREMIAH WITH A MESSAGE

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.



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.

Jeremiah 1:9-10

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."

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Evangelism

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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.



FAITHFUL IN EXILE

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

**Beginning Winter 2016-2017*



TESTED BY FIRE

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trust God for protection.

YOUR STORY

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?**

- ▶ **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?**

- ▶ **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?**

- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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?
- How does the way we look at ourselves and others change when we recognize that God has truly formed us?



HEART

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?
- What are some distractions in your life that might hinder you from committing to these habits?



HANDS

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.

- What are some obstacles that keep you from speaking God's truth to others more often?
- 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?

11

SESSION ELEVEN

Jeremiah Prophesies a New Covenant

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **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

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.

HIS STORY

THE PROBLEM WITH THE HUMAN HEART

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.

Jeremiah 17:5-10

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."

- **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?**



THE NEW COVENANT

God promises to indwell His people.



THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

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

THE PROMISE OF A HEART INDWELLED BY GOD

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.

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.

Jeremiah 31:31-33

"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.

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



EZEKIEL'S VISION
God is capable of raising the dead.



FAITHFUL IN EXILE
When God's people pursue holiness, others take notice.

**Beginning Winter 2016-2017*

Jeremiah 31:34

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."

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian

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.

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 indwelled 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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.



TESTED BY FIRE
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trust God for protection.



WALL OF HANDWRITING
Warning of God's judgment and the need to repent.

YOUR STORY

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?**

▶ **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?**

▶ **How does the new covenant benefit us? What does it do to our hearts?**

▶ **What do you think it means that God will forgive us and no longer remember our sin?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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?
- How does knowing you have a new heart change the way you approach obedience to God?



HEART

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?
- 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?



HANDS

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?
- How has this session encouraged and challenged you when it comes to reflecting God to those around you?

12

SESSION TWELVE

The Fall of Jerusalem

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **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

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.

HIS STORY

ZEDEKIAH RULED WITH A HARDENED HEART

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.

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.

2 Chronicles 36:11-14

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.

- Have you ever witnessed someone who had hardened their heart toward the will of God? What happened?
- Have you ever noticed yourself taking this same path? How can you guard yourself from this in the future?



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.

ZEDEKIAH REJECTED THE WORD OF THE LORD

Despite his hardness of heart, Zedekiah still had the sense to speak to Jeremiah the prophet of God. At this point, he evidently realized that 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.

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.

Jeremiah 38:14-18

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."

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.



FAITHFUL IN EXILE
When God's people pursue holiness, others take notice.

**Beginning Winter 2016-17*



TESTED BY FIRE
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trust God for protection.

2 Chronicles 36:15-21

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.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Sin as Transgression

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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.



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.

YOUR STORY

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?**

- ▶ **How does our response to God's Word serve as an indicator to the condition of our hearts?**

- ▶ **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?**

- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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?
- What are some of the active ways we can help each other fight against pride?



HEART

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?
- How did you respond? What do you think your response communicated about the condition of your heart?



HANDS

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?
- What are some ways God has called us to be distinct from the world around us?

13

SESSION THIRTEEN

Ezekiel's Vision

SCRIPTURE

Ezekiel 37:1-14

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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.

HIS STORY

Ezekiel 37:1-3

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."

EZEKIEL HAS A VISION

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.

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?**

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

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.



EZEKIEL'S VISION
God is capable of raising the dead.



FAITHFUL IN EXILE
When God's people pursue holiness, others take notice.

Ezekiel 37:4-10

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.

GOD PROMISES TO DO THE SAME FOR HIS PEOPLE

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.

Ezekiel 37:11-14

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."



TESTED BY FIRE
Shadrach, Meshach,
and Abednego trust
God for protection.



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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.

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.



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.

YOUR STORY

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?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **Share about a time when God's Word brought spiritual awakening in your own life.**
- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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?
- How does acknowledging that danger change the way you look at the gospel?


HEART



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?
- What are some of the implications of this truth when it comes to our own attitudes and approaches to being in God’s Word?

HANDS



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 it 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?
- How does this story motivate you to become better equipped in sharing the Word of God with others?