



NO FEAR

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PREVIEW

Fear has a way of making time stand still, and it multiplies itself in a nasty way. But faith in God's plan brings peace that abolishes immobilizing fear.

PRAISE

Read Psalm 56. In the context of this passage, David was a hostage of the Philistines. Although he expressed his fears to God, he had faith that God would deliver him.

Share experiences when you had a choice between fear and faith (e.g., recovering from an illness).

Lord, thank You for extending Your mighty hand and winning many victories for me. When I am fearful, You listen to my irrational thoughts and give me peace. I pray that when I am afraid I will learn to place my confidence in You.

PARABLE

Have you ever showed up to class positive that you were going to have a great day and suddenly the teacher announced she would be collecting the assignment you completely forgot about? In less than a minute, you jump from happily sipping your Starbucks to contemplating hiding in the bathroom to finish the assignment. Thoughts fly through your mind: Am I the only one who forgot? What if the teacher gives me no chance to re-do the assignment? What if I fail the class? What will my friends think? Your fears take you captive. Anxiety rears up its ugly head. Your palms break out in a sweat, and your heart beats like a jackhammer.

The teacher begins collecting assignments, and when she comes to you, you make the snap decision to be honest: "Sorry, I just forgot." You sit there with bated breath until she responds, "OK, turn it in tomorrow." You can't believe it! You feel like the most blessed person to walk the planet and think to yourself, That wasn't so bad.

PRESENT

We encounter irrational fears such as the fear of clowns. But we also have realistic fears like the death of a loved one. In your school, you may discover many students who deal with troubling situations surrounding their family or home environment. But they lack the ability to safely cope with their emotions and may resort to actions such as self-harm.

The reality of fear is that it places us in a position either to sin or to trust God. The connection between fear and sin is that it does not come from God. For example, we can find ourselves trying to please a crowd of people because we fear their disapproval.

So how do we navigate the fears we encounter?

First, the Holy Ghost can be the Comforter and restorer in everyone's life. In order to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost, people must see that Jesus is God and realize that their sin separates them from Him. By turning away from their sin and toward God, they are able to receive the Holy Ghost.

Proverbs 3:7 instructs us not to be wise in our own eyes but to fear the Lord and depart from evil.

Those who fear God will turn away from sin. In turn, God fills their lives with perfect peace. Living a repentant life means continually turning away from one's own wisdom and placing everything in God's hands.

Instead of facing a problem and taking on the "I got this" attitude, consider taking the problem to God. Psalm 55:22 (NKJV) says, "Cast your burden on the LORD, and he shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved." By fearing God and allowing Him complete access, you are expressing a deeper level of faith than trying to do it on your own. But when you are restricting God's access to your problems, you are showing Him that you doubt His ability to be the solution.

Now, to be clear, fearing God does not mean being afraid of Him. Rather, it demonstrates that you understand God's character to be so righteous and mighty that you regard Him with the highest respect. In other words, He is the superhero who always saves the day. You know that when you call His name, He will come to your rescue—even if He waits until the very last second.

You can also activate faith by being bold. Sometimes God intentionally puts you in certain situations for a reason, so it is ridiculous to ask Him to get you out of them. In these moments, you can learn to grow your character and do the task at hand with excellence.

Let's say you feel God asking you to pray for another student, which makes you feel uncomfortable. You have two options: (a) be fearful and take so long to decide that the opportunity passes, or (b) take a bold step of faith. By taking that step of faith, you have the peace of knowing that you tried your best to please God, even if the outcome doesn't happen right away. Understand that when faith is involved, God is in charge of the outcomes. Your fears may not instantly melt away, but by faithfully giving them to God, you will recognize peace coming into your life.

Trusting God with your solution does not mean you can idly continue your life. To live a life of faith is to give God access every day through repentance, which cannot happen without a devoted prayer and fasting life. In Psalm 56, we see that David prayed and vented to God about his situation. Although he was scared, David praised and trusted God to fulfill His promises. When faced with fear, you should take David's example and seek God's face, place your burdens on Him, and praise Him.

PRACTICE

Isaiah 41:13 (NKJV) states, "For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you'."

- 1 Identify common fears or concerns in your life.
- 2 Take those fears to God, and in your own words, express how you will give Him complete access to overcome those fears.
- 3 Listen. By completely surrendering, God now has an opportunity to give you direction.
- 4 Praise God for taking on your burden.

PRAY

Lord, I understand it is not Your plan for me to fear. I give You every worry that troubles my life and trust that You alone have the wisdom and power to overcome. Thank You for the situations you place me in to grow my character. I pray that I will not react in fear, but will learn to place everything in Your hands.

PLUS

Listen to the song "Perfect Peace" by Indiana Bible College

(See Philippians 4:4–7.)



CAST YOUR CARES

RUSS FAUBERT, BIBLE QUIZZING DIRECTOR



PREVIEW

Issues of one degree or another arise just about every day, and sometimes they can begin to pile up. As the old saying goes, “When it rains, it pours.” Because each issue seems manageable on its own, we’re often tempted to handle things ourselves as they arise, only to then fall behind and feel anxious and overwhelmed. However, you’ve got a big God who wants to unburden you. He invites you to trust Him with your cares, both big and small.

PRAISE

God is omnipotent, meaning “all powerful.” He created the universe by simply speaking. His power is never diminished in the least, and He never grows weary. Nothing is too big for our God to handle, and no issue is too small for Him to care about.

PARABLE

Looking at Psalm 55, it’s easy to see that David had issues. Bible scholars don’t know for sure just when David wrote this psalm, but some think it was when his estranged son, Absalom, staged a coup to become king. Among the many who turned against David in support of Absalom was Ahithophel (ah-HITH-oh-fell), David’s grandfather-in-law and one of his closest counselors.

David and his royal entourage escaped Jerusalem before Absalom arrived with an army, but when word reached the king of Ahithophel’s treachery, the town in which David found temporary refuge did not seem far enough away. David poured out his turmoil in Psalm 55:6–8 (NLT):

Oh, that I had wings like a dove;

then I would fly away and rest!

I would fly far away to the quiet of the wilderness ... How quickly I would escape—far from this wild storm of hatred.

PRESENT

David said that if an enemy had betrayed him, it would have been easier to bear it, knowing the disloyalty came from someone who hated him (Psalm 55:12). But when it turned out to be Ahithophel, someone he trusted and respected, that was the straw that broke the camel’s back. His close friend’s betrayal pierced his heart like a dagger and was more than David could bear (Psalm 55:20–21). He had been completely taken in by the man’s lies.

We can surmise that David had reached his breaking point, for he wrote that his burden of grief and desolation was more than he could bear. The only solution was to turn to his truest friend, the One whom David knew was strong enough to bear the burden. He knew God would take care of him. (See Psalm 55:22).

It is important to note that when things get bad, God will not take your burdens (issues, cares) from you; instead, you must give them to Him. Ultimately, it is not enough to know that you need God; you must acknowledge your dependence on Him, and then act accordingly.

Don't exhaust yourself physically, emotionally, or spiritually when you can give your burdens to the Lord. His strength is limitless! He's already carrying you, so offloading your cares from your shoulders to His only makes sense.

PRACTICE

Anxiety among teens today is at an all-time high. The tension and stress they needlessly bear has been equated to that of air traffic controllers.

What things stress you out?

Share a time when you let little things for which you were responsible get out of control and overwhelm you.

What about when things were out of your control? Did that sense of being overwhelmed feel much different?

Whether the cause is ourselves or others,
the cure to cares and anxieties is still the
same: our great big all-powerful God!

PRAY

Lord, I know I need you, but I don't always act like I do. Forgive me for taking too much on myself and not giving you my burdens to carry. I want to exchange my cares and anxiety for Your peace and strength. Thank you, Lord, for carrying me!

PLUS

Make a list of the issues you are facing or will face this coming week—whether big or small, whether at home, at school, or at work—and write them all down.

As the list grows, you may begin to feel overwhelmed, but even if you don't, don't wait until you do before asking God for His help. Keep the list with you to pray over each issue and give it to the Lord. Be intentional about casting your cares upon God.



EVER LASTING



Psalm 103

PREVIEW

From our perspective, it can seem quite unreasonable to forgive someone over and over again. It's irrational to view each day as a new start with no recollection of past offenses, no matter the severity, and lavish the offenders with gifts they do not deserve. And in our humanistic limitations, it is nearly impossible to imagine a truly unconditional love that knows no bounds or conditions. Yet, in every single day, we are met with that kind of unfathomable grace and mercy by our Father and Creator. He sees us clearly, knows us fully, and still loves us endlessly.

PRAISE

Psalm 103 speaks of the pure, unrivaled goodness of God. This passage of Scripture reminds us why we joyously live to bless His name, simply because He is who He is. He is our Savior and Redeemer, who pulled us out of darkness and gave us hope. He is our friend and Father whose comfort is always near. He is our peace, our safe place, our provider and miracle-worker. And perhaps the greatest of all, He is rich in everlasting grace and mercy regardless of our unworthiness. We are granted unmerited favor and unwavering forgiveness of all our faults. Neither of these are earned through our goodness and works. His grace and mercy are gifts given solely because of His selfless character and divine compassion for His children.

PARABLE

We could assume that David's motive in writing this psalm was just to paint a picture of God's sweet lovingkindness toward His children. I wouldn't necessarily argue with that assumption, but I believe there was more to it than that.

Read Psalm 103:17–18: “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.”

It is important to note how David took the time to emphasize that the extent of our obedience will determine our blessing. Our God is generous on a level we can only strive to reach. There is no question about whether or not He desires to pour out blessings and the gift of salvation. But just as much as He is generous, He also is a righteous God. It's our obedience and devotion to the Lord's Word that gives us access to the best that He intends for us. Praise from our lips has little value if we are not praising Him with our lives. Let us celebrate His goodness not only with our words, but by the continuous refinement of our character and the sacrifice of our will.

PRESENT

Something truly miraculous happens when we choose to live our lives to bless the Lord. There's a beautiful exchange: when our blessings go up to Him, He is ever so graciously pouring blessings back down on us. Our faithfulness is met with much greater faithfulness; our blessings with much greater blessings. We can rest in the knowledge that our Father is gentle in dealing with our weaknesses, and never fails to renew our strength. His love for us is from everlasting to everlasting.

PRACTICE

Read Psalm 103:12. How far is the East from the West? It's an immeasurable distance of two ends stretching infinitely in opposite directions—the two ends will never meet. That's how far God separates us from our sins.

What would happen if we gave what we have been given? What if we sought to extend the same kind of understanding and compassion to those around us? It's amazing how the simple act of undeserved forgiveness can change the world of the offender, offended, and even the outside observers. Once we can wholly recognize and accept the depth of His grace and mercy to us, it is our responsibility to then show the world God's goodness through our own gracious actions.

PRAY

Lord, there are so many things I could thank You for. But in this moment, I just want to say thank You for being who You are. No matter my circumstances, no matter my mistakes, You have been and will always be gracious and merciful to me. Let me never forget how blessed I am to simply know You and be known by You. You are the God of all.

PLUS

We could never count the infinite ways God has blessed us. But sadly, we don't often take the time to thank Him for all He's done. Think about it: how many times each day do we take God's provisions for granted? Take some time today (and every day!) to reflect and thank the Lord for all He has provided for you over your lifetime. It is beyond your ability to comprehend how He has made a way when the situation was impossible, how He led you to growth through trials you thought weakened you and all the gifts that came at the perfect time when you didn't know what you needed. Now ask yourself how you can live a life that more intentionally blesses Him as a way to honor how He has so greatly blessed you.



GOD HAS YOUR BACK

RUSS FAUBERT, BIBLE QUIZZING DIRECTOR



PREVIEW

When the whole world seems against you, make no mistake: God still has your back. He may not seem to be present, but He is covering your six. You just can't see Him because He's behind you, out of your immediate view. You have to trust Him, especially when His presence does not seem apparent.

PRAISE

David called God his glory, defense, deliverer, sustainer, and the lifter of his head. Thank God that He is our defender, He brings victory, and He restores hope! The Lord may not remove the opposition you are facing, but He will see you through it.

PARABLE

David was the youngest of eight brothers. Despite being the runt of the litter, David's great faith overcame overwhelming odds when he killed a nine-foot giant named Goliath, survived being on the run in the wilderness from jealous King Saul, and eventually became king of Israel in Saul's place. David was no stranger to conflict and resistance.

Under his rule, Israel rose to the height of its glory. It seemed King David had everything going for him, so he probably did not anticipate that one of his own sons would rebel against him.

Absalom, David's third son, had a falling out with his father when David failed to deal with Amnon, his oldest son and Absalom's half-brother, who had mistreated a member of Absalom's family. So Absalom took matters into his own hands and had Amnon killed. He then fled to Geshur, apparently to stay with his grandfather, King Talmai. Long story short, after three years David sent Joab, the captain of his army, to bring Absalom home to Jerusalem. Still, David did not welcome Absalom at the palace. This snub must have festered in Absalom's spirit because he deliberately and with malicious intent stole the hearts of the people from David. After gathering enough support and amassing an army, he started a rebellion, with the intention of usurping David's throne.

With some of David's closest advisors having turned against him, and his own son marching on Jerusalem with an army, David, his immediate family, and his royal court were forced to flee. Psalm 3 marks the morning of David's retreat: "O LORD, I have so many enemies; so many are against me. So many are saying, 'God will never rescue him!'" (Psalm 3:1-2 NLT).

PRESENT

When David awoke that morning, he didn't know just how things would turn out. Would Absalom's coup be successful? Would David and his family be the ones in exile? Or would God come to his rescue?

There likely are mornings you wake up to face many uncertainties. Whether due to circumstances or individuals, your world can seem overwhelming at times. You may not see God at work in your situation. You may even make poor judgments that compound your problems. But God always has your back!

Instead of plotting revenge, David responded to his son's heinous act of treason with prayer and worship. It took a few days and a few more dicey moments, but God restored David to the throne. Prayer and worship, faith and trust, are the same things that are going to carry you through those uncertain days. You don't have to go on the offensive because God is there.

PRACTICE

We can learn from David's example in Psalm 3 when he was surrounded by those intent on tearing him down.

- 1 David identified God as his greatest defense and hope (v. 3).
- 2 He verbalized his dependence upon God, asking for His help (v. 4).
- 3 He patiently rested in God's provision (v. 5).
- 4 He did not let fear persuade him to act brashly (v. 6).
- 5 He let the Lord fight on his behalf (v. 7).

Even when people come against you, do not respond in kind, do not lash out in fear. Some people will do what they're going to do, and you can't stop them. You simply must let God do what He is going to do for you.

PRAY

God, give me the faith to know that even when You seem far away from my situation and I can't see You, that You have my back, You are my defense, and You are my hope.

Give me the courage, even when others are up in my face, not to act spitefully. Your actions, Lord, are greater than any actions I could take on my own behalf.

I pray for Your peace, Lord, in the face of uncertainty and confusion, and for the patience to wait on Your salvation.

PLUS

This week begin each day in prayer and worship, just as David did. If you are facing a particularly difficult time and can't seem to find the right words, read Psalm 3 each morning. Let it be your prayer as it was David's. God is aware of your situation and will come to your rescue.



IS YOUR FILTER WORKING



PREVIEW

As we are on the way to becoming more Christlike, it's important that we take time to examine the things and people we have allowed into our lives. It's also important that we look at how those things or people have affected our lives. Ask yourself: Did those people help me become more like Jesus? Did they encourage me as I moved closer to Him? Or did those things help or harm my relationship with Him? If anything was harmful to my relationship, was my filter working?

PRAISE

Ask the students in your group to share things or people that helped them move closer to Christ.

PARABLE

Nowadays, hardly anyone drinks tap water. Tap water can be cloudy, have a chlorine odor, and tastes yuck. For these reasons most people prefer bottled water or some other form of purified water. Why do most people prefer purified water? Because it tastes better, doesn't smell like a bleach bottle, and it's clear. Water that has been purified has passed through a series of filters. These filters can remove silt, sediment, dirt, sand, metals, and a variety of other things from the water, giving you a clear-looking great-tasting glass of pure water. God has allowed for us to have a filter in our life. If our filter isn't working, we will be like that yuck-tasting, cloudy, nasty-smelling glass of water. But if our filter is working, we will be like that clear, great-tasting, pure glass of water. Is your filter working?

PRESENT

Psalm 101 is a psalm of David. The Bible refers to David as a man after God's own heart. As we look at Psalm 101, we see that this person who was very close to God had a working filter in his life. We see that how his filter operated, was entirely up to him. One version of the Bible tells us ten different times in Psalm 101 that David said, "I will."

What was the "I will" about? It was about David making the decision about what he would allow into his life and what would be filtered out of his life.

For example, David said in verse 2, "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart" (or with a heart of integrity). Then David said in verse 4, "A froward [crooked] heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person."

David wanted to have a clean heart for himself and was determined to walk in that way. As a result, he filtered out those people from his life that had crooked hearts. Thus, we see that David had a filter for his associations.

Do you have people in your life who encourage your relationship with God and encourage you to do the right thing? These are the people you want to keep in your life. They help you live a better and purer life. They might not always tell you what you want to hear, but they help steer you in the right direction. These are the friends and influences you want to keep around.

Do you have close friends or influences that encourage you to do wrong? Every time you're with them, you seem to get in trouble. Every time you're with them, you do things you normally wouldn't do, listen to things you normally wouldn't listen to, and talk to your parents in ways you shouldn't. These are ones that you may want to consider filtering out, so you can live a purer life.

David had a filter for his eyes. In Psalm 101:3, David said, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside." David made up his mind that if it wasn't going to help him do right, he wasn't going to tolerate the sight of it. He learned to filter out all the things that could enter his life through his eyes and affect his heart.

Then David made a decision in verse 6: "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land." Instead of looking at bad things, bad habits, and crooked people, David determined to look at what honest and sincere people were doing. These were the things he allowed himself to see.

What do you allow yourself to see? Is there a chance that those things can enter your life by way of your eyes and affect your heart? If so, this would be a proper place to apply the filter to your life.

David had a filter for behaviors, people, and attitudes. Is your filter for behaviors, people, and attitudes working? If not, when you fix it, you will find out how much more beautiful life can be.

PRACTICE

Ask the members in your group to make a list of people and habits in their lives. Then have them ask the following questions:

- 1 Do these things and people help me move closer to Jesus?
- 2 Do these things or people discourage my relationship with Jesus?

PRAY

Jesus, I love You! Thank You for allowing me to have a relationship with You. I want to do what I can to hold on to that relationship. If my filter is not working, help me fix it. Help me filter out the things and people in my life that discourage a relationship with You, and help me to identify which things and people are strengthening my relationship with You.

PLUS

Intentionally start to apply what you've learned from this lesson by asking yourself this question: Will this harm or help my relationship with Jesus Christ?



LET'S GO TO CHURCH



Psalm 122

PREVIEW

Church. It's a sacred place of refuge and holiness where we give glory and praise to God. It's where redemption and deliverance live. It's God's house where His peaceful, life-giving Spirit is ever present. It's no wonder David wrote about how glad he was to go there! We are so incredibly blessed that He has given us an open-ended invitation to come to His house anytime we want. What an honor! Nonetheless, things in life can cause us to forget how much of an honor it truly is. Let's take a few moments to remember together.

PRAISE

Psalm 122 tells of the excitement shared by the people of God when they came together to worship Him. As they entered Jerusalem, they came with thanksgiving and praise to bless His name. In the same spirit, we should rejoice with the body of Christ every time we step into His presence. Speak the triumph of God's people as the Israelites did: "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem." Reaching the gates of Jerusalem was a testament of the journey many Israelites had to make. So, as we cross over from our process into the fulfillment of our promises, let us give thanks for everything God has brought us through.

PARABLE

All the tribes of Israel would travel great lengths for no other reason than simply to gather together to worship the Lord. Although the somewhat arduous trek to Jerusalem was required of them by their religious laws, they made the journey with gladness and selflessness in their hearts. Whatever inconvenience they may have experienced was overlooked because they understood the value of the destination.

Let's compare that to God's people (us) today. Every week, we have the same opportunity to connect with God and our fellow believers. We have greater access to His power with far fewer obstacles keeping us from our house of worship than the Israelites faced. Yet we rarely exude the same kind of thankfulness as we enter into His gates. What was once seen as a great privilege to God's people, we now too often take for granted or view as a drudgery.

PRESENT

The Israelites were a people whose culture revolved around the things of God. They spent their lives studying His Word and testifying of His goodness. They were intentional about remembering His provision, reflecting on stories of past victories, and rejoicing over their many blessings. Because of their purposeful efforts in acknowledging the Lord, the Israelites truly understood who He was. And to know Him was to love Him. Through this understanding, they were able to worship out of love instead of obligation. It was a joy for them to get together to praise

their Deliverer even though it meant sacrificing some things to get there. It was where they felt safe and found their strength, and that was of much greater worth to them than anything they had to give up in the process.

We need to take on the perspective of the Israelites. We need to stop dwelling on the inconveniences of the process and start focusing on the value of the destination. Any of the time, energy, or emotion we expend serving our church and worshiping our Savior is nothing in comparison to the blessings we receive when we're there.

PRACTICE

In our culture today, business is the norm. In the midst of unending to-do lists, finding time for church can feel like just another thing to add on to our overwhelming schedule. After a while, spending time in His presence too easily gets pushed aside to make room for the things we deem more pressing. Eventually, we can find ourselves becoming more and more distant not only from God, but from who He has called us to be.

So how can we combat this?

Simple: We make Him first priority, always. We seek Him out and learn who He is. We fall in love with our Creator. Once we discover our own deep love for the Lord, we will find that we not only enjoy going to His house, we hunger for it. We crave whatever gets us closer to Him and helps us find more of Him.

What can you change in your life to make the things of God the most important priority?

PRAY

Lord, I thank You for allowing me the privilege to come into Your Holy Place to freely worship You. I'm so grateful to have a church family that I can turn to for support and encouragement. I ask that You would sustain my joy in worship no matter what season of life I'm in or how busy I may become. Let my love for You and Your house always outweigh the weight of sacrifice.

PLUS

Our attitude toward God directs our view of worship. We may find worship a chore if we have distanced ourselves from God, but we find gladness, as David did, when going to church with grateful hearts and with the proper perspective. As we enter a new week full of challenges and stressors, let's remember that going to church is not an extra task burdening us; it's where we go to lay our burdens down.



MORNINGS ARE AWESOME (ISH)



PREVIEW

Mornings can be difficult, but when you start them with Jesus, everything seems to turn out all right. It's hard to have a bad day when you start it with your awesome Father.

PRAISE

Ask the students if they are early birds or night owls. Do they have any early morning routines they follow to help them wake up? How often do they hit the snooze button?

PARABLE

Show this text conversation to the group:



Bottom line: good things can happen in the morning. What is something that wakes you up in the morning, something that gives you purpose to get out of bed?

PRESENT

Read Psalm 5:3. David declared that good things happen in the morning. It was in the morning that the Lord heard his voice; it was in the morning that he was able to present his needs; and it was in the morning that he waited patiently for the Lord to move. David took comfort in knowing that no matter how rough the night had been, there was some hope waiting for him in the morning.

Read Lamentations 3:22–24. We have new mercies every morning. No matter what happened the night before, mercies are new in the morning. While we may not be promised an answer the next morning, we are promised new mercies.

It is interesting to note that David waited patiently for the Lord to answer and never gave up on God, even if it meant asking for the same thing

day after day. He took comfort in knowing that even though his requests may have changed, he still served a God whose hearing did not. David knew that God hears His people and will move on their behalf in His perfect timing.

David went on to write that because of the love of God, he was able to enter the presence of God every day. He knew we do not deserve the love of God but every morning we are given new grace to face the day with the help of the Lord.

David understood that God does not look on man's outward appearance, but He looks upon the heart. He also understood that God knew when he was sincere or when he was insincere.

Each morning, David found himself too busy not to spend time with the Lord. He knew he could not handle his cray-cray life, royal schedule, and kingly responsibilities without first spending time with the Lord.

Do we look to God in the morning, approaching Him even before our day begins, or are we too busy to spend even just a few minutes with Him before we start our day?

I fear that too often we, as Christians, tend to worship God from afar. We have good intentions in developing a closer relationship with the Lord, but we let the business of life get in the way. And yet, what is there in our lives that is more important than God? Nothing!

Participating in early-morning devotions is a sure way to put God first in our day. On those mornings that we acknowledge God from the moment we place our feet on the floor, our day is different. We deal with temptation differently. We respond to difficulty differently. We engage with God throughout the day differently. Setting aside early-morning time for personal devotions lets us dedicate the whole rest of the day to God.

PRACTICE

It is time to change some habits of your morning routines. Instead of checking Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, try reading your Bible or completing a devotion. Try getting ahold of your Savior before social media gets ahold of you. It will change your day, your outlook, and your life.

PRAY

Jesus, I love You! Thank You for allowing me to have a relationship with You. I want to do whatever I can to hold on to that relationship. Therefore, as David did, I am determined to seek You early every morning. I want You to be the first priority in my life.

PLUS

This lesson would be a great introduction to Devo 365 books. These are five- to ten-minute devotions written by students, youth pastors, and pastors from all over the country. These brief but timely messages would be a great resource for helping students to focus on a pertinent subject each morning.



PEACEFUL SLEEP

SYDNI GROSS, P7 LEADER (TOLEDO, OH)



PREVIEW

The Lord understands us and is mindful of us, giving many beautiful, encouraging promises in His Word. The promise we will be looking at today is the promise that He will give us a sense of peace and safety, which allows for restful nights and peaceful sleep.

PRAISE

God gives us peace in all aspects of our lives. (Ask students to share times when they became aware of the peace of God in their lives, and how it made them feel.)

Similarly, God ensures that wherever we go He will keep us safe in His hands. (Ask students to share incidents when God has kept them safe in a time of danger.)

PARABLE

(Ask everyone in the room if they're more of an early bird or a night owl.) Whether you're an early bird or a night owl, I think we all can agree that we love to sleep. But despite that fact, we sometimes just cannot fall asleep. For example, how many of you have a hard time drifting off when you know something is going to happen the next day, like your birthday, the first day of school, or leaving for vacation? On the other hand, maybe you can't sleep because you're thinking about the long list of things you have to do the next day. Maybe you're nervous about something, like a big test in your least favorite subject. It's an unfortunate truth: sometimes our sleep is prohibited because our minds are too preoccupied with other pressing things.

PRESENT

Read Psalm 4:8 (KJV) and ask the reader to give a modern interpretation or what they think this verse means. Then read the verse from the New Living Translation: "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe."

In this verse, God promises that no matter what happens throughout our day, our sleep will be peaceful and safe. Yet it can be so easy to forget this promise.

Perhaps you had a bad day and everything that happened is still weighing on your mind. Or maybe there's a difficult situation that's causing you to stress out. Quite often stress can be a huge reason preventing peacefulness and sleep. Consequently, our lack of sleep can make our stress worse, and we enter a dreadful cycle of worry and sleeplessness. Thankfully, we have a promise that our sleep is protected by God.

(Ask students how many of them feared the dark when they were kids.) Kids are often scared of the dark because they aren't sure what is lurking in the dark. They imagine scary monsters living in closet or under the bed. While most kids grow out of that stage,

many of them never outgrow that fear of the unknown, which can lead them to feel unsafe about many things, most notably their future.

No one can predict the future. The uncertainty causes many of us to feel unsafe, fearful of what may happen. This fear often takes hold in the wee hours of the night as we lie in bed, staring into the darkness. However, I'm here to tell you that you don't have to be scared and you don't have to feel unsafe, because God can give you a sense of safety and a peaceful sleep.

No matter what happens to you throughout the day, God knows it and He sees it. He loves you and wants you to be peaceful and safe. He promises that even your sleep will be full of peace and safety because, as the song says, "He's got the whole world in His hands." Stated more personally, He has your whole world in His hands.

PRACTICE

Try praying to God every morning and night, asking Him to bring this promise to your remembrance. Try making a schedule or a to-do list of all the things you have to do the next day and setting a time for each thing so you don't have to worry about it throughout the night.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the incredible promise of peaceful sleep that You've given to me. Thank You for seeing my life, keeping it in Your hands, and giving me the safety that only You can give. I pray that You will help me to constantly remember Your promises and love every day and throughout each night.

PLUS

Challenge for this week:

Write down the things that have been causing you the most stress or fear and brainstorm ideas on tips, tricks, and solutions to help alleviate some of that stress.



MOVING MOUNTAINS



PREVIEW

When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah became His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion. The sea saw it and fled; Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs. What ails you, O sea, that you fled? O Jordan, that you turned back? O mountains, that you skipped like rams? O little hills, like lambs? Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters. (Psalm 114:1–8, NKJV)

We see in Psalm 114 that God moves mountains and hills as easily as rams and lambs kicking up their heels. God is in the business of moving mountains. Matthew 17:20 also refers to the moving of mountains: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”

PRAISE

Have you ever seen how small a mustard seed is? Have you ever noticed how enormous a mountain is? If you haven’t, then the only logical thing to do is google them. What are the differences between these two objects? (List them on a piece of paper.)

PARABLE

One day a teacher and his student were hiking through the woods and came across a small sapling. The teacher suggested, “Try pulling that sapling out of the ground.” With ease, the student uprooted the young tree. They kept walking and came across a slightly larger tree. Once again the teacher said, “Try pulling that young tree out of the ground.” The student did as the teacher asked, but this time with a little more difficulty. They kept walking and came across a large tree, much older than the past two. Once again, the teacher instructed, “Try pulling this tree out of the ground.” With a puzzled look on his face, the student responded, “But that would be impossible.”

Moral of the story: Habits that are short-lived are much easier to change/stop (uproot) than old habits that have been around a long time.

PRESENT

Ask the students to raise their hands if they have ever been through a difficult time in their lives. Some may have lost a loved one, be suffering from an illness, or going through financial hardships in their family. Whatever it may be, we all have “mountain moments” in our lives that look impossible to overcome. Here is a little secret: you might be doing the right things and living a just life but still going through a storm. The question is, what do you do when hard times hit? Do you stop whatever you’re doing and hide? It is interesting that you learn more by going through difficulties and pain than you do from living a pain-free, perfect life. Pain is an effective

teacher. Want to know why elders have so much wisdom? They have been through the storms, sicknesses, and hardships. Don't curse the pain, because it's letting you know you're still living and growing.

Want to see how powerful faith is? Look at Matthew 17:20: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Imagine holding a cupful of mustard-seed faith. That's all it takes to overcome life's problems. With just that small amount of faith you can speak to those problems and move them out of the way.

Let's refer back to the list we created on the difference between a mountain and a mustard seed. One clear characteristic stands out—the difference in size. When you see a mountain, it's so huge you can't see the whole thing at once, but you can barely hold on to one mustard seed because it's so tiny.

Mountains seem so big when they're right in front of you. They block the view; you can't see your future; you have no idea how the problem is going to turn out. But God can see what's on the other side of the mountain, and His Word encourages you to speak to that mountain and move it out of the way. If you're afraid to speak words by faith, if you doubt anything good can come out of the situation, it's the same as letting the mountain take your voice away.

PRACTICE

But today we are going to speak to our mountains. (Have everyone say, "Move.") Refer back to the list of differences you created between the mountain and the mustard seed. Notice that no one listed "growth potential" in the mustard seed column. The mountain is what it is, but the mustard seed has great growth potential. That seed will grow into a mustard plant that will produce more seeds that will grow into more mustard plants.

PRAY

God, please help me to realize the potential of my faith and help me not to be intimidated by the mountains in my life. Give me enough confidence to speak to my problems and issues, and they will be removed.

PLUS

Remember you may not think you have much faith, but the growth potential of your faith is limitless, just like the mustard seed.



SURROUNDED BY LIONS



PREVIEW

At times we find ourselves surrounded by difficulties, problems, and unknowns. Sometimes these issues are caused by the actions of others, sometimes by our own actions. In this lesson we will be discussing how God is the constant in a world of variables.

PRAISE

Listen to the song “Not Ashamed” by Passion and focus on the lyrics while you listen.

PARABLE

Here are some interesting facts about lions:

- Most male lions can grow up to ten feet in length and can weigh between 330 to 550 pounds; female lions grow up to nine feet and weigh between 265 to 395 pounds.
- Females do all the hunting for the group, while males guard the territory and fight predators and challengers.
- Wild male lions can live for approximately twelve years and females for fifteen years.
- A group of lions is called a pride. Prides can have as many as forty lions, which may include adult females, cubs, sub-adults and two other male lions.
- You can call them lazy. They spend around 16–20 hours a day sleeping or resting. So they are basically active only for the remaining four hours when they are hunting or protecting their territory.
- Although lions drink water every day, they can manage to live without it for four or five days if needed.
- An adult male’s roar can be heard up to five miles away!

PRESENT

Read Psalm 57:4. David found himself in a pretty dark and hopeless situation, surrounded by lions (hostile enemies). The lion metaphor used here describes his situation as being surrounded by things and people that, without the help of the Lord, would bring him down.

Saul was king of Israel and David was one of his servants. One of David’s jobs was to play music when Saul was in a rotten mood, which was way too often. David’s music would lift Saul’s spirits—or, as the saying is often misquoted, “soothe the savage beast.”

People liked David very much—much more than Saul. King Saul was well aware of the discrepancy, and resented it. At

times his rage would boil over and he would try to kill David, who had to flee for his life. Bible scholars believe that David wrote Psalm 57 while living in a cave, hiding from Saul.

Even though chased by enemies, David's heart was fixed on one constant: God would deliver him in times of trouble. He had faith that everything was under God's control, even though his future appeared uncertain. David was steadfast in his trust and faith in the Lord. He knew God would somehow deliver him even when surrounded by impossibilities.

We, as disciples, need the same steadfast faith no matter what we face. When the doctor gives a fearful prognosis, we should not doubt God or blame Him. If a family member's job is lost and the fear of financial failure seems imminent, God is still good, and He will work it out to His glory and our benefit. If our family has to move and we find ourselves in unfamiliar surroundings with many unknowns and "what if's," God is still on His throne. Our faith and trust should not waver. Reliance on the guidance of a loving God will keep us strong in times of doubt and uncertainty.

Being secure and firm in our convictions and trust in God's promises will keep us steady through unknown tomorrows. Be encouraged today; everything will be all right. God will work it all out as He has done many times in the past. He hasn't left you alone; He will always take care of you.

If you make up your mind to be a secure and anchored Christian, you will survive and prosper even through a frightening future. When all is bleak and uncertain, your heart will not surrender to the circumstances. You will ride out the storm and arrive safely where and when God wants you to be. There is not a lion out there that is a match for your Savior!

PRACTICE

Martin Luther said, "None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to affect, except those who have learned it by experience." The truth is you are in trouble if you wait to pray until you are in trouble. God is willing and able to deliver you from whatever problem you are facing. You are doing yourself a disservice if you wait until you're in trouble to talk to your Father. Make it a daily habit. Let Him hear your voice so when you cry out for help, He will know who's calling and will move on your behalf.

PRAY

Jesus, thank You for hearing me when I call! You are there for me even when all of my friends and family desert me. Your Word promises You will stick closer than a brother. God, I thank You that when I'm surrounded by lions You will deliver me, even if it looks impossible. You hear me, You know where I am, and You are an on-time God! I love You and thank You for who You are. In Jesus' name, amen.

PLUS

Share a time when God made a way when there seemed to be no way. Encourage each other and remind your group that nothing is impossible with God.



THE ANOINTED ONES

PART 1 – AMADO HUIZAR



PREVIEW

God has anointed you so that you may be equipped for every good work—to resist evil, to know the truth, preach the truth, practice the truth, and be able to pray in truth. To be anointed simply means to be chosen. David wrote in Psalm 23:5, “You anoint my head with oil.” You are anointed of God.

PRAISE

Have you ever considered yourself to be an anointed Christian? Maybe you’ve thought that only certain people in ministry are anointed. Maybe you’ve considered that only the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles were the anointed. No matter what you have or haven’t thought about the anointing of God, if you are a Christian, then you have received an anointing.

PARABLE

Have you ever seen those April Fools jokes where somebody will take a box of heavenly Krispy Kreme donuts, remove all of the donuts, and fill the box with vegetables and fruit? Can you imagine the disappointment of that coworker or classmate who is anticipating the sweet treats on the inside of the box, only to find that once the box is open, there’s nothing but stuff that your mom always says is good for you? This same principle applies to us as Christians. Since God has anointed us, those around us should see we are different on the outside; however, we must be careful not to become an April Fool Christian. The thoughts and intentions of the heart always should match the actions of our hands.

PRESENT

Do you know what it means to be anointed? According to Webster’s Dictionary, to anoint means to “rub oil or ointment on,” “to put oil on in a ceremony of consecration.” Therefore, to anoint something or someone is to apply something—in this case oil—to an object.

Most often, the term “anointed one” is used in the Bible to refer to a person who has received a special calling from God. There are many such individuals in the Scriptures, most often notable public figures such as kings and prophets.

King David, for example, is often described in the Old Testament as God’s “anointed one” (e.g., Psalm 28:8). David also used on a number of occasions a similar expression (“the LORD’s anointed”) to describe King Saul (e.g., I Samuel 24:1–6). King Solomon, David’s son, used the same expression to refer to himself in II Chronicles 6:42.

In each of these situations, the “anointed one” being described was a regular person who had received an extraordinary call or blessing from God. This gives me hope because it means regular people, just like you and me, have the potential to do great things for God because we have been anointed.

Maybe you've been anointed with oil in a prayer service, or when someone has prayed over you for healing. Maybe you've even done the anointing. Then again, perhaps the idea of anointing with oil is foreign to you. Whatever the case, anointing is found frequently in the Bible.

Prophets were anointed. I Kings 19:16 (NIV) says, "Also, you shall anoint Jehu ... king over Israel, and anoint Elisha ... to succeed you as prophet."

Priests were anointed. Exodus 40:13 (NIV), says, "Then dress Aaron in the sacred garments, anoint him and consecrate him so he may serve me as priest."

Kings were anointed. I Samuel 16:3, 13 (NIV) says, "Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate. ... So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him [David] in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power."

The sick were anointed. Mark 6:13 (NIV) says, "They ... anointed many sick people with oil and healed them."

Objects were anointed. Leviticus 8:10 (NIV) says, "Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and everything in it, and so consecrated them."

For what purpose were all these people and things anointed? Prophets were anointed to be able to proclaim God's word. Priests were anointed to carry out their duties of worship and sacrifice. Kings were anointed so they could rule. People were anointed for healing. Objects were anointed so they could be set aside for holy use.

PRACTICE

I John 2:27 says, "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him."

This verse confirms that you have been anointed by Jesus Christ. Because of the anointing, you have the ability to receive divine wisdom and understanding beyond your years. The anointing will make you a better student. The anointing will make you a better friend. The anointing will help you navigate through difficult times in your life. The anointing will make you a better Christian.

Anointing isn't just for show; it's not a potion to the prayers you pray or the extra mojo for your next song or lesson to teach. The anointing was and is much more than that. We will look into how the anointing can revolutionize your life in our next lesson.

PRAY

Jesus, I thank You that You have called me to fulfill Your purpose according to Your plan, and You have anointed me to do great things. Help me not to take for granted this calling and this anointing, and let me live my life fully committed to You. Let my outside actions align with my inside thoughts. Let me be a student who is not afraid to live for You and be the light that You have called me to be. In Jesus' name, amen.

PLUS

If time allows, pass out donuts to correlate with the lesson today and talk about the importance of outside actions aligning with inside thoughts. Here are some leading questions:

1. How can you spot someone who is a fake?
2. What are the dangers in being a fake Christian?
3. In what ways can we be real Christians every day?
4. Where can I go in those times when I am having difficulty living out my faith?
5. How can I apply what I heard today to my life in the coming days?

Always remember to remind your club of the next date/time of your meeting!



THE ANOINTED ONES

PART 2 – AMADO HUIZAR



PREVIEW

In I Samuel 16:13, the prophet Samuel took oil and anointed David, a teenager like you and me, as the next king of Israel. From this moment forward, David's life was set on a path that would take him from a shepherd to a king. This process did not happen overnight, but because he was anointed, he had the patience to wait on God's plan, and God saw him through life's toughest battles.

PRAISE

Waiting is a part of life. Most normal people HATE waiting. Some people go to amusement parks for the food and not for the rides, because 9/10 the wait time for food is much shorter than the wait time for rides.

PARABLE

According to a recent survey, here is how long the average American waits:

- 20 minutes a day for the bus or train
- 32 minutes whenever they visit a doctor
- 28 minutes waiting in security lines whenever they travel
- 13 hours annually waiting on hold for customer service
- 38–50 hours annually waiting in traffic

Americans spend a combined 37 BILLION hours waiting in line. Waiting is certainly a large part of life.

PRESENT

Read I Samuel 16:13. In this text, David was anointed early in life. David needed this anointing to endure what would happen through the course of his victorious but often chaotic life. The battles, betrayal, sin cover-ups, fleeing, second-guessing, flesh-feeding, soul-stirring path of his not only would be an example of what to be and what not to be, but we would see the merciful hand of God. Many scholars believe David wrote Psalm 23 toward the end of his life, as a memoir from the author and a parable to the reader, like a reflection, a manifesto, or a lengthy modern-day Facebook post.

David understood his sheep needed to be anointed every day for several reasons: to counteract insects, to help reduce conflict, and to heal/prevent infection. We will briefly discuss how the anointing helped with bugs in this lesson, and the next two lessons we will deal with how the anointing helped reduce conflict and heal/prevent infection.

Sheep are particularly susceptible to flies landing on their noses. These flies travel up the sheep's nose and lay eggs, which then turn into worms

that can burrow into the animals' brains. This drives the sheep crazy and they will try to get rid of the irritation by banging their heads against hard objects, which can kill the sheep. To prevent this, each day the shepherd pours oil on the sheep's noses, and the flies slide out instead of flying in.

I don't know about you, but I certainly have a lot of daily irritations buzzing around my head—rude actions, bothersome comments, pesky mishaps. Some of those get in my head and cause negative thoughts—angry, fearful, sinful thoughts. And if I allow them to burrow deeper into my mind, they become part of my life and can destroy me.

But I have a Good Shepherd, and He promises if I come to Him every day, He will anoint my head with oil. I can come back to him many times a day, and I do! In prayer, I bring the Shepherd all the little irritations and bothersome thoughts that cause me discomfort before they can gain a foothold in my mind. Sometimes the oil is found in the waiting, between the time when God speaks to me until I see a promise come to pass.

PRACTICE

We've seen how sheep need to be anointed to stay healthy. The anointing oil has a specific scent that is a deterrent to the bugs; the bugs cannot stand the smell of the oil. It's the same way with the things that bug you. Think about it: what kind of things bug us as humans? (Depression, fear, inadequacy, low self-image, etc.) When I let God's anointing cover and flow through me, these bugs can no longer reside within or even near me. They will die off if I do not rush the process God is taking me through.

PRAY

Lord, You are a gracious God. You know my struggles, You know my trials, You know my weaknesses, and You know my failures, but You love me through it all. You love me when the bugs overtake my life and I find myself beating myself up for mistakes and failures. Your anointing flows fresh over me and washes me clean. I thank You that Your blood washes me when I come boldly to Your throne of grace. Give me strength to overcome the small things in life. Your grace is sufficient for me. In my time of weakness, you are the strongest. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

PLUS

If time allows, pass out donuts or some other treat and talk about the importance of outside actions aligning with inside thoughts. Here are some leading questions:

1. What are some advantages or disadvantages of owning a fake product (fake AirPods, fake Oakleys, basically any "knock-off" product)? (Possible answers: costs less, looks like the real thing, makes people think you have expensive items, poor quality in the long run, have to be replaced sooner than real products)
2. How can you spot someone who is a fake?
3. What are the dangers in being a fake Christian?
4. In what ways can we be real Christians every day?
5. How can I apply what I heard today to my life in the coming days?

Always remember to remind your club of the next date/time of your meeting!



THE ANOINTED ONES

PART 3 – AMADO HUIZAR



PREVIEW

In I Samuel 16:13, the prophet Samuel took oil and anointed David as the next king of Israel while he was just a teenager like you and me. This week we will discuss how the anointing will help prevent conflict and preserve unity among believers in Jesus Christ.

PRAISE

Listen to about five minutes of Hezekiah Walker's "I Need You to Survive" and remember the lyrics for later.

PARABLE

There is a video being shared on Facebook concerning two antelopes that were fighting. They were locked in battle, heads to the ground, unaware of an approaching lion. They were so engrossed in the fight that they didn't start running away until the lion literally broke up the fight. The caption of the video said: "As long as we are fighting our own, we won't see the real enemy coming."

PRESENT

We have seen how David anointed his sheep every day to help with several things: to counteract insects, to help reduce conflict, and to heal/prevent infection. In today's lesson, we will discuss how the anointing can assist us through the battles of life and the fact that, just as the song says, you and I need each other to survive.

Sheep are notorious head-butters. Rams especially will butt heads with one another to gain position and establish a dominance hierarchy. A shepherd knows his sheep will clash sometimes and he can't prevent it, so he puts oil or grease on their heads. When they clash, their heads glance off one another without doing much harm.

Our Good Shepherd knows we can't always avoid disagreements, but praying with and for one another is one way we can keep from harming each other when we butt heads. The enemy of our soul would love to harm us, and we often make his job easier when the battles we choose to fight are with those within the church.

Many battles with our brothers and sisters are not worth fighting. The anointing will prevent conflict as well as minimize the harm incurred if we find ourselves in battle. We need united youth groups, united churches, united homes, united families, and united schools.

PRACTICE

The pyramids of the Giza Plateau are possibly the most famous structures in the world. The pyramids had great social meaning when they were built. Every household in Egypt sent workers, grain, and food to contribute to this colossal project. The final

step in the building program was to place a gold-plated capstone on top of the pyramid. The capstone signified that the monumental project was finally finished, and it was a time for dancing and singing as the entire nation celebrated completion of the national project.

In this sense, it was the pyramids that built Egypt rather than the other way around. The pyramids unified the nation in the service of one great and monumental achievement. We all can learn from this example. Unity derives from a shared vision and common purpose. Just as there were great differences among all those Egyptian workers, so there may be great differences among us. However, when we focus on a common task and goal, the unity and the achievements of unity can be great. When those times do arise that we do not see eye to eye, the anointing provides the buffer that allows us to avoid unnecessary conflict.

PRAY

Jesus, I thank You that You have placed me among the members of the body of Christ. We are better together. We are stronger together. Your Word says that a threefold cord is not easily broken. Let us never take for granted the precious gift of unity. Give us the strength to resist temptation to hurt those in our lives with words. Let us build each other up, and not tear each other down. Thank You for Your anointing in our lives. Let us continue to bring into unity our homes, our school, and our community as we work with one mind and one accord. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

PLUS

Always remember to remind your club of the next date/time of your meeting!



THE ANOINTED ONES

PART 4 – AMADO HUIZAR



PREVIEW

In I Samuel 16:13, the prophet Samuel took oil and anointed David as the next king of Israel while he was just a teenager like you and me. This week we will discuss how the anointing will heal wounds in our lives.

PRAISE

Does anybody have any scars from an injury in the past? If it is appropriate, see if anyone would like to tell the story about how they got their scar or about how they were injured in the past.

PARABLE

We all have suffered some sort of physical injury, whether it was from a sports accident, a car accident, or maybe even done by our own hands. Injuries leave scars. Scars usually do not hurt but they are reminders of a traumatic event in our lives. For some, scars bring back feelings of humor. For others, scars bring back painful memories. The anointing takes what is painful and turns our pain into purpose.

PRESENT

Sheep live outdoors—with barbed wire fences, thistles, rocks, sticks, insects, and predators. It's not a kind, gentle setting. Even the greenest pastures have hazards. So shepherds will check their sheep each day, sometimes morning and evening, to look for wounds that need attention. Adding oil to the wound brings healing.

Similar to the sheep, we too live in a dangerous world, and we suffer wounds, sometimes daily. One of the worst sayings from childhood is "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." Well, that's just not true; words CAN and DO hurt us. They cause wounds that can go much deeper than physical sticks and stones. Wounds that only the Good Shepherd and the balm of Gilead can heal.

In the ancient world, balm was a substance known for its medicinal properties. The territory of Gilead was famous for its production of balm, typically derived from the resin of balsam trees. This balm was exported mainly to Egypt and Phoenicia. Today the expression "balm of Gilead" is applied to the healing that is found in Jesus Christ.

Each of us is wounded by all kinds of things. Jesus is attentive to all our wounds—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Daily, honest communication with Jesus is the best way to find healing. The anointing, the balm of Gilead, will heal you, mend you, and restore you. David said, "He restoreth my soul." Your healing won't come by any other means outside of Jesus Christ.

We are His sheep, and He is our Shepherd. We must choose to be chosen of Him, branded by Him, anointed by Him, for Him.

PRACTICE

Read Matthew 22:14. The United States Army has had many recruitment slogans, but the one from 1950–1971 stands out. It is “Choice, not Chance.” Serving in the oldest branch of the United States Military was and is a CHOICE, not CHANCE.

As it is with being anointed, it's by choice, not by chance. David chose to serve as a shepherd before serving as a king. He chose to be found by God through the prophet Samuel. It wasn't by chance. With you it isn't by chance either. Your miracle isn't by chance. Your ministry calling isn't by chance. It's by choice.

God chose you two thousand years ago on a hill called Calvary, but you get to choose Him today in salvation. Water baptism in His name, and the infilling of His Holy Spirit, as declared in Acts, isn't simply entrance to His kingdom; it is the sealing of His power and anointing on us.

PRAY

Jesus, thank You for taking stripes on Your back over two thousand years ago so I can walk in healing today. There is nothing I have been through that You haven't felt Yourself. You took all pain and guilt and torment upon Yourself when You gave Your life for mine. Thank You for loving me and caring enough about me to remind me today that my wounds will never outmatch Your love. I am hopeful today, Jesus, that You are going to use my story for Your glory. Thank You for hearing me when I pray, and thank You for loving me and healing me. Let my life be a reflection of You, a life full of hope for a sinner saved by grace. In Jesus' name.

PLUS

***Always remember to remind your club of
the next date/time of your meeting!***



THE CLIMB



PREVIEW

Mountain climbing can be very difficult. It requires fitness training, proper diet, and sheer determination. Climbing spiritual mountains requires the same. What we do, what we allow into our lives, and into our mindset will affect our ability to climb.

PRAISE

Has anybody ever climbed a mountain or at least a tall, steep hill? Would you like to share that experience with us? What do you think it takes to become ready to climb a mountain?

PARABLE

Mount Everest has an elevation of 29,035 feet. The mountain peak is in the jet stream, and winds can blow 200 miles per hour. It takes 40 days to climb Mount Everest, which includes time spent in base camp so the body can adjust to the high altitude. Through December 2018, there have been 9,159 successful summits of Mount Everest. Many climbers are accompanied by Sherpas, Himalayan mountain guides. Kami Rita, one of the most accomplished high-altitude climbers of all time, holds the record for 23 ascents.

From the first climb in 1924 until January 2019, 295 people have died on Everest. Most of the bodies are still on the mountain, forever frozen in their icy tomb. The main causes of death are avalanches, falls, altitude sickness, and exposure.

Climbers burn over 10,000 calories each day, losing up to 20 pounds during the expedition. So you could say that when people set out to climb Mount Everest, they will lose weight for sure—and possibly lose their life.

PRESENT

Read Psalm 24:3. In order for us to be able to climb the mountain of God, our hands and our hearts must be cleansed from unrighteousness. What we handle and how strong we feel will affect how we climb. Jesus is not looking for perfection from us, but He wants us to do our best during the climb, which requires preparation.

History indicates that David probably wrote Psalm 24 after moving the Ark to Jerusalem from the house of Obed-Edom, where it had rested about three months. The Philistines, enemies of the Lord's people, had captured the Ark about twenty years before this. But they kept noticing that wherever they took the Ark, their people were developing tumors and dying of plague. They decided to send the Ark back to Israel, and it ended up at the house of Obed-Edom, a Levite.

David's first attempt at bringing the Ark back to Jerusalem ended in disaster. The Ark was on a new cart, and when the oxen stumbled, one of Obed-Edom's sons reached over to steady it and was struck dead. God did not want the Ark to be put on

a cart; it had to be carried on the shoulders of the priests.

The Ark was a physical manifestation of the presence of God, and was supposed to be housed in a holy place, where only the high priest could go. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest would sprinkle the innocent blood on the Mercy Seat, God would forgive the sins of His people.

The same is true for us. We can't come close to God without the atoning blood of Jesus. Read I John 2:2. Propitiation means "to atone for sin." John used the word "propitiation" to tell us that Jesus was the atoning sacrifice for our sin. We should have died on the cross, but Jesus took our place. His blood has cleansed our dirty hands and purified our polluted hearts, making us fit to approach the mountain of the Lord.

Having a relationship with Jesus gives us "redemptive lift." That means we are climbers—people who are willing to scale the heights and suffer through some falls on their way to the summit of the Lord. There is only one other option for someone who doesn't want to climb: valley dwelling. Nobody ever got any awards for staying in the valley.

This Christian life you are living is like a climb. Through the continual cleansing of the atoning blood of Jesus, you are fit to climb the mountain of God and draw near to Him. I want to encourage you today to keep climbing!

PRACTICE

A man named Bob fell down into a muddy hole. His friend Joe walked by, and Bob called out, "Hey, Joe, it's Bob! I'm stuck in this hole and I can't climb out! Can you help me?" So Joe walked over to the edge of the hole and jumped in with Bob. Astonished, Bob yelled, "What did you do that for? Now we're both stuck in the mud!" Joe smiled and said, "I jumped down because I've been in this hole before, and I know the way out."

When it looks like there's no way to climb out of the mess you're in, hold on. God is sending a friend (you could say a Sherpa) to help you continue on up the mountain. These friends, or guides, are committed to helping you climb and grow in Christ. Once you become a full-fledged mountain climber, you can help guide others.

Ask yourselves these questions: Who is in my life that is committed to seeing me grow? Who can I develop a better relationship with that will allow me to help them grow? Am I pulling my friends closer to God or pushing them away with my words and actions?

PRAY

Jesus, you promised us that if we have faith the size of a tiny mustard seed, we can look at our mountains and tell them to move, and they will be removed. But we know that if we do not see our mountain move, You will give us the strength to climb that mountain. Once we reach the summit, our mountain will be below our feet. Thank You for giving me fresh mountaintop perspective today. Help me not to grow weary in the climb. Elevate my life so those around me may see Christ through me. In Jesus' name, amen.

PLUS

Remind your club that there are people in their lives who can help them walk through tough times, people like their youth pastor and pastor. If they feel the need to talk to someone, these people can be trusted and will be more than happy to meet with them.



POWER OF A SHIELD

RUSS FAUBERT, BIBLE QUIZZING DIRECTOR



PREVIEW

Justice is a funny thing. Sometimes it is swift and happens immediately. Other times it seems like it is nowhere in sight. But justice delayed is not justice denied. God always has His say in the end.

PRAISE

God keeps good books! This means that while things don't always appear to be in our favor, given enough time, God always pays His debts and yields great dividends!

PARABLE

One of the best-known stories in the Bible is David and Goliath. This is the classic underdog tale of a teenager, armed only with a sling and the name of the Lord, who kills a giant warrior and wins the day for his entire nation.

What is less known is that David had volunteered to challenge Goliath because no one else had been brave enough to step out and defy the giant face to face. Even King Saul, who was the biggest man in Israel, head and shoulders above every other Israelite, refused to confront this giant, allowing the whole army to be shamed by fear.

Even less known is the fact that after David defeated Goliath and the army returned to Jerusalem victorious, Saul became so jealous of David that he twice threw a spear at him. When David managed to dodge the spear thrusts unscathed, Saul appointed him as a commander in the army, possibly with the hope that the young warrior would be killed in battle.

This is the possible setting for Psalm 13. David had championed the armies of Israel in the name of the Lord when no one else would, but the only thanks he got from his commander were repeated attempts on his life.

PRESENT

Have you ever done something good only to be painted as the bad guy? Or you did everything you were asked to do, yet you ended up being blamed even when things turned out well? How did you feel? Stunned? Dumbfounded? Powerless? You played by the rules but you still got burned! Where is the justice in that?!

David was incensed with the unfairness of the situation. He complained to God, "O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand?" (Psalm 13:1–2 NLT).

You also can be honest with God about your feelings. It is much better to vent to Him in prayer than to unload your indignation on

some other poor soul. When you are open with God, it is much easier to see things as He does. God provides greater perspective in prayer.

PRACTICE

When the results are the opposite of the good you've done, how do you feel?

Do you allow your immediate feelings to dictate your actions when things are unfair?

Are you motivated to continue to do your best even if you don't get credit for it?

Do you gossip to others, or do you talk to God and trust Him to resolve the issue?

David's response, despite his initial feelings, was to worship: "But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me. I will sing to the LORD because he is good to me" (Psalm 13:5-6 NLT).

The result was that "David continued to succeed in everything he did, for the LORD was with him. . . . All Israel and Judah loved David because he was so successful at leading his troops into battle" (1 Samuel 18:14, 16 NLT).

PRAY

Lord, help me to understand that doing right is not based on whether others do me right in return. Give me the grace to bite my tongue and not lash out hurtfully. You, Lord, are the ultimate Judge, and Your justice is always right and always timely. Thank you, Lord, for Your love and goodness toward me!

PLUS

Throughout this coming week, look for opportunities to share with others a time when people or circumstances were unfair and God felt far away, and yet the situation ended up in your favor. God didn't reverse things for you to keep it to yourself. Testify of God's goodness in your life! Don't put down anyone who is unfair; lift up God, who is always just.



THE SHADOW



PREVIEW

It may not seem like it, but life passes you by very quickly. Some days it seems like History class will never end, while other times you might look back and think, Man, this year is just flying by. Just like morning and evening come and go, so does life. You have to make the most of every day God has given to you.

PRAISE

Ask the students to solve the following riddles:

Riddle #1—Round and round I go never stopping in a continuous flow. I hang out with numbers each and every day and nothing ever gets in my way. What am I? (The hands of a clock)

Riddle #2—Can you name three consecutive days without using the words Wednesday, Friday, or Sunday? (Yesterday, today, and tomorrow)

Riddle #3—I am free yet priceless. You can't own me, but you can use me. You can't keep me, but you can spend me. Once you lose me, you can never have me back. (Time)

PARABLE

Certainly, we all have wasted time at some point in our lives. Here are a few random facts about how people spend their time:

- The average woman spends a year deciding what to wear.
- The average American spends 2 hrs/day wasting time while at work.
- The average commuter spends 45 minutes in traffic each day.
- Americans spend a combined total of 233,000,000+ minutes on Facebook each month.

PRESENT

Read Psalm 144:4. David wrote that life is like a disappearing shadow. The reality may come as a surprise, but you aren't going to live forever. The day you are born is the day you begin to die. What you do in the time span between birth and death defines who you really are.

Have you ever walked outside on a chilly morning and exhaled deeply? The water vapor in your breath comes in contact with the cold air outside and forms tiny water droplets, which look like a cloud. You see the cloud for a second, and then it disappears. That's life.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:8; 5:10.

An artist came across a beggar sitting by the roadside. He quickly sketched the man while thinking that since God created

him in His own image, he could make something of himself, even though at this stage he was a beggar. So the artist drew a picture of what the man could become, instead of what he was.

He called the beggar over to see the sketch. “Is that me?” the beggar asked. “Yes, that’s the man I see in you!” The beggar stated with new purpose in his eyes, “If that’s the man you see in me, then that’s the man I shall be!”

Realizing our true potential makes life new and exciting. We sense a mission awaits us, which generates the desire to make the most of the time God has given us. It’s a shame that some people see themselves as having little value. They feel that who they are and what they do doesn’t matter, with the result that they often waste time on meaningless tasks or activities.

God sees you as a person with value. He sees beyond your shortcomings and your sin, beyond your guilt and unworthiness. You have great worth and value to God.

Psalm 37:4 (Good News Translation) says, “Seek your happiness in the LORD, and he will give you your heart’s desire.” Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35, NIV © 2011). Jesus didn’t come and sacrifice His life so you could veg out on Netflix all weekend. He came that you might have life, and life more abundantly! You shouldn’t be living a boring life—you should be living an abundant life!

So what are you going to make of yourself? You’ve been given a unique mix of abilities, talents, gifts, and potential nobody else has. You’ve been given your own interests, desires, and dreams. God has given opportunities for you to develop your gifts. Consider how wonderful God is to love you so much that He would create you, love you unconditionally, and make you a unique individual. So don’t waste time; do something worthwhile with your life!

Many scholars believe David was reminiscing about his victory over Goliath as he wrote Psalm 37. It was as if he was encouraging the reader to never forget that every day, every age, every moment in life is an opportunity to step out in courage and put your name on the pages of history. You can do great things. Don’t waste your days sweating the small things; seize the day and slay that giant!

PRACTICE

What are some things you can do to take back precious time God has given you?

How can you change your mindset that you are valuable and worth something to your Creator?

How are you going to spend your time more effectively this week?

PRAY

Jesus, thank You for allowing us to gather together today. Thank you for allowing us to have the opportunity to spend our time today talking about You. God, every day is a gift. Let us not waste a single day but be good stewards of the precious time You have given to us. Thank You for the reminder that You have made us all unique, with our own giftings and abilities. Let us use what You have given us for Your glory and Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

PLUS

If time allows, discuss these seven tips for making good use of your time:

1. Prioritize your day.
2. Create a list every morning. Write it down. And stick to it.
3. Value your time and learn to say no.
4. Take time to find out what you do well and what needs improvement.
5. Understand all ramifications of major decisions.
6. Keep your mind sharp ...
7. And your body fit.



MY HIDING PLACE



PREVIEW

For some, it's almost an automatic response to cover up mistakes, bad habits, and shortcomings, because those things show weakness in us. None of us want to admit weaknesses or have anyone identify areas in which we have fallen short. However, when we have weaknesses or shortcomings, it's always best to take them to God and hide ourselves in Him.

PRAISE

Encourage everyone in your group to share a time when they felt safe because God was there for them.

PARABLE

Have you ever played hide-and-seek? Do you remember what it was like when you knew you had found the perfect hiding place? The seeker might have come close to finding you, but never succeeded because your hiding place was such a good one. In fact, the hiding place might have been so good that you eventually had to reveal yourself. Little do we realize that God can be like that hiding place for us. Instead of hiding our wrongs, we can simply take them to Him and hide ourselves in Him.

PRESENT

Many scholars believe King David wrote Psalm 32 after he fell into sin with Bathsheba. David's sin with Bathsheba created a huge mess. David was alarmed when he realized the repercussions of his actions, and quickly tried to come up with ways to cover his sin.

Have you ever been there? You did something wrong, and you knew if anyone found out you'd be in huge trouble. So instead of admitting you were wrong, you tried to cover the sin with a bunch of little lies. But eventually the truth came to surface. That's what happened with David.

The truth of David's sin could no longer stay hidden, as his sin was uncovered. In Psalm 32, David revealed the inner turmoil he was feeling as he tried to cover his sin. It is much like what we experience on the inside when we try to hide the wrong in our life. The New Living Translation tells us he said, "When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat."

When David tried to hide his sin, it disturbed him; he was defenseless against his own thoughts. He could not escape the memory and guilt of what he had done. His memory and guilt were eating him alive. He felt weak, drained, and oppressed.

We know what it's like when we've done wrong and thoughts go racing through our heads. As much as we would like to escape the memory of our wrongdoing, we can't. It becomes like a predator

stalking its prey, and everywhere we turn we can't seem to escape it. We become nervous around certain people and certain conversations. Certain words will trigger a memory of the wrong. We might even have sleepless nights because we know what we've done. There may be times we don't even feel good enough to go to church and reach out for God, because even at church the predator is stalking the prey.

There is a hiding place for anyone to run to when they've sinned. That hiding place is in Jesus. When they confess their wrong to Jesus in prayer, they give themselves over to His mercy. Another time when David sinned he said, "Let me fall into the hands of the LORD, for His mercy is very great." Will running into the hiding place mean there won't be consequences for our actions? No. But it does mean that the person and the wrong have been placed into the care of a loving, caring, and merciful God. God would rather cover a person's sin than have them try to cover it themselves. When people stop trying to cover up their sin and will acknowledge it to God, the weight of guilt is lifted from them. Now they're no longer trying to carry the weight alone; they're no longer trying to battle the consequences of sin on their own. They now have a God who steps in and becomes their place of safety and security.

PRACTICE

The next time you catch yourself doing wrong, tell God about it immediately, then make a decision to turn from it. Tell yourself you are forgiven according to I John 1:9, which says God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

PRAY

Lord, help me not to be comfortable with sin in my life. Help me to hide myself in You, instead of trying to hide my sin.

PLUS

This week make God your hiding place and encourage those in your club to do the same.



OUR ETERNAL GPS

RUSS FAUBERT, BIBLE QUIZZING DIRECTOR



PREVIEW

Have you ever been lost? Whether as a kid at the mall or a new driver who took a wrong turn, all of a sudden the indicators you expected to see were gone. Your mom or dad were no longer in sight. The landmarks or street signs you anticipated weren't there. You eventually made it to safety but the experience was disorienting, maybe even panic-inducing!

PRAISE

God is under no obligation to inform you of His "travel plans" for your life, but He does ask that you trust Him on the journey. Thank God that He knows where He's going, even if you don't. He is your ultimate Guide.

PARABLE

David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the next king of Israel when he was a young person. This was because the current king, Saul, had disobeyed God, failed to repent, and forfeited the kingdom. Saul's son Jonathan would never be king despite the custom of royal birthright. In David, God found Himself a man after His own heart.

When it became clear to him that David was God's choice to be king, Saul tried to eliminate the competition. David had to run for his life, so he fled into the wilderness of Judah. This is the context for Psalm 63.

When you're in the wilderness, it's easy for every rock and tree and knoll to look the same. The elements you usually rely upon to guide you in life are missing. You try your best to find your way, but it can feel like you're going in circles. You may know where you want to go, but without knowing where you are, directions are of little use.

This is how David felt when he said, "O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1, NLT).

PRESENT

When David was first anointed by Samuel as a teenager, he may have thought he was on the fast track to the throne. Everything was falling into place. He could see all the signs pointing him to the palace. It was now just a matter of traveling the clear, well-defined road that would lead him to his destination. But things didn't go quite as anticipated.

When David found himself in the wilderness of life, way off the beaten track of his expectations, his example is a roadmap for all of us:

1. He remembered that God was still his God, a personal God, who knew right where he was (v. 1).
2. He remembered a landmark in his life (the sanctuary) when times were better (v. 2).

3. He chose to sing and praise, knowing that while his surroundings had changed, God's love remained the same (vv. 3–5).
4. He turned his thoughts away from his circumstances and focused on God, his Keeper and Guide (vv. 6–8).

PRACTICE

Using only lines, arrows, circles, and squares, draw a picture of your life's path as you have experienced it and/or expect it.

Was it a straight arrow, ascending directly to success? Or did it have twists and turns, obstacles and roadblocks? Maybe even a dead end or two?

As much as some people try to portray it, especially on social media, no one's life stays continually on "easy street." But while some have no recourse but to fake it, you have a very real God who will guide you through the wilderness times and grow you to fulfill His destiny and anointing on your life.

PRAY

Thank you, Lord, that You are my spiritual GPS. I can consult You in prayer, refer to Your Word as my map, and trust that You will guide me to Yourself.

When I find myself feeling lost and afraid, give me the grace to praise You despite my situation. Help me realize Your love for me and doubt less and less Your destiny for my life.

Thank you for anointing me for great things!

PLUS

This week get a notebook and begin a journal about the good things God has done in your life. If you are intentional about recording the good times, when the wilderness times come, God's goodness will be much easier to remember. Those memories will help you praise God even in a "parched and weary land."



SURROUNDED BY LIONS



PREVIEW

At times we find ourselves surrounded by difficulties, problems, and unknowns. Sometimes these issues are caused by the actions of others, sometimes by our own actions. In this lesson we will be discussing how God is the constant in a world of variables.

PRAISE

Listen to the song “Not Ashamed” by Passion and focus on the lyrics while you listen.

PARABLE

Here are some interesting facts about lions:

- Most male lions can grow up to ten feet in length and can weigh between 330 to 550 pounds; female lions grow up to nine feet and weigh between 265 to 395 pounds.
- Females do all the hunting for the group, while males guard the territory and fight predators and challengers.
- Wild male lions can live for approximately twelve years and females for fifteen years.
- A group of lions is called a pride. Prides can have as many as forty lions, which may include adult females, cubs, sub-adults and two other male lions.
- You can call them lazy. They spend around 16–20 hours a day sleeping or resting. So they are basically active only for the remaining four hours when they are hunting or protecting their territory.
- Although lions drink water every day, they can manage to live without it for four or five days if needed.
- An adult male’s roar can be heard up to five miles away!

PRESENT

Read Psalm 57:4. David found himself in a pretty dark and hopeless situation, surrounded by lions (hostile enemies). The lion metaphor used here describes his situation as being surrounded by things and people that, without the help of the Lord, would bring him down.

Saul was king of Israel and David was one of his servants. One of David’s jobs was to play music when Saul was in a rotten mood, which was way too often. David’s music would lift Saul’s spirits—or, as the saying is often misquoted, “soothe the savage beast.”

People liked David very much—much more than Saul. King Saul was well aware of the discrepancy, and resented it. At

times his rage would boil over and he would try to kill David, who had to flee for his life. Bible scholars believe that David wrote Psalm 57 while living in a cave, hiding from Saul.

Even though chased by enemies, David's heart was fixed on one constant: God would deliver him in times of trouble. He had faith that everything was under God's control, even though his future appeared uncertain. David was steadfast in his trust and faith in the Lord. He knew God would somehow deliver him even when surrounded by impossibilities.

We, as disciples, need the same steadfast faith no matter what we face. When the doctor gives a fearful prognosis, we should not doubt God or blame Him. If a family member's job is lost and the fear of financial failure seems imminent, God is still good, and He will work it out to His glory and our benefit. If our family has to move and we find ourselves in unfamiliar surroundings with many unknowns and "what if's," God is still on His throne. Our faith and trust should not waver. Reliance on the guidance of a loving God will keep us strong in times of doubt and uncertainty.

Being secure and firm in our convictions and trust in God's promises will keep us steady through unknown tomorrows. Be encouraged today; everything will be all right. God will work it all out as He has done many times in the past. He hasn't left you alone; He will always take care of you.

If you make up your mind to be a secure and anchored Christian, you will survive and prosper even through a frightening future. When all is bleak and uncertain, your heart will not surrender to the circumstances. You will ride out the storm and arrive safely where and when God wants you to be. There is not a lion out there that is a match for your Savior!

PRACTICE

Martin Luther said, "None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to affect, except those who have learned it by experience." The truth is you are in trouble if you wait to pray until you are in trouble. God is willing and able to deliver you from whatever problem you are facing. You are doing yourself a disservice if you wait until you're in trouble to talk to your Father. Make it a daily habit. Let Him hear your voice so when you cry out for help, He will know who's calling and will move on your behalf.

PRAY

Jesus, thank You for hearing me when I call! You are there for me even when all of my friends and family desert me. Your Word promises You will stick closer than a brother. God, I thank You that when I'm surrounded by lions You will deliver me, even if it looks impossible. You hear me, You know where I am, and You are an on-time God! I love You and thank You for who You are. In Jesus' name, amen.

PLUS

Share a time when God made a way when there seemed to be no way. Encourage each other and remind your group that nothing is impossible with God.



HIS LOVE NEVER FAILS



Psalm 136:1–26

PREVIEW

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever.

To Him who alone does great wonders, for His mercy endures forever; to Him who by wisdom made the heavens, for His mercy endures forever; to Him who laid out the earth above the waters, for His mercy endures forever; to Him who made great lights, for His mercy endures forever—the sun to rule by day, for His mercy endures forever; the moon and stars to rule by night, for His mercy endures forever.

To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn, for His mercy endures forever; and brought out Israel from among them, for His mercy endures forever; with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, for His mercy endures forever; to Him who divided the Red Sea in two, for His mercy endures forever; and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for His mercy endures forever; but overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, for His mercy endures forever; to Him who led His people through the wilderness, for His mercy endures forever; to Him who struck down great kings, for His mercy endures forever; and slew famous kings, for His mercy endures forever—Sihon king of the Amorites, for His mercy endures forever; and Og king of Bashan, for His mercy endures forever—and gave their land as a heritage, for His mercy endures forever; a heritage to Israel His servant, for His mercy endures forever.

Who remembered us in our lowly state, for His mercy endures forever; and rescued us from our enemies, for His mercy endures forever; who gives food to all flesh, for His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His mercy endures forever. (Psalm 136, NKJV)

PRAISE

Reading through Psalm 136 may make you think you're listening to a broken record. Why did the writer repeat that phrase twenty-six times (once in every verse)? Because to him the concept of God's unfailing mercy was extremely important, and he didn't want God's children to ever forget it.

Just imagine the cascading waters of Niagara Falls. Twenty percent of the world's fresh water is in the Great Lakes, and most of it tumbles over the falls in a deafening tumult—up to 3,160 tons per second! This water cycle has been in existence for thousands of years and has never failed. Yet this image would be only a small depiction of God's love and mercy for us. Jesus was crucified, mocked, pierced with a crown of thorns, denied His power, and nailed to a tree, yet His love for us never fails. Isaiah 53:5 (NKJV) states, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." His love was so great for us that even knowing we were going

to turn our backs on Him and kill Him, He still loved us enough to die for our sins. As the psalmist pointed out, His love and mercy never fail.

PARABLE

If there was one word we have distorted, it is the word “love.” We often say we love Chick Fil A, Popeyes, tacos, pizza, and so on. We even say we love Disney, NetFlix, a particular movie, or a certain brand of clothes. Do you get the picture? The word “love” has been so overused—repeated so many times without purpose—that the term is losing its value. It’s meaning is no longer worth what it originally was.

PRESENT

The real meaning of love is how we feel about others with whom we have a relationship. For instance, the word “love” describes how we feel about God. The Bible gives us examples of how God exemplifies His love for us. God’s love for us is beyond our knowledge. Although we fail from time to time, God never stops loving us. The kind of love that God has for us is unconditional. We don’t deserve it, and we can’t earn it. In Greek, the word for this kind of love is “agape.”

Here’s a humorous story that illustrates my point. A young boy sat down to write the following love letter to his girlfriend: “Dear Sarah, I love you so much! I will climb the highest mountain to see your smile. I will swim the longest river just for one of your kisses. I will cross the broadest sea for one of your hugs. I will pass through a burning desert to look upon your face. With never-ending love, Bobby. P.S.: I’ll be over to see you next Tuesday if it doesn’t rain.”

How should we use the word “love”? Love is a simple four-letter word that has the power to do many things. It has to be applied at the proper time and in the right context. Love is both an emotion and an action. We can’t just verbalize our feeling without showing it as well. This is how God feels toward us. His love is unconditional; He loves us in spite of our mistakes. He loves us enough to correct us when we are wrong. He loves us enough to let us go through some things so we can discover how dependent we are on Him. He loves us so much that He won’t let anything separate us from that love.

PRACTICE

Create a list of things you love, then create another list of what you think God loves. Now compare the two lists. Do the things on the first list look trivial compared to the second?

PRAY

God, give me a true understanding of Your unconditional love, like the prodigal son’s father who welcomed his son back after he left home and wasted his inheritance on worldly things. Show me what that kind of love looks like. I want to love others with unconditional love like You did.

PLUS

Find someone in your school to whom you can show that same kind of unconditional love.