

THE JOURNEY

BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS



UNIT THREE – TO TRUST HIM

LEADER'S GUIDE

THE JOURNEY

DEAR LEADER,

Thank you for your willingness to invest in the discipleship of your people. We hope that The Journey will be a valuable resource for you. Just a reminder, we need your feedback to help make improvements. Please submit your feedback to thejourney@iphc.org.

In this document, you will find:

1. Unit 3 Commitment Forms

- Hold your people accountable to their commitments to show up, participate, and care for others in the group.

2. Eight lessons of Unit 3: To Trust Him

- Each lesson contains scripture, discussion, content, conversation starters, and At-Home scriptures and exercises.
- We suggest devoting 15-20 minutes to teaching the content, which allows for 20-25 minutes of discussion among the group. The conversation starters will be great at the end of class.
- For some of the discussions, we included possible answers that may help you start the conversation. Otherwise, scan the content of that section for helpful leads.
- In each lesson, there are At-Home scriptures and exercises. These are included to help participants carry the lesson into their week.
- Some of these exercises are simple and some may require more thoughtful scheduling, but please encourage your people to commit to the At-Home section. It is during this time At-Home that you will see the greatest growth in their lives with Jesus.
- Don't feel obligated to use all of the At-Home exercises. These are suggestions. You know your group and what they need better than we do. If these exercises fit your needs then please use them.

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- With any of the content or At-Home components, please feel free to alter, add to, and take away what doesn't fit your particular group.
3. At-Home Exercise worksheets and description sheets
 - At the end of this document, there are supporting documents for the At-Home component.
 - The worksheet can be completed each week. This allows the participants to make commitments and hold each other accountable.
 - Some of the At-Home exercises teach spiritual disciplines which might need more explanation. For those, we have included printable description sheets and worksheets.
 4. Be sure to also download the Participant Guides for your group as well!
 - The Participant Guide is a simplified front-and-back document that allows your people to stay engaged in the lesson, while also providing them with a take-home component.
 - Encourage them to bring a notebook and a Bible.
 5. For additional resources, check out our website at iphc.org/thejourney.

We want to help you in any way that we can. If you have questions, feel free to contact us. We want you to have success in discipling your people. Our prayer is that The Journey can play a small part in that.

In Christ,

YOUR DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES FAMILY

Email us: thejourney@iphc.org

Call us: 405-792-7171

BEFORE YOU CAN START A JOURNEY

IT'S ALWAYS BEST TO KNOW WHERE YOU ARE

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS A STARTING
POINT FOR YOUR JOURNEY.

HOW OFTEN ARE YOU CONSCIOUSLY AWARE OF GOD IN THESE SETTINGS?

RANK YOUR ANSWERS ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10.

WORK	HOME	CHURCH	RELATIONSHIPS
_____	_____	_____	_____

WHERE DO YOU MISS GOD THE MOST IN YOUR LIFE? WHY?

MY COMMITMENT

- 1) Will you commit to participating in The Journey the next eight weeks to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)? _____
- 2) Will you commit to set aside time so that you can do the At-Home Exercises? _____
- 3) Will you commit to check on a friend in the group each week to see how they are doing with The Journey? _____ Who will it be?

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Please sign and date and hand in to your Journey leader.

MY COMMITMENT

- 1) Will you commit to participating in The Journey the next eight weeks to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)? _____
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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Please sign and date and hand in to your Journey leader.

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DEAR FELLOW TRAVELER,

Welcome to The Journey. We are so glad you are here. We believe that discipleship is a journey of becoming more like Jesus, and we want to come alongside you on this adventure. Perhaps you are new to following Jesus. Or maybe you've been following Him for many years. Regardless of your place on the path, we believe The Journey is for you.

The Journey is a versatile resource designed with the church and home in mind. The content will contain foundational, biblical teaching presented in an interactive format. It's intended for use in community with other believers. We also have built At-Home Exercises into the content for you to engage in at home throughout the week. We hope that these exercises help to strengthen your understanding of Jesus and hold you accountable for meeting with Jesus daily.

Our lives are radically changed by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit through salvation, but our journey with the Lord shouldn't stop at our salvation experience. We must then embark on a journey of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. By digging deeper into this relationship, The Journey will help you extend discipleship beyond Sundays. By immersing yourself into God's Word, prayer, and worship, you will fall more in love with the One who loves you most. Remember, there is always more to learn, still room to grow, and always support available for you on the journey.

We have been praying for you. We have had you in mind as we have been preparing this study. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit would work mightily in your life as you commit to this personal and communal discipleship journey with the Lord.

With you on The Journey,

YOUR DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES FAMILY

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UNIT THREE: TO TRUST HIM CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

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2. W.A. Mills
3. Dr. Adrian Hinkle
4. Brad Davis
5. W.A. Mills
6. Dr. Lou Shirey
7. Terry Fowler
8. Bishop Tommy McGhee

THE JOURNEY

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT BIBLE TRANSLATION ARE YOU USING?

All scriptures used in The Journey will be the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

HOW IS THE JOURNEY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER BIBLE STUDIES?

The Journey is an invitation to say yes to Jesus in every part of your life. Centered around weekly class experiences, the focus of The Journey is on the 6 days you aren't with your group. We want you to grow in knowledge, as all Bible studies do, but we also want you to be transformed by the power of God and become more like Jesus. By connecting, growing in knowledge, daily intimacy with Jesus, and participation in community, we hope that you will experience transformation.

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH DISCUSSION?

We believe that the discussion of the lesson with one another is a vital part of learning. It teaches us to think critically about what we are hearing, to be dependent on one another (someone else may have an insight that we need to hear), and to build trust and relationships in the group.

DOES THIS WORK FOR SMALL AND LARGE GROUPS?

Yes! We believe that the flexibility of this resource allows it to function in both settings. It can be easily adapted to fit the needs of any sized group!

THE JOURNEY

LESSON ONE:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRUST GOD?

INTRODUCTION: It is impossible to trust fully what you do not know. As we continue our Journey toward becoming more like Jesus, trust is a natural development of our knowing and loving Him. The first two units of lessons laid this foundation of knowing and loving Jesus.

As infants, humans soon learn that their cries for help are answered by an outside force (whether by a parent, a grandparent, or a caretaker). The repetition of this faithful response builds trust.

This is also one way trust is built in our lives with Jesus. As we come to know and love Him, He demonstrates His faithfulness to hear and respond to our cries of help, need, and desperation. Even when the answers may not be what we “requested,” His faithfulness and trustworthiness are neither diminished nor negated.

Trust-building is an on-going process. It begins with our saying yes to Jesus, and it will continue throughout our lives with Him.

I. TRUSTING GOD IS AN ACT OF SUBMISSION

READ ALOUD: Luke 22:41-44: And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.



DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Jesus knows what is coming, and He still prays, “not my will, but Yours.” What does Jesus’ act of trust and submission to the Father teach us about trust?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Trust is not passive. It is the action of belief. Jesus shows us in Luke 22 that His trust was the fruit of His deep love for, His relationship with, and His faith in the Father. He knew the Father and out of this knowing, He could surrender and trust His life to Him.

Trust is a posture of reliance, and the Bible teaches us that in our reliance we become the fullest versions of ourselves. It is in knowing Jesus that I become my true self. It is in loving God that I can love myself. It is in trusting God that I become strong enough to walk through the struggles of life. This is true human flourishing: not when we learn to rely on ourselves, but when we learn to depend on Jesus.

But this kind of trust does not happen overnight. We will struggle to surrender and say, “Yes, I trust You, Jesus.” We will walk through seasons of deep trust and reliance, and we will walk through times when our trust is paper thin. Trust is an on-going process of surrender and submission as we go deeper and deeper into this relationship with Jesus.

By studying Jesus’ pattern of life, we can discover why His trust was strong enough for the Garden and the Cross. The Gospel accounts often refer to Jesus withdrawing from the disciples to pray (Mark 1:35, 6:46; Luke 6:12, 9:18, 11:1). Luke 22 is one example. His life of communion with God provided the depth of soul that could withstand life’s greatest trial.

II. TRUSTING JESUS AND NOT MYSELF

READ ALOUD: John 15:5: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.



DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How does Jesus' statement, "For without Me, you can do nothing," play a role in your life? Is this statement easier said than lived? What does it mean to "trust in the Lord with all your heart?"

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Strength, confidence, independence, and self-reliance are all excellent character traits, but what happens when our experiences of success in life start to convince us that we should trust in ourselves? Imagine a pastor who is so skilled at communicating the truth of the gospel that he no longer spends time in prayer before he preaches. Imagine a music leader who spends most of his time worried about the production quality rather than interceding for those he plans to lead. Imagine a small group leader who has stopped being a disciple of Jesus because she has become more trusting in methods and experiences of being a disciple. Imagine a businessperson who works his whole life to build security for his family and ultimately misses out on enjoying life with that family.

Some of these examples may seem extreme but think about the subtle ways we demonstrate a lack of trust in Jesus in our daily lives. Does our trust have a threshold? Do we think Jesus is trustworthy only with life's big problems? Or have we entrusted even the smallest things to Him?

When Jesus taught the disciples what has become known as the Lord's Prayer, He taught them (and us) to pray for "our daily bread." For many of us, food provision is not a daily concern of our lives and praying for daily bread seems unimportant or unnecessary. But trusting God to provide daily bread is to ask Him to oversee our basic needs, even the trivial things in our lives. A lost set of keys, an important conversation, or the answer to a problem; each of these is important enough to trust Jesus for a solution.

Life is challenging. It presents a steady diet of obstacles, problems, and difficulties. Who is sufficient for every one of these things? Jesus is. Not me.



III. TRUSTING LIKE A CHILD

READ ALOUD: Matthew 18:1-5: At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

Matthew 19:13-15: Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What is it about the humility of a child that causes Jesus to say they “are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): To trust Jesus with the humility of a child is to surrender ourselves to Him in full reliance, with no thought to our advancement, recognition, or title. Children do not put their trust in adults because they have an underlying agenda they want to accomplish. They trust adults because they are wholly dependent on them. Children know their neediness. Have we forgotten how needy we are?

Our temptation is to see relationships, including our relationship with Jesus, on a value scale. We diminish the image of God in a person and see them only for what they offer us. We see them as means to an end.

Jesus is not a means to an end. Particularly, He is not a means to our ends. Our advancement, our vision, and our goals are not the main purpose for our existence. Are we willing to lay aside what we want to accomplish if Jesus has other plans for us? We must avoid seeing our relationship to Jesus, or others, as a power move or a plan for our success. Jesus’ invitation is

to come to Him and die; not to come and be successful. Do we trust Him enough to die to ourselves?

A young woman, preparing to go to the mission field, was asked to define her plan for her life. She responded: "I have accepted God's will without knowing what it is, and I am leaving it to Him to fill in the details." May each of us demonstrate this same child-like trust in God for our lives.

CONCLUSION: Trusting God is never a lesson learned. It is a lesson being learned. On this side of Heaven, we will always be moving towards perfect trust. Let Jesus be the guide and teacher.

Jesus is our example of true submission. Learn from him.

Jesus is trustworthy with our lives. Lean on Him.

Jesus calls us to become like little children. Depend on Him.

Let these words of the song, "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus" (Louisa M. R. Stead), become an anthem of your life.

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to take Him at His word;
Just to rest upon His promise;
Just to know, "Thus saith the Lord."

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er!
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
O for grace to trust Him more.



CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Explain what it means to you to trust God.
- 2) What is the difference between passive trust and active trust?
- 3) Give an example of how you had to choose to trust God in a situation rather than leaning on your own understanding.
- 4) If you lived every moment fully aware of your trust in Jesus, what would your life look like?

AT- HOME SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:1-27

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week's At-Home Scriptures. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) Throughout the Gospel accounts, they refer to Jesus withdrawing from the disciples to pray (Mk 1:35, 6:46; Lk 6:12, 9:18, 11:1, 22:41-44). Jesus shows us a way of living that finds strength in withdrawing from busyness to be with God. This week, try to say no to one activity each day. Choose to spend that time alone with Jesus. You choose the activity.
- 3) Spending time with God, and people who know Him well, will help to increase our trust in Him. Hearing stories of God's faithfulness is encouraging. Ask a friend, a parent, a mentor, or a spouse if they have stories of God's faithfulness that they can share with you. Don't be afraid to share your own stories with them.
- 4) This week, share with others some of the things God has been teaching you in The Journey. This kind of personal sharing is always helpful. Don't worry about it being wise or intellectual. Simply share what God is doing in your life and watch others warm up to the good news.

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LESSON TWO: HOW DO WE KNOW WE CAN TRUST JESUS?

INTRODUCTION: One of the secrets of the Church is the doubt believers experience. Doubt itself is not sinful, and it can be a catalyst to new spiritual growth. If you ever arrive at a place where all your doubts are gone, and all your questions answered, take a deep breath and relax because you have entered Heaven. In his book, *Wishful Thinking*, author and theologian Frederick Buechner says, “Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.” The greatest doubters often grow into the strongest believers. Honest doubts, once resolved, can become the bedrock of unshakable faith.

In his sermon, “If I Believe, Why Do I Doubt?” pastor Ray Pritchard suggests our doubts tend to fall into three categories. The first type, intellectual doubts, are often raised by those outside the Christian faith, while spiritual doubts are reflected primarily by those inside the church. Finally, circumstantial doubts, the largest category, encompass all the “whys” of life. Circumstantial doubts are the questions we meet at the intersection of biblical faith and the pain of living in a fallen world. When we refuse to deal with circumstantial doubts, they become spiritual doubts, and those spiritual doubts eventually become intellectual doubts.

Having established early in *The Journey* who Jesus is, why He came and what it means to trust Him, this lesson will examine the evidence for trusting Christ, answering the question, “How Do We Know We Can Trust Jesus?”

I. AN IMPERFECT FAITH

READ ALOUD: Mark 9:14-24: And when He came to the disciples, He saw a



great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him. And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?"

Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Which of the three types of doubt have you wrestled with most: intellectual, spiritual, or circumstantial? Explain your response.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): This verse from Mark is part of a larger narrative where Jesus heals a demon-possessed boy after returning from the Mount of Transfiguration. The father implores Jesus to heal his son, who has been tormented since childhood. The father then says to Jesus, "If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus responds, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father cries out and says through tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" Many describe this father's faith as an imperfect faith. Do you think this father's faith in Jesus was imperfect?

Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, paraphrases the father's response to Jesus, "I believe. Help me with my doubts!" Many people think doubt is the opposite of faith, but it is not. Unbelief is the opposite of faith. Unbelief is a refusal to believe, while doubt refers to inner uncertainty. Many people also

think doubt is unforgivable, but it is not that either. God does not condemn us when we question him. Both Job and David repeatedly questioned God, but they were not condemned. God is big enough to handle our doubts and questions. Struggling with God is a sure sign that we have faith. In fact, the desire to trust God more is an indicator of belief. Additionally, it is often in the honest struggling and striving with God that our faith grows.

II. A PERFECT SAVIOR

READ ALOUD: Mark 9:25-27: When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!” Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): The focus of my faith is more important than the quantity of my faith. You can have an imperfect faith if its object is a perfect Savior. Is Jesus a perfect Savior? How do we know we can trust Him?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): In his book, *Abandoned Faith*, Alex McFarland identifies skepticism as one of eight values millennials embrace in the 21st Century. He cites the age of terrorism and scandal as a reason for their hesitation to trust government, institutions, and churches. Millennials must see faith lived out before they will consider embracing it. Hence, we must be ready to give a reason for our trust in Jesus. Some of those reasons include the following:

- The Prophecies about Jesus: Jesus appealed to fulfilled prophecy to substantiate His claims, and His is the only life that can back up those claims. The Old Testament contains sixty, major messianic prophecies, and approximately 270 ramifications that find their fulfillment in one person, Jesus Christ. In *More Than a Carpenter*, Josh McDowell confirms, “It is helpful to look at all these predictions fulfilled in Christ as an address in history.” Peter Stoner, author of *Science Speaks*, agrees, “Applying the science of probability to just eight of these prophecies

suggest the chance that any man might have lived to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 1017 [10 to the 17th power].” We can safely trust Jesus because of fulfilled prophecy.

- The Resurrection of Jesus: There are many convincing proofs that Jesus did rise from the dead, including the empty tomb, over 500 eyewitnesses, countless changed lives, and the martyrdom of His disciples who died proclaiming the resurrection. The evidence demands a verdict. Because Jesus’ death is a historical fact, the corroborating testimony of non-Christian sources, in addition to the Bible, helps confirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some of those non-Christian sources include: Josephus (AD 37-100), Suetonius (AD 70-160), and Pliny the Younger (AD 61 or 62-113). The historical testimony of those who were not Christians stands in agreement with Scripture that Jesus died and rose because those are the historical facts. We can trust Jesus because He has risen from the dead.
- The Faithfulness of Jesus: The Hebrews writer declares Jesus to be “a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17). Jesus forgives sinners. Sin is a defiance of God and His laws. The only person who can forgive sin against others, or God, is God Himself. As the God/Man who never sinned, Jesus is “able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

Furthermore, Scripture invites us to cast our burdens, cares, worries, and anxieties on Jesus because He cares for us (Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7). Jesus spent many of His parables defining the faithfulness of God, an attribute others have translated as enemy-love, unexpected favor, surprising grace, unmerited forgiveness, unsolicited love, and compassionate grace. Jesus makes the faithfulness of God incarnational in His life, death, burial, resurrection, and eternal intercession for us. When doubts meet at the intersection of biblical faith and the pain of a fallen world, there remains the faithfulness of Christ. We know we can trust Jesus because even “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).

III. AN HONEST PRAYER

READ ALOUD: Mark 9:24: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): It is easy to look down on the poor, tired father who saw no hope for his tormented son, but he deserves our respect. The words “help my unbelief” expose his inner turbulence. He believed, but he also doubted. Hope and fear raged a fierce battle in his soul. When Jesus healed this man’s son, he experienced complete deliverance that very hour. It was a marvelous display of Christ’s power over demonic invasion and human despair. The father dared to bare his soul with an honest plea. Jesus compassionately responded to his vulnerability, even as He does today with all who will dare to pray, “Lord, I believe; help me with my doubts.”

Has there ever been a time in your spiritual walk when you honestly prayed this prayer? How did Jesus answer you?

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) We all experience seasons of uncertainty or doubt. Talk about a time you were faced with doubt.
- 2) How do you think doubt can lead to a stronger spiritual foundation?
- 3) What has helped you most during the times you’ve cried out, “Lord I believe, help my unbelief”?
- 4) How would it change things if you saw your doubts as opportunities to learn and grow deeper in relationship with Christ, instead of a reason for unease?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:14-29

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Mark 9:14-29. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God’s Word speak



to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) Intentionally reach out to a friend this week, ask how they are, and then wait to hear the answer. Listen with a caring heart, attentive mind, and loving attitude. Be ready to share your testimony of how your honest prayer asking Jesus to help you with your doubts has served to strengthen your faith, knowing we can trust Jesus.

3) Purposefully offer thanksgiving as an act of worship. Mike Coleman, the founder of Integrity Music, encourages believers to take a "30-minute Thanksgiving Break" in which you give thanks to the Lord for a half-hour. Be careful not to request anything, only "count your blessings."

4) Memorized information fills our minds: birthdates, phone numbers, addresses, sports stats, tv quotes, etc. But are they also filled with God's Word? Scripture Memorization is a spiritually-grounding discipline. Being able to bring scripture back to our minds provides strength and comfort when we need it most. This week, choose a passage that reminds you that Jesus is trustworthy.



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LESSON THREE: REMEMBERING: MEMORY AND TRUST

INTRODUCTION: The book of Psalms offers some of the most specific instructions for adults to use when teaching their children the reasons for their faith. A prime example of this instruction appears in Psalm 78, where fathers are advised to tell their children about the mighty wonders of God so their offspring, in turn, may teach the next generation.

As a whole, Psalm 78 is an anomaly. Whereas the majority of the Psalms are addressed to God, Psalm 78 speaks to the congregation to remind them of the stories they have learned. Readers are encouraged to remember past events and the consequences of sin and rebellion. Through this remembrance, readers are called to make the connection on how God's greatness should inform their behavior.

But before we focus on the examples of instructions found in Psalm 78, we will look first to Judges 2 to see the significance of why we must remember God's actions and the consequences of forgetting.

I. CONSEQUENCES OF FORGETTING

READ ALOUD: Judges 2:6-15: When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of





Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): This passage, from the opening of Judges, is a brief explanation for the tragic stories detailed later in the book. An entire generation had forgotten (or simply didn't know) God's goodness and provision. Why do you think they forgot? Did something prevent the elders from teaching the younger generation? Why is instructing the next generation important? What is at stake if we fail to do our part?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The book of Judges provides the account of the generation who lived after the conquest of the Promised Land. The previous generation had witnessed the miraculous entrance into the Promised Land and experienced vivid examples of God's redemption and provision. It was a generation who devoted themselves to their God. The newer generation, depicted in Judges, is seemingly ignorant of these experiences. The latter part of Judges 2 recounts how Israel forgot what God had done for them. The narrator describes the people in verse 10 as a generation who did not know God or his actions. The elders of Joshua's generation neglected to teach the importance and reasons for their faith. In essence, they hadn't told their children and grandchildren about their testimonies of seeing God move on their behalf. The results of not teaching are recorded in Judges 3:12-8:35. The lack of religious education results in apostasy (abandonment of faith). As demonstrated in Judges, the lack of spiritual leadership within families and commitment to teach children about God's faithfulness results in a downward slide of morality.

Likewise, Psalm 78 uses this same pattern. This psalm begins with a call for parents to teach their children about God and his faithfulness. It further



warns, in verse 7, that the purpose for this teaching is so that the children will set their hope in God and not forget His works. It then goes on to spend the majority of its focus on examples of those who did not remember God's faithfulness and as a result, experienced his anger.

II. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR REMEMBERING?

READ ALOUD: Psalm 78:1-8: Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): It is interesting that the writer specifies, "I will utter dark sayings" (v. 2) and goes on to say, "we will not hide them from our children." Notice the focus on retelling the testimony of how God has moved. Why is telling our testimony important? What is likely to change in our children when they know how God has moved previously? When we are with family or close friends, we often tell stories from our past that impacted us. What makes sharing these experiences so important to us? How can we use this common behavior to strengthen how we share our personal encounters and stories of God?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The use of repetition is one crucial element presented in the introduction of Psalm 78. The focus on instruction within this psalm is further drawn out by the repetitive use of three specific terms: fathers, children, and generation. The word fathers is repeated three times, while the words children and generation are both repeated four times in verses 1 through 11.





Within Old Testament literature, the term father often signifies a difference in age rather than ancestry. This is also true of the term children, which is often attributed to youthfulness or possibly to one with less knowledge. However, given the context of this psalm, as well as the familial responsibility of religious education established in Deuteronomy 6, it is likely that the literal use of fathers and children is represented here. The term generation found in verses 4 and 6 is used here to describe those who are yet to come. Later, the word is used in verse 8 to describe a group who previously lived. In all four cases, this word is used to define people who were not living at the origination of this psalm. The context of these words in this psalm suggests that its teaching should be told repeatedly to each successive generation, similar to the instructions given in the Pentateuch.

The focus here is clearly on the family as those responsible for teaching their children about their own faith and witness to how God has moved in their lives. The instruction includes a combination of their own stories with the stories that have been handed down to them. In essence, we have a responsibility to share our testimony early and often. By telling the stories of how God has moved, we create curiosity. Additionally, for those who haven't personally experienced God's actions, we confirm our own belief and witness to what He has done.

The primary lesson presented in Psalm 78 is the importance of remembering the significance of God's actions on behalf of Israel. Failure to remember His deeds leads to rebellion, which results in God's anger. Through these examples, the writer affirms the consequence of disobedience is destruction. Interspersed with these examples are lessons and warnings that the writer emphasizes. The underlying cause of disobedience is the failure to remember God's deeds. This is the highlighted theme from verse 11 that is carried throughout the psalm. This theme is also reiterated in verses 42 and 56, where the writer again describes Israel's forgetfulness and failure to observe the testimonies of how God moved previously on their behalf.

In contrast to Israel's unfaithfulness, God's attributes of graciousness, patience, and reliability are highlighted. The assurance of hope is then exposed. Because God is reliable, those who worship Him should remain faithful to Him.



III. WHAT IS REMEMBERING?

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How does hardship shape us and how does hardship either build or break us? What do you think impacts the difference between these two outcomes? How are our identities influenced by our parents and our own personal choices?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The imagery of Psalm 78 is written so that readers can see themselves in the story. Through this “experience,” the readers gain a godly perspective for one of the basic precepts of their faith. By focusing on the successive stories, readers begin to draw conclusions from the contrasting acts of God’s grace and acts of sin and consequent punishment. From this, the repetitive cycle from the book of Judges begins to surface: sin, punishment, repentance, pardon.

As discussed earlier, the writer(s) emphasizes in Judges 2:10 that a generation arose who did not know (experience) the work of God; thus the nation would experience calamity. Serving as an overview of the organized accounts extending from Judges 3:12 through 8:35, Judges 2:11-19 introduces the pattern of sin, punishment, repentance, pardon. This pattern is also presented in Psalm 78. This contrast then highlights the supremacy of God over His people. God is merciful, while Israel is disobedient.

An interesting aspect of the teaching included in Psalm 78 is the use of story. The basis of the relationship between God and His people is established by an understanding of who He is through the accounts of how He interacts with people. It is the powerful use of testimony. Action, rather than emotion, is the basis of faith. Correct behavior is established through the use of story to help one understand the correlation between the cause and effects of our actions. In other words, how we live is determined largely by how we respond to what God has done. The writer of Psalm 78 uses familiar language and stories as a means of teaching God’s character. Knowledge and faith are developed by experience and transferred through testimony.

IV. HOW DO WE REMEMBER TO REMEMBER?

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How should we remember the

past? What impact do memorials and monuments have on the way we think about history? How can this be incorporated into how we remember biblical stories and personal miracles we've witnessed?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): A deep dive into the Old Testament reveals a striking pattern of how Israel taught and the systems they established to help ensure their stories would be passed from one generation to the next. For instance, they used festivals (i.e. Passover, Feast of Booths, etc.) to remember significant events. They also used specialized memorials such as the stacking of stones (see Genesis 28:18; Joshua 4:7) as well as symbolism (see Numbers 15:38-40) to help remind them of how God had moved on their behalf.

To help yourself "remember to remember," look for ways to share your testimony. God is active, and we experience Him daily, albeit some days more powerfully than others. If this is new to you, start somewhere safe. Talk with your spouse, children, or parent about something God has done for you. As you grow in confidence, begin sharing with friends or co-workers. Remember the importance of testimony is in creating curiosity for others that begins to build their faith and trust in God.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) How are memories powerful in your own life?
- 2) Why is teaching the next generation important?
- 3) Why do you think, by default, most of us are passive and look to others to teach our children?
- 4) What parts of God's action in history should we remember today?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Judges 2:6-16; Psalm 78

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Find something in your normal routine that reminds you of your commitment to God. One example is that when you are hungry, let that be an opportunity to thank God for providing for you or as a reminder to ask

God to increase your spiritual hunger.

2) Think of something powerful God has done for you. Find an object or item that is a reminder of this event. This can be anything that is significant to you. Set this some place as a reminder of that moment when God moved on your behalf. When you see it, take the opportunity to thank God for bringing you through that moment.

3) Use family meals or car rides as a time when you share what God is doing in your life. As a place to start, maybe you establish Thursdays as “Thankful Thursday” where one person shares something they saw or felt God doing, either personally or for someone else. You can then use that as a conversation starter on God’s faithfulness or character.

4) Go for a walk and use that time to reflect on what God has done for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of what God has brought you through and to open your eyes to God’s daily provision.



THE JOURNEY

LESSON FOUR:

TRUSTING IN SUFFERING AND PAIN

INTRODUCTION: “I trust you until you give me a reason not to trust you.” That statement is one you’ve likely heard from a parent, teacher, or coach. The premise is simple: as long as you do what is expected, you will continue to earn trust. Sadly, many times, we apply this premise to Christ. I will trust Christ as long as He does what is expected or, more specifically, what I expect Him to do. We see this in scripture when Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (Luke 11:21). Martha believed that if Jesus had arrived earlier, if He had shown up when requested, if he had not delayed, then her dear brother would have been healed.

Scripture also reveals other Christ-followers who face a crisis of faith in a difficult moment. For example, John the Baptist proclaimed this memorable phrase about Jesus: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” However, when he finds himself in prison, he doubts, and John sends his disciples to ask Jesus: “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3). In both scenes, Martha and John had expectations of what Jesus should have done, and they found themselves struggling to trust Him when things turned out differently.

Martha and John also wrestled in their circumstances. Martha’s grief over her brother’s death and John’s abuse in prison at the hands of King Herod were real and tangible sufferings. Because of their pain, Martha and John had to learn to trust Jesus in a more profound capacity.

It can be easy to trust when all is well, but trusting amid pain and suffering is a different story. In this lesson, we will learn to trust Jesus because He sees us, He understands our experiences, and He will come to our rescue. We will learn to lean



into Jesus and not “our own understanding” as we walk through tragedy.

Proverbs 3:4-5: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not into your own understanding but in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path.

I. JESUS SEES OUR STRUGGLE

READ ALOUD: Mark 6:47-48: Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Why is it hard to trust when you can't see? Share about a time when you had to trust even though you couldn't see God at work.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): This significant moment in scripture is often overlooked. When reading this story, we know that Jesus walked on water, but notice what took place before he stepped out on the sea. The Lord had sent His disciples across this 7-mile lake while He stayed behind to pray. During the trip, a great storm arose and caused the disciples to stall in the middle of the lake.

Notice what the Bible says in verse 48. Jesus saw them straining against the wind. He was on land looking toward the boat and saw that they were stuck. No matter how much they rowed, the vessel did not move. The disciples' nautical skills and physical strength were of no help. The boat was stuck. But Jesus saw them.

Pain and suffering are similar to the disciples' experience in that storm. No matter how much we try to move forward, at some point, we will find ourselves stuck in suffering. Like waves that pound our heart and mind, we struggle to overcome the deepest pain and hardships. There seems to be no

way of escape, no safe space, no shelter from the storm. Like the disciples on that sea, we get stuck, and we don't see Jesus. But Jesus sees us.

The pain from a divorce, the death of a loved one, abuse (emotional, mental or physical), broken promises, and betrayal all cause feelings of isolation and distance. We relive the worst moments in "mental movies." Scenes are replayed in our minds, causing the pain to return over and over again. However, there is a truth that we can cling to in the struggle. Jesus sees us. In the pinnacle of our pain and the silence of our suffering, He reminds us that we are not alone. The Lord will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus sees you!

II. JESUS UNDERSTANDS OUR SUFFERING

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 4:14-16: Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us, therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Do you ever feel like no one understands your pain? Is this way of thinking selfish? Why or why not?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Jesus, the Suffering Savior, understands our pain. The Bible says in Hebrews 2:18 (NLT), "Since He Himself (Christ) has gone through suffering and testing, He is able to help us when we are being tested." Jesus understands because he has lived it.

There is a difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is the ability to feel sorrow toward someone who is facing difficulty. A person is sympathetic when they acknowledge another's circumstances. However, empathy is a shared understanding of the experience of another. A person can be empathetic because they have endured something similar. Jesus does not just recognize our circumstances; He understands them because of personal experience.



Isaiah 53:2b-5: And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 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.

From this verse, we recognize that Jesus experienced rejection, sorrow, grief, affliction, wounds, and bruises. On the Cross, He carried not only His own pain and suffering, but He also took on and felt our sadness, our grief, our sin, our doubt, our sickness, our suffering, and our pain. Jesus understands our plight and has empathy toward us. When you feel like no one else in the world understands, Jesus does.

III. JESUS COMES TO OUR RESCUE

READ ALOUD: Mark 6:49-50: And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Talk about a time when you needed to be rescued. What are the characteristics of one who rescues?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Our story continues with the disciples in the midst of the storm. Remember, they were stuck, and Jesus was on the shore, watching them strain against the waves. And yet, the next verse gives us hope that Jesus will come to their rescue. Yes, He sees them. Yes, He understands their suffering and struggle. Yes, He goes to His people.

As Jesus approaches the disciples, He makes a bold and unique statement. With pure delight, Jesus bellows, “Be of good cheer, it is I!” Wow, what a moment!

Can you imagine? The disciples are stuck. They have rowed nowhere for hours. They are exhausted, frustrated, and stalled. Then Jesus shows up, walking on water, and telling them to be joyful! Jesus says that to us today. Yes, even in the struggle, Jesus is present. Be of good cheer!

In James 1:2, the writer tells us to, “Count it all joy when you fall into many trials.” As followers of Jesus, our response to pain and suffering is different than those who do not know Him. This does not mean we will not face difficult days; it just means we have a way through. It is tough to find joy in suffering and peace in pain, but because of Jesus, we can accomplish this. We must learn to lean into Jesus and trust Him in the storm.

Our key verse in Proverbs reminds us to “lean not unto our own understanding but in all of our ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct our paths.” Jesus will come to our rescue. He turns mourning into dancing, pain into peace, heartbreak into healing, and destruction into restoration. Jesus comes to our rescue. He truly is trustworthy, even in our pain and suffering.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) We all experience pain and suffering. Talk about what you’ve learned in a season of suffering.
- 2) What does it mean to you that Jesus Himself suffered?
- 3) What has been most helpful in your times of pain and struggle? How do you “sit in suffering”?
- 4) What can we actively do to meet the needs of those who are suffering?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Mark 6:30-56

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Mark 6:30-56. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God’s Word speak to your life. Don’t rush as you read. Take your time.





2) Forgiveness is an essential part of life with God. This week, ask yourself these questions: Who do I need to forgive? How do I need to forgive myself? Is anger keeping me from extending forgiveness?

3) If you are in the midst of a difficult situation, ask Jesus to help you find joy. One moment of His joy can propel you out of darkness into His light. Ask the Lord to give you three opportunities to pray for someone going through pain and suffering. Use this lesson as a springboard to share Jesus with someone who is hurting.



THE JOURNEY

LESSON FIVE: SELFISHNESS AND SURRENDERING

INTRODUCTION: Are you selfish? Of course, you are. We all are, to some degree. Not everyone is equally self-centered, but neither is anyone free of it. Wanting our way is woven into the fabric of our fallen nature. Since the fall of humanity, it has been our default orientation. We can see this, even from our earliest days.

In his article, “Lay Aside the Weight of Selfish Preferences,” author Jon Bloom writes:

We insist in the cradle and then as toddlers; we insist on the playground and then as over-confident teens; we insist in the church and the workplace; we insist as parents of toddlers and then as stubborn parents of over-confident teens; we insist as parents of adult children, and then as retirees, and then as nursing-home residents. We are disturbingly and persistently selfish.

Our selfishness is a master of disguise, hiding behind a thousand masks to cloak its motives. Our selfishness is a wordsmith and trained attorney, quick to defend and prosecute, persuading judge and jury on behalf of its sole client. The late Kenneth Benson, third president of Holmes Bible College in Greenville, South Carolina, would often say, “Selfishness is the taproot of sinfulness.” Insisting on our way is at the center of most interpersonal conflict and abuse of others.

I. THE REALITY OF SELFISHNESS

READ ALOUD: Philippians 2:3a: Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit...



DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Paul speaks of “selfish ambition” and “conceit.” How would you define these words? Are they similar in meaning? What is the correlation between these words? Where did we learn such behavior?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): In the Greek New Testament, the phrase “selfish ambition” is one word. This word is found before New Testament times only in Aristotle where it denotes the self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means; hence, a desire to put one’s self forward, a partisan and fractious spirit. The word, conceit, speaks of vainglory or empty pride. Eugene Peterson paraphrases this passage from Philippians 2 in *The Message*: “Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top; don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage.”

Selfishness is that attitude of being concerned with one’s own interests above the interests of others, a disposition rooted in vanity and arrogance, akin to narcissism, or an overly high opinion of oneself. Where did we get the inclination of building up ourselves while tearing down others?

The root of selfishness present in every human heart dates back to the Garden of Eden. In Galatians 5:20, the Apostle Paul identifies “selfish ambitions” as a work of the flesh. Selfishness ruins friendship (Proverbs 18:1), hinders prayer (James 4:3) and is the product of earthly wisdom (James 3:13-14).

Scripture abounds with examples of the selfish ways of men and women, a trait we all inherited from our parents, Adam and Eve (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12; 1 John 1:8-10). Selfishness provoked King David to steal another man’s wife and have him murdered (2 Samuel 11:1-27). Selfishness caused the rich young ruler to turn his back on Jesus (Matthew 19:21-22). Selfishness leads to “disorder and every evil practice” (James 3:16).

II. THE REQUIREMENT OF SELFLESSNESS

READ ALOUD: Philippians 2:3-4: Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but

also for the interests of others.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Paul's admonition seems to be "Thou shalt be selfless." Why do you think Paul exhorts the believers at Philippi to a life of selflessness? What attitude adjustments are necessary to promote the interests of others above one's own interests?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The Church at Philippi was one of the healthiest churches planted by the Apostle Paul. His letter to the Philippian Christians was partly to thank them for their financial support (Philippians 4:15-20) and somewhat to deal with problems in the church. One of these messes involved two prominent church leaders, Euodia and Syntyche, who were not getting along (Philippians 4:2-3). These two leading women, and perhaps others in the congregation who were taking sides with one or the other, needed an attitude adjustment. They had redirected their focus from the Master and the Message to the mess.

Combatting the sin of selfish ambition requires genuine humility. Unpretentious humility restores and grows relationships. Being humble involves having a true perspective about ourselves in relation to God. "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (Romans 12:3, ESV). Healthy relationships need less of "me" and more of "you." Selflessness brings out the best in others. It builds trust in relationships.

Paul's appeal flows from our union with Christ and each other as brothers and sisters in the family of God.

"So I'm asking you, my friends, that you be joined together in perfect unity—with one heart, one passion, and united in one love. Walk together with one harmonious purpose, and you will fill my heart with unbounded joy. Be free from pride-filled opinions, for they will only harm your cherished unity. Don't allow self-promotion to hide in your hearts, but in authentic humility put others first and view others as more important than yourselves" (Philippians 2:2-3, TPT).



III. THE REVELATION OF SURRENDERING

READ ALOUD: Philippians 2:5-8: Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Is humility something we do, or is it something the Holy Spirit does in us?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Paul calls the Philippian believers to think and feel in a new way. The Greek verb translated as “let this mind be in you” (Philippians 2:5) has to do not just with intellectual activity, but also with one’s spirit or disposition. Thus, several contemporary translations speak not of thinking, but attitude.

- “Have this same attitude in yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus” (AMP).
- “You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had” (NLT).
- “The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had” (GNT).

Galatians 5:22-23 says the Holy Spirit works in us to be more like Christ (Ephesians 4:14-16), and part of the fruit, or results of that work, is gentleness or humility, the opposite of self-aggrandizement. Hence, humility, selflessness, and surrendering are the results of yielding ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul says, “Let this mind be in you...” acknowledging the need for our cooperation with the Holy Spirit. “Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him” (Philippians 2:12-13, NLT).

In his appeal, the hymn writer, Cyrus Nusbaum, expressed well the cooperative work of the human will with the divine will: “Let Him have His way with thee.” These words are quickly followed by the refrain, “His pow’r can make you what you ought to be.” Christ empowers us to follow Him

in surrendering. Hence, Paul says, “Consider the example that Jesus, the Anointed One, has set before us. Let his mindset become your motivation” (Philippians 2:5, TPT).

“He existed in the form of God, yet he gave no thought to seizing equality with God as his supreme prize. Instead he emptied himself of his outward glory by reducing himself to the form of a lowly servant. He became human! He humbled himself and became vulnerable, choosing to be revealed as a man and was obedient. He was a perfect example, even in his death—a criminal’s death by crucifixion!” (Philippians 2:6-8, TPT).

The fullest revelation of surrendering is the self-humiliation of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose complete trust in His heavenly Father led Him to make the ultimate sacrifice for our redemption. Fallen humans can love one another and perform acts of selflessness, although rare enough to be remarkable when it does happen. Still, the way of living one’s entire life, which Paul commends, requires a surrendering that only results from trusting the Father like Jesus trusted the Father.

CONCLUSION: The crucifixion of Jesus was not the end. Had it been, Jesus scarcely would provide a model of the kind of attitude we should have. But death could not keep its hold on Him (Acts 2:24). His journey to the cross led to the empty tomb.

“Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11, NIV).

The next time you edge God out because of ego, journey again with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane and eavesdrop on His prayer to the Father. Hear Him say, “Nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Ask God to sanctify your ego so that you can joyfully surrender your will to the Father’s will with an ego that exalts God only.

Jesus came to demonstrate through the cross that all who trust in the Father



as He trusted the Father will discover that faith-fueled love—love that does not insist on its own way (1 Corinthians 13:5)—will overcome the world.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) We all struggle with selfishness. How has your selfishness brought about harm to you or others?
- 2) Do you agree that a life of selflessness and surrendering means thinking less of “me” and more of “you”?
- 3) Is it realistic to expect that Christians should be selfless people in a diverse, multi-cultural society?
- 4) How would you describe surrender? How does that help you to live out “less of me, more of Him”?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:1-18

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Philippians 2:1-18. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God’s Word speak to your life. Don’t rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) Selflessness brings out the best in others. Think of three ways that you can actively practice putting others before yourself. During this week, put these acts of selflessness to work. Was it difficult to stop focusing on yourself? What did you learn?
- 3) Selfishness is part of the human experience going back to the Garden of Eden. We are all selfish. In what parts of your life are you most selfish? Once we can identify our selfishness, we then need to learn ways to have an “attitude adjustment”. What are some ways that you can adjust your attitude to that of Christ Jesus?

THE JOURNEY

LESSON SIX: TRUST MISPLACED

INTRODUCTION: Trust is one of the most overused words in everyday language. In advertisements, we are urged to trust a product. In making decisions, we are encouraged to trust our instincts. In relationships, we are told to trust in each other. Even though we can have some degree of confidence in a product or a gut instinct regarding a person, Scripture clearly declares we are to place our trust in God alone. Placing trust in anything other than in God becomes misplaced trust, and misplaced trust is idolatry, which leads to disaster.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines trust as “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.” God is the only One who lives up to this standard. Psalm 9:10 assures us, “And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; For You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You” (NASB).

I. WHAT WENT WRONG?

READ ALOUD: Genesis 3:1-7: Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.



DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How did the serpent tempt Eve? How does this text represent misplaced trust? Was it the result of Adam and Eve's sin?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Misplaced trust is an age-old story. It began in the Garden of Eden with the serpent/Satan's crafty question posed in a way to cast doubt on God, His Word, and His goodness. Satan began by asking, "Did God indeed say...?" The bait of doubt was cast, and Eve misquoted God: "The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die'" (Genesis 3:2-4).

Eve did more than misquote God. By succumbing to the serpent's deception, she doubted the essence of who God is. Is His word trustworthy? Is His love everlasting? Does He want the best for me? Will He provide for all my needs?

What God actually said is this: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17).

Notice how Satan took the focus off of what God freely and generously gave Adam and Eve (every tree but one) and instead suggested that God had withheld something from them. Satan said, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5). The truth is that their eyes were opened, but not by making them like God, but by making them self-aware, opening the choice between trusting God and trusting in someone or something else. God's way or my way?

In *Life Without Lack*, Dallas Willard presents a clear understanding of the issues in Genesis 3. Satan is described as a special angel who fell away from God when he desired to be like God. In this fallen state, Satan continues to attempt to hurt God, and he does that through humans.

Willard states: “If we look at Satan’s work from beginning to end in the Bible, from the opening chapters of Genesis to the concluding chapter of Revelation, we see a clear pattern: Satan’s constant deception of human beings.”

II. WHAT ARE YOU LEANING ON?

READ ALOUD: Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What do you see as the danger of leaning on your own understanding? What is the benefit of leaning on God?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): It matters what you lean on. It’s wise to know what will hold you secure. In Proverbs 3:5-6, the writer clearly states that we are to trust God with all our hearts. The word translated trust in verse 5 means “to lie helpless, facedown.” “It pictures a servant waiting for the master’s command in readiness to obey, or a defeated soldier yielding himself to the conquering general.”

In contrast, we are not to “lean on our own understanding.” The verb, to lean, means “to rest over on something or someone, to repose in confidence.”

Can you imagine leaning on yourself? It’s a good way to end up sprawled on the ground, which ironically mirrors the word picture of trust in the previous paragraph—“to lie helpless face down.” Here’s the choice: We can fall on the ground by leaning on something that will never hold us secure, or we can willingly and totally surrender face down to God, the only trustworthy source.

The admonition to not trust in our own understanding does not mean we check our brains at the door, or ignore common sense, or fail to seek wise counsel. It means that we use our intelligence in cooperation with God’s direction. The writer of Psalm 119 understood this truth: “I run in the paths of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding” (v.32, NIV).



Besides the warning to avoid trusting in our own understanding, here are a few more verses that caution us about misplaced trust. Each of these areas is an ancient truth that is biblically grounded and relevant for us today.

Military Strength: King David declared, “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (Psalm 20:7, KJV). “I will not trust in my bow, Nor shall my sword save me. But You have saved us from our enemies” (Psalm 44:6-7a).

Riches: “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17).

People/Leaders: “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes” (Psalm 118:8-9, NIV).

Perhaps the last category seems harsh, especially in the light of good people we know. Consider the difference between a “provisional” trust in people and the “ultimate” trust in God. Provisional is subject to change, held lightly in view of the frailties of human nature. Ultimate trust is for God alone. Each of us must strive to be loyal and trustworthy to friends and family, but we are not God. Even at our best, we can fail people, disappoint them.

God is the only one who is completely trustworthy.

A verse in the book of Job describes the sad state of leaning on anyone or anything other than God. “What they trust in is fragile; what they rely on is a spider’s web. They lean on the web, but it gives away; they cling to it, but it does not hold” (Job 8:14-15, NIV).

III. WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

READ ALOUD: John 2:23-25 (AMP): Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in His name [identifying themselves with Him] after seeing His signs (attesting miracles) which He was doing. But Jesus, for His part, did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people [and understood the superficiality and fickleness of human nature], and He did not need anyone to testify concerning man [and human nature],

for He Himself knew what was in man [in their hearts—in the very core of their being].”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What stands out to you about John 2:23-25? What surprises you?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): In the July 30 entry of *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers stated: “Our Lord trusted no man, yet He was never suspicious, never bitter. Our Lord’s confidence in God and in what His grace could do for any man was so perfect that He despaired of no one. If our trust is placed in human beings, we shall end in despairing of everyone.”

Jesus is not surprised by humanity’s failures. He certainly wasn’t shocked by Adam and Eve’s sin, nor did it stop Him from loving them, and us. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

When it comes to the dilemma of people who have let us down, disappointed us, failed us, we can do what Jesus did: love and forgive. Parents fail children. Christian leaders fail congregants. Married couples fail each other. A broken relationship in marriage can be among the most hurtful failures. But no biblically-sound marriage ceremony will ask a couple to trust each other. Christian marriage is a triangular relationship in union with each other and God. Trust is reserved for Him. Love and forgiveness are our gifts to each other. In every human relationship, we hold lightly the provisional trust in people and lean heavily on our ultimate trust in God.

An astounding truth is that even though Jesus did not entrust Himself to any human, He graciously entrusted His redeemed ones with the gospel message. “But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Knowing well that we carry the treasure of the gospel in the fragile clay jars



of humanity—cracked and broken—He still gave us the great privilege of making the Gospel known to the world.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) What people, things or ideas are easy for you to trust?
- 2) Have you placed your trust in something or someone that failed you? Talk about it.
- 3) How does placing trust in Jesus lighten your load?
- 4) Jesus isn't surprised by our failure or sin. He doesn't stop loving us. How can we extend that same love to those who break our trust?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Psalms 20 & 56

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week's At-Home Scriptures: Psalms 20 & 56. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) Pray over the areas of misplaced trust in your life. Let the Holy Spirit guide you to reveal any area where you have placed your trust in anything or anyone other than God. Make each area a point of repentance.
- 3) Meditate daily on the truth of this verse Try to memorize it by the end of the week. "You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, For in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:3-4).
- 4) "Through deception and temptation, Satan targets our knowledge of and trust in God...We are faced with the same choice today as Adam and Eve: Do I choose to trust in God—His way—or do I doubt Him?" Don't answer this question lightly. Spend some time thinking about your response. After you have finished, write your reflections down. If you feel comfortable, share your experience with another member of your Journey group.

THE JOURNEY

LESSON SEVEN: TRUST WOUNDS

INTRODUCTION: Many people have suffered from old “trust wounds” for years, even decades, because they are unwilling to commit to a real cure. Some have experienced betrayal, rejection, or some type of abuse early in life, and the hurts resulting from these things are understandable. The problem comes when people are unwilling to accept or pursue the real cure for these wounds.

Spiritual and emotional wounds are similar to physical wounds or injuries. For example, I suffered from knee pain for many years due to injuries to both knees. An orthopedic surgeon informed me I needed a knee replacement. I felt I was much too young, and knee replacement surgery was for senior adults. Finally, after many years of pain, I relented and had knee replacement surgery. I now enjoy freedom from the pain I endured for so many years.

Many suffer through years of spiritual and emotional pain when it comes to old trust wounds such as betrayal, rejection, sin, or abuse. One of the primary reasons is because of an unwillingness to accept the proper cure.

The Bible is full of stories about betrayal, rejection, and abuse, but the teaching Jesus gives us in Matthew 18 provides the nuts and bolts for dealing with this subject.

I. WHO IS THE GREATEST?

READ ALOUD: Matthew 18:1-5: At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of



heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Why did the disciples ask Jesus who was the greatest? Who are the “little ones” to whom He referred?

- A possible answer to the disciples’ dispute is found in Mark 9:34. Following the Lord’s transfiguration, the disciples argued about who was the greatest. When they arrived in Capernaum, Jesus asked them about what they had been disputing, but they kept silent because their argument was about who was the greatest.
- The identity of the “little ones” is found in the CONTENT section below.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Peter, James, and John may have thought they were more important than the other disciples because they were a part of Jesus’ “inner circle.” It seems all the disciples were interested in what Jesus had to say on the matter. Instead of preaching a sermon on the subject, Jesus used a child to teach a lesson on humility. “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3, NIV). Children are not concerned about position and titles. Generally, they are humble and have modest opinions about themselves and others. At the root of most offenses is a lack of humility. Jesus used this child to illustrate that there are no elite individuals in His kingdom. The little ones are children of the kingdom.

Jesus strongly warns against causing offenses (vv. 6-9). He teaches that one is judged harshly for offending a “little one” (believer). “...it would be better for [the offender] if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (v. 6, NKJV). Two kinds of millstones were used in Jesus’ day. One was turned by hand, and the other one was turned by an animal (donkey). The one referred to here is the kind turned by an animal. He says it would be better to have this type of millstone tied around the offender’s neck, and he be cast into the sea rather than sin against a humble servant of God (little one).

II. LIVE PEACEABLY WITH ALL MEN

READ ALOUD: Romans 12:18: If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): (Self-Evaluation) On a scale from 1-10, how do you measure up to live peaceably with all men?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The Apostle Paul teaches believers to live at peace with everyone. “ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12: 8, NIV). This means we are always to seek peaceful resolutions and work diligently to cultivate peace in disputes. Paul includes husbands, wives, parents, children, employers, employees, and other believers in his admonition. When offenses occur, peace is interrupted, and the interruption continues until reconciliation takes place.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul said that the peace of God is to rule our hearts (5:13) Writing to the believers in Colossae, he said believers are to study to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (see Colossians 3:15). The question to ask ourselves is this: When an offense does occur, what can I do to bring peace to the situation? Will I pour water or gasoline on it, or will I ignore the offense and hope it goes away?

When an offense disrupts the peace in our lives, there are at least three ways to respond;

- 1) Pursue peace (pour water on the fire).
- 2) Retaliate or seek revenge (pour gasoline on the fire).
- 3) Ignore the fire and hope it burns out.

The biblical response is to do everything in our power to restore peace with everyone, especially with another believer.

III. JESUS' PLAN FOR CONFLICT

READ ALOUD: Matthew 18:15-20: “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears

you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): At what point do you put matters of offense into the hands of God?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Jesus Himself knew the challenge of keeping peace, so He gave us His Father's plan for settling disputes.

1. Go to the person who offended you; tell him his fault (Matthew 18:15).

Do not involve anyone else at this point; keep it between you and the person. According to the teaching of Jesus, no one else is to know, not even close family members or friends. If believers followed this teaching, many small fires would be extinguished because of a lack of fuel.

2. If he does not hear, take one or two witnesses (v. 16).

Jesus quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, where accusations in the days of Moses required confirmation by at least two witnesses (even for murder). "On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness" (Deuteronomy 17:6).

When an offense is taken to the two or three witnesses, both parties, the offended and the offender, go together to present the dispute. The main point here is to go together. They are not to discuss their side of the situation separately. That way, the witnesses can make a judgment on what needs to be done, and the offended person and the offender submit to that judgment.

3. If the offense is not settled, Jesus says, tell it to the whole church.

If the offender is still unwilling to repent, treat him as a heathen or tax-collector (v. 17). In Jewish culture at that time, this meant to break fellowship and put the matter in the hands of God. When we have done



everything possible to settle an issue, we are told to put the matter into God's hands and trust Him. Jesus tells us, "...where two or three are gathered in His Name, He will be in our midst" (v. 19). If the offended and offender allow Him, God will show up and help work out the dispute. We must never forget Paul's counsel to live in peace with everyone as possible (Romans 12:18).

IV. FORGIVENESS AND UNFORGIVENESS

READ ALOUD: Matthew 18:21-35: Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

"But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): (Two-part Question): What are the results of forgiveness? What are the results of unforgiveness?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The parable of the unforgiving servant illustrates the power of forgiveness and the consequences of unforgiveness. Peter asked, "How many times is a person to forgive?" He went on to suggest seven times. Jesus responded by saying, "Seventy times seven." In other words, forgive as many times as a person asks.

Jesus told His followers the story about a certain king who wanted to settle his accounts. In the process, he learned one of the servants owed him a lot of money. The servant was brought in and commanded to pay his debt. Because he was unable to pay it, he begged the king to give him more time. The king was moved with compassion and forgave the debt. That same servant went out and found a servant who owed him much less and demanded immediate payment. The servant begged for more time, but he was denied and thrown into jail. The master heard of his servant's actions and called him in. He called him a wicked servant and canceled his forgiveness because of his unforgiveness.

Jesus teaches us to ask forgiveness, and it will be given as many times as we ask for it, but if we are not willing to forgive others, our forgiveness is lost just like the unforgiving servant.

CONCLUSION: Paul sums up the teaching well in his letter to the Ephesians, "Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down upon your wrath"(4:26). I have offended people, and I have been offended. Life experience has taught me it is better to deal with offenses as early as possible, as Paul teaches us. The longer we wait, the bigger the fire becomes, and the more difficult it is to extinguish.

As I mentioned in the introduction, I suffered for years with knee pain because I was unwilling to do what was necessary. The real cure was knee replacement, and once it was done, my quality of life was much improved. Forgiveness is wonderful, and yet many suffer for years because of their unwillingness to address the real issue--unforgiveness. The difference between my knee pain and unforgiveness is significant because my knee pain did not have eternal consequences. Unforgiveness does.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Talk about how the root of most offenses is perhaps a lack of humility?
- 2) People hurt us. Relationships can be hard. What makes it hard to live peaceably with those who break your trust?
- 3) What can you do to actively promote bringing peace to situations that impact you?
- 4) How does forgiving those who hurt us bring greater freedom to us?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week's At-Home Scripture: Matthew 18. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) Think of something powerful God has done for you. Maybe he healed you, provided when you needed it, or carried you through a dark season. Think of one event and then find something that is a reminder of this event. This can be anything that is significant to you and an object or something you choose that reminds you of it. For example, perhaps you survived an accident that you never should have walked from. A picture of the car or something else personal can be used to remind you of God's faithfulness in that moment. Set this some place as a reminder of that moment when God moved on your behalf. When you see it, take the opportunity to thank God for bringing you through that moment.
- 3) This week's lesson might have brought up difficult things from your past. How we deal with these old wounds can alter our lives moving forward. The first step is forgiveness. Ask yourself, "Who do I need to forgive?" "Is hurt and anger keeping me from extending forgiveness?" Commit that individual and your hurt to the Lord. **It is important to acknowledge that some hurts might require the help of a pastor or counselor to process. The hurt may be so deep that forgiveness is painful. Facing our wounds (acknowledging their harm and existence) allows the Holy Spirit to do the work of healing that we need. But for our spiritual health and well-being, we all must face these wounds.**



THE JOURNEY

LESSON EIGHT: TRUST IN THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION: Periodically, I receive a notification on my phone telling me that one of my Facebook friends has “added” to his story. The implication is that he is writing his own story.

- Proverbs 3:5,6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart. And lean not on your own understanding: in all your ways acknowledge Him. And He shall direct your paths.”
- Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

Today’s lesson declares that we can and should trust God with our future. He has a story He wants to write for us. The question is, “Who is writing your story?” For the Christian, there are only two options: Will I choose to write my own story, or will I trust God with my future and let Him write my story?

Surely God can be trusted with your future. He wants to direct your path. We are not capable of writing a great story. His plans for our lives are far better than any we could make for ourselves. Unfortunately, many Christians continue trying to script their own stories without trusting God to pen them.

How about you, who is writing your story?

The book of Genesis introduces us to a man named Jacob. Much of this first book of the Bible is written about his life or his story. If his life were a play or drama, it might contain two acts with two scenes in each act. The program would read like this:



Act 1—The Self-Life

Scene 1--Jacob Is Lying

Scene 2--Jacob Is Learning

Act 2—The Surrendered Life

Scene 1–Jacob Is Limping

Scene 2–Jacob Is Leaning

I. ACT 1 — THE SELF-LIFE

READ ALOUD: Genesis 25:23: “And the Lord said to her: Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other. And the older shall serve the younger.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): The self-life describes a person who is determined to accomplish his desires by any means. We have heard the saying, “The end does not justify the means.” Jacob’s life demonstrates this adage. Have you ever known someone who lived a self-life?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT):

Scene 1 — Jacob is lying

When he was born he was named “Jacob” which means a deceiver. He lies and deceives to the point of stealing the birthright and the blessing from his brother Esau. What a manipulator he is. He even has the help of his own mother. Together they plot and plan how to get their way in their own timing. My friend, getting our own way is a losing proposition. Our way is not God’s way. His way is higher and better than anything we could imagine.

Scene 2 — Jacob is Learning

Eventually, Jacob’s cover was “blown.” As a result of his own sins he had to escape to the land of his uncle Laban. For twenty years he lives and learns what it is like to have people deceive and trick him even as he had done to his own brother and father. During his time with Laban, his wages were changed so often that it is only by God’s help that his uncle didn’t take everything he had. What Jacob is learning during this season of his life is

that the law of the soil is also the law of the soul. “Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.”

II. ACT 2 — THE SURRENDERED LIFE

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Good News: No one has to continue to live the self-life. Each one of us has the opportunity to surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. We can stop writing our own story and hand the pen to our Lord and live the life He desires for us. This is what we call the surrendered life. What is the greatest obstacle in your life that prevents full surrender to God?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): In the next two scenes, we observe how Jacob surrendered his life to the plan, or purposes, of God.

Scene 3 — Jacob Is Limping

One dark and lonely night, Jacob found himself wrestling with the Lord. He resisted Him until the Lord touched the “hollow of his thigh,” leaving Jacob crippled. No longer able to win, he cried out: “I will not let you go unless you bless me” (Genesis 32:26).

The Bible teaches us clearly that God blesses us when we choose to stop trusting ourselves and trust Him and live out His story for our lives. You see, God does not want to see you defeated, but He does want you to be dependent. Jacob surrendered to the Lord that night and became victorious, even though he limped for the rest of his life as a reminder of his encounter with the Lord. The surrendered life is a winning proposition. Only as we are conquered are we able to become conquerors.

Scene 4 — Jacob Is Leaning

In the last chapter of Jacob’s life, we see him leaning on his staff having been truly blessed by our God and able to be a blessing to others. He is no longer leaning to his own understanding (see Proverbs 3:5) but leaning on the staff of God’s story for his life. It is quite possible that the staff or rod on which Jacob leaned was full of carvings depicting his life and the incredible story God had written for him and his descendants.

CONCLUSION: Have you ever surrendered the pen of your life over to our Lord? Today, you can give up the self-life and begin the surrendered life. He will write the rest of your story, and it will be the best story you could ever choose.

Prayer: Father God, we want to confess that too often we live our own way. Forgive us of the sin of self-reliance and help us to turn from the self-life and surrender to Your will and way. Today, we ask that Your will be done in our lives. Amen!

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Talk about a time that you have tried to plan or write your story instead of allowing God to lead. How did that end?
- 2) Why is it hard to fully trust God with the plans for your life and give up selfish desires?
- 3) We often hear of people having to “hit rock-bottom” before surrendering to Jesus and trusting His plans. What do we learn by “hitting rock-bottom”?
- 4) We will continually have to surrender our selfish plans for the far greater plans Jesus has for us. How does trusting His plan, that may feel uncertain, actually bring us peace?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Jeremiah 29:1-14; Matthew 6:19-34

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week’s At-Home Scriptures: Jeremiah 29:1-14 and Matthew 6:19-34. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God’s Word speak to your life. Don’t rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) Jesus deserves our very best—our worship. Set aside time this week to focus on Jesus’ power and glory. On Saturday evening, begin preparing your heart to worship on Sunday. Go early to church expecting to experience God. Worship and thank God for all the ways that He is the Answer in your life. Pray for those around you to also experience God during the service.

3) Generosity is not something reserved for those we love. Jesus admonishes us to do good, not only to those who are kind to us, but also to those who are not. This week do something helpful or kind for someone you don't know, for someone who has not done anything for you.

4) We have now reached the mid-point of The Journey. Spend some time this week reflecting on your experience so far. It might be helpful to write a letter to yourself. Here are some possible questions you could ask: Where have you found yourself becoming more like Jesus? What areas of your life are you still trying to control? Are you still trying to write your own story? After you finish your letter, commit yourself to fully trust God with your life. He's trustworthy.



AT-HOME EXERCISES

WEEKLY WORKSHEET

COMMITMENT: Setting an expectation and commitment will help in holding yourself accountable to follow through on The Journey. Share this with someone else in the group.

- I commit to do an At-Home Exercise _____ days this week for _____ minutes.
The best time of the day for me to do this is: (circle one) **Morning Noon Night**
- I commit to check on _____ to see how they are doing and to share about my own experiences.

1ST DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

2ND DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

3RD DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

AT-HOME EXERCISES

WEEKLY WORKSHEET

4TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

5TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

6TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

7TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

AT-HOME EXERCISES

BIBLE STUDY DESCRIPTION

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

S.O.A.P. METHOD OF BIBLE STUDY:

S.O.A.P. stands for Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer.

FOUR STEPS:

1) SCRIPTURE

Choose a passage of scripture to do a focused reading of. Start by reading the passage and by physically writing it out. This simple act adds to your focus on the passage. As you write, ask the Lord to speak to you through His Word. Pay attention to anything that catches your eye.

2) OBSERVATION

Write down what you see in the verses. Who is the audience? Is there any repetition in the passage? What words stand out to you?

3) APPLICATION

This is when God's Word becomes life-giving and alive in our lives. Ask yourself, "What is God saying to me today? How can I apply what I just read to my personal life? What is Jesus asking me to change or give up? Is there an action I need to take?"

4) PRAYER

Pray God's Word back to Him. If you sense that God is speaking to you or has revealed something to you, take this time to pray about it. Ask Him to keep it on your mind throughout the day. Humble yourself and confess anything that needs to be confessed.

When we study God's Word with a focused approach like the S.O.A.P method, it can take as little or as long as you have time to give. You may notice that some days take a shorter time while others take a longer time. The most important thing is that you are consistently exposing yourself to the truth of God's Word with humility and surrender.

AT-HOME EXERCISES

BIBLE STUDY DESCRIPTION

FOUR STEPS

Bible Study works best if you intentionally carve out time to be alone with God. It's important to find a place that is quiet, comfortable, and free from distractions. Then, begin by asking God to speak to you through His Word and to help you notice what He has for you in this moment. Don't forget to use the Bible Study description sheet for help with the S.O.A.P. method.

1) SCRIPTURE

- Write down the passage you will be reading: _____
 - Start with silence. Quiet your thoughts and wait patiently to let distractions go by. Ask Jesus (The WORD) to speak to you in His written Word.
 - Read the passage. Don't forget to read a few verses before and after for context.
 - Write the verses down as you read.
 - Pause here. Think about what you just read. Did anything jump out at you?

2) OBSERVATION

- Ask yourself these questions:
 - What do you see in these verses?
 - Who is the audience?
 - Is there any repetition?
 - What word(s) stand out to you?
 - What do I learn about God in these verses?
- Making a bullet-point list is also a good way to write down your observations.

3) APPLICATION

- After you have reflected on the passage, prayerfully respond to what God has shown you in His Word.
- Ask yourself these questions:
 - What is God saying to me today in His Word?
 - What is the Holy Spirit inviting me to pray after what I've just read?
 - How can I apply what I just read to my personal life?
 - What secrets of my heart has this passage exposed? Is Jesus asking me to give something up?
 - Are there any actions I am being called to take?

4) PRAYER

- Give yourself a few moments to sit with what you just read.
- Pray God's Word back to Him.
- Thank God for speaking to you in His Word.
- Ask God to keep these truths in your mind throughout the day.
- Confess what needs to be confessed.

Don't forget to complete the At-Home Exercises Worksheet as well!

AT-HOME EXERCISES

BIBLE MEMORIZATION DESCRIPTION

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105

While it's common to think of scripture memory as something reserved for children, the book of Psalms gives all of us a compelling reason to make this practice a personal habit: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you...I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word" (See Psalm 119:11-16).

When we take the time to memorize scripture, we are filling our minds and our hearts with God's truth. When we need encouragement, these memorized passages will come back to us as a source of strength. Storing God's truth in our hearts will boost our confidence in God, help us follow Him more closely, and draw us closer to His Son. Memorized scripture can also be used to evangelize and disciple others around us. This is truly being a ready witness.

HOW TO MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE:

1. Select a passage.
2. Give yourself a time frame to memorize it.
 - a. It's a good idea to have someone you can share your memory practice with.
3. Choose the method that works best for you.
 - a. Not everyone memorizes things the same way. It's important to use what works for you!
 - b. There are many Bible memory apps and websites.
 - c. Use a dry erase marker, and write it on your bathroom mirror.
 - d. Write the verse(s) on notecards and stick it in various places around your house, job, and car for easy practice.
 - f. Repetition will be helpful.
4. Once you have memorized your scripture passage, try to use it often. As much work as it takes to remember things, it's far easier to forget them.

Don't forget to complete the Weekly At-Home Exercises Worksheet as well!