

Buried

HOPE IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

A 5 WEEK STUDY GUIDE WITH DAILY DEVOTIONS



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BURIED ALIVE

Trevor Cole | Communication Pastor

Does the mere thought of being buried alive sound like a nightmare to you? The idea of having thousands of pounds of dirt piled on you while you're still alive will make even the toughest person cringe. Sadly, that is often the state of our spiritual lives.

Ephesians 2:1-3: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Can you recall any times in your life when you tried to be a good person before you put your faith in Jesus? What did that look like when you tried? _____

What does Paul mean when he says you were dead in the trespasses and sins? _____

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We often confuse ourselves when we remember our situation before Christ. We didn't become dead when we sinned; we sinned because as verse 3 states, we were by nature sinful.

Ephesians 2:4-9: ***But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.***

What does verse 5 say took place when we were saved by grace?

We are alive because we have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, but we wind up buried by sin so often. If we are in fact alive together with Christ, why then do we so often find ourselves in a state of being “buried alive?” _____

What are some areas where you often find yourself buried alive by sin? _____

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What sin was burying the individuals in the following passages?

Genesis 20:1-2: *From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. 2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.*

Genesis 37:5-8: *Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7 Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.*

Jonah 1:1-3: *Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil[a] has come up before me." 3 But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.*

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2 Timothy 1:6-7: ***For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.***

All of those passages show us lives that were not fulfilling the plan God had for them because they were buried by sin. If you have put your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin, then sin no longer has total control of you, but we often give it control. As long as we are here on earth we will battle sin, but there are some fantastic passages throughout God's Word that will keep us from being buried alive by sin.

1 Corinthians 10:13: ***No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.***

What does this passage say all mankind has in common? How can this be an encouragement in your life? _____

Hebrews 4:12: ***For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.***

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The Word of God has to be more than something we hear about on Sundays. What are some ways you can bring it into your daily life?

James 5:16: ***Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.***

Being a lone ranger will never lead to victory. How do you or could you apply this passage on a practical level? _____

God has a plan for us, but we will always miss out on it when we are buried by sin. Continue to ask God for the power of the Holy Spirit in your life, hide His Word in your heart, and be accountable to other believers and God will transform your life from the inside out.

NUMBERS 16

Ryan Story | Student Pastor

Google is a fascinating enhancement to our lives. I have often pondered what life was like before Internet search engines. I think of how many times I use Google in a day and wonder how people functioned before having any information about anything at their fingertips? Using encyclopedias, gross. When I was asked to write the devotionals this week I was simply given the theme “Buried Alive”, and instantly I typed in Google “buried alive Bible”, and a story that I was very unfamiliar with popped up. To be honest, it was a story that I could not recall ever reading.

Ask most people what books they struggle reading in the Bible, and there are generally three that on that list: Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Numbers. Reading any Book of Law can become mind numbingly boring. Leviticus and Deuteronomy can produce an amazing study about why we all need Jesus. It is the Word of God and does not return void, but let’s agree that reading about how to remove boils and deal with leprosy is not exactly the most entertaining or enlightening thing the Bible has to offer (Leviticus 13). However, Numbers is an interesting book. There are chapters with real-life accounts of how many people were in each tribe of Israel. That can be become a bit troublesome to read at times. Then there are some amazing stories about Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Caleb, and what life was like for the Nation of Israel after they left Egypt. Take some time to read Numbers 16, but for those of you who won’t, (legit read your Bible!) the story goes like this:

The one thing about the Israelites was they loved to grumble and complain while they were in the wilderness. One day a man of

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the Levites by the name of Korah is introduced. He aligned with a group of Reubenites, as well as other leaders, and instigated against Moses and Aaron. They were claiming that the way Aaron and Moses were representing the people to God was bad. Korah and his followers thought that Aaron and the other priests went too far and claimed, "All the congregation is holy, every one of them and the Lord is among them." Moses fell to his face and said, "In the morning the Lord will show who is His, and who is holy and will bring him near to Him." The next morning Moses gives an amazing speech. (legit read the story) The moment Moses finished speaking "the ground under them spilt apart. And the Earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah".

I was reading this story and started thinking about my attitude. The reality of life is we are going to have disagreements with people. We will disagree with our spouses, children, employees, and even church leadership. I look at Korah, and I feel the reason God swallowed him up was not necessary because he disagreed with Moses and Aaron. Throughout the Bible, you see people disagreeing with the person God put in charge, and God didn't kill them. I feel it was how Korah went about it. Korah did disagree with Moses and Aaron. Korah was a Levite, so he did know the law and the promises that God made. However, Korah never went to Aaron or Moses with his issue. He went to the Reubenites and gossiped. Korah went to other leaders and gossiped. We in the church world do a marvelous job talking badly about people, whether that be leadership or otherwise. One way that I feel we can become buried alive is when we handle conflict wrong. Jesus never once says, "Agree with everyone, and it is better to be mad at something than to talk to someone." In Matthew 18, Jesus goes into detail about how we are meant to handle conflict with our brothers and sisters. The first stipulation is to go to them

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privately - Not gather an army, not attempt to get people on your side, not to seek advice with the intent of getting people to side with you. Jesus says to go to your brother. Korah got caught up on preference rather than principle. Korah let what he wanted control his actions. He never looked at the big picture, nor did he talk to the people with whom he disagreed. What Korah wanted wasn't a bad thing, but it was not the most important thing. Let's make sure we all do our best to resolve conflict the way God wants us to, so we can show each other and the world that we are actually brothers and sisters on a mission together.

DEAD RINGER

Ryan Story | Student Pastor

Have you ever wondered where certain common phrases originated? There are thousands of stories about the origins of these phrases. After a random Google search, I ended up learning about the phrase “dead ringer”. “In 1896, T.M. Montgomery, who was supervising the disinterment of remains at the Fort Randall Cemetery, reported that a little over 2% of those bodies exhumed were definitely victims of being accidentally buried alive.” Take a second to re-read that. About 2% of the people that got buried woke up, tried to claw their way out, and were unable to do so! Given that the oxygen supply in a coffin doesn’t last that long, it is likely the actual percentage of people buried alive was higher, when you include the ones who didn’t wake, but were still technically alive when buried. In any event, to prevent “deaths by burial”, a string would be attached to the finger of the person presumed dead, and it was attached to a bell on the other end above ground. When the person moved, the bell would ring, and that was what you would call a “dead ringer.”

We have all had moments in our lives where we felt buried with no escape. There are so many things that seemingly bury us: Stress, doubt, regret, laziness, anger, bitterness, and the list could become endless. We could start adding all our shortcomings in relationship with Jesus and we have a list that could make even the most optimistic person a pessimist. While I was reading the story about the dead ringer, I started to think about the person who was in the grave, and I realized that person was me at one point in my life, and more specific, it is every person at one point in their life.

Imagine that you are the person who is buried alive; you wake up

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and realize that you are trapped, and there is no way out. After trying in vain to free yourself, you realize that freeing yourself on your merit is not an option. Slowly accepting your fate seems to be the only option, but you move your hand, and hear a bell. You move that hand again and hear it again. Then frantically you move your hand until you can hear the murmur of someone who is coming to rescue you.

We that know Jesus have all been in that place. We were all alive, buried in our sin, buried in our rebellion towards the creator of the universe. While I was reading this, a scary thought crossed my mind; “how many people are still buried, knowing full well that all they have to do is move their hand?” In Acts 2, Peter is preaching to a crowd of people and says, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” It is a scary thought that anyone who has been taught who Jesus truly was, and what He did but has not called out for Jesus to save them. After that scary thought passed, God whispered something that changed the way I will look at the word “dead ringer” for the rest of my life. Imagine the amount of love you would feel for the person who came and unburied you. At one point in my life, I was a dead ringer. I was buried with no way out. Today, I look back on the day I called out for Jesus and remember how He saved me. With a joyous heart, take a second and remember the day that you rang the bell and Jesus came and unburied you.

ACHAN'S SIN

Ryan Story | Student Pastor

When I was a kid, there was one game I was better at than any other. That game was hide-n-seek tag. Way back in my youth, my friends and I would play tag at night in the woods next to my house. Tag was life back then. We would start at sundown and play until 2 or 3 in the morning. I went out one day and bought Army fatigues, face paint, and a pair of boots. I made it my life goal each night to hide so well that no one could find me. For whatever reason, the best feeling in the world was when someone would walk right by you without noticing that you were two feet from him or her.

While tag was fun, I look at my time spent hiding in the woods as an interesting learning experience. When someone passed me, I would feel like I accomplished something by him or her not finding me, when in actuality the fun of tag is being found. We all live life with hidden sin that we have not asked God or others to help us with acknowledging.

Most people know some of the story of Joshua. Most everyone who has been in church for some time has heard the amazing story of how God helped Joshua and his army take out the city of Jericho. Not everyone knows the story of Ai. Take some time today to read Joshua 7 and 8, but the spark notes version of this story goes like this.

-God told Joshua how He was going to defeat the city of Jericho. One of the stipulations was no one from the army was able to take any treasure that was found.

- One of Joshua's soldiers, a man by the name of Achan, took some treasure and buried it under his house.

- God did not help the children of Israel defeat the city of Ai.

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- Joshua asked God why, and God told him that someone had stolen something.

- The children of Israel found out it was Achan and that he hid the stolen treasure under his house.

-The children of Israel killed Achan and his family.

What are some things that you have hidden from other people, but you know God clearly sees? Achan disobeyed God and thought he could bury his sin and never get caught. Sadly it cost Achan and his family everything. When we live our lives and try to hide sin from God, no one ever wins. God loves us too much to let us get away with sin. Let us not go through life and try to bury our sin, let's not try and play hide-n-seek with our Savior. Let us go "boldly to the throne of grace" and ask God to help us with the problems we have buried deep in our hearts.

MY BURDEN IS LIGHT

Ryan Story | Student Pastor

When life gets crazy how do you feel? Some people shut down; some people lash out at others. We all seem to have our unique way of dealing with stress. For whatever reason, I make a clicking sound with my tongue whenever I start to feel overwhelmed. It has never made sense to me why I do it, but it always made me feel like a rattlesnake. The reality though is whether you explode or internalize it; we all know the feeling of being overwhelmed. We all at one point in our lives we have experienced the weight of life.

One of the verses in the Bible that has always given me an equal part of comfort and cynicism is found in Matthew 11. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

When I read this, my flesh wants to fight me in believing the words that Jesus is saying. When I read that Jesus will give me rest, it becomes a fight to want to believe Him. I want to argue with my Lord and insist that there is nothing that can be done to give me rest. I have my counter point ready with: “Jesus, living for you is hard! When I take up your yoke, my life becomes way harder!” It feels as if no matter what we do, life becomes harder, more stressful, and no relief.

However, like I said, that is my fleshly side. In those other moments when I am not trying to “do life alone”, I read Matthew 11, and I see hope. In those moments that I feel buried by the circumstances of life, I see Jesus “yoking” with me and helping

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me get through life (clearly Jesus doing all the heavy lifting). Living for Jesus is not an addition to the craziness of life; it is a partnership. I love that Jesus calls us to take His yoke, so our burden can become light.

If you are feeling buried by circumstances, if your life is starting to feel like you are boxed in and cannot move, take some time reading Matthew 11. I pray that anyone who is feeling buried can ask Jesus to help them stand and find the rest that only the Lamb or God can bring.

BURIED IN DEBT

Ryan Story | Student Pastor

In 2009 I made a bold move in my life. I decided to quit a job at a local supermarket and take a job as a classroom assistant at a “juvie”. Now I loved working as a stock boy; I made my schedule, I was maxed out on the salary pay scale, I was a backup manager, and, to be honest, it was not a hard job. The only problem was I loved working with kids. I just graduated Oakland Community College with an Early Child Development Associate Degree and was torn. No place wanted to hire a 20 something year old dude to work with pre-school aged kids. So I applied to work outside my field a bit. I always felt God telling me “you are a teacher not a stock boy.” God was right, and He blessed me with a job, so good-bye stock boy, hello “Mr. Story”.

Now while that sounds like an awesome God story, which it is, an amazing reality set in. I went from making well above my means every week to making just barely enough to survive and pay my bills. Now working all year round was great, but I always ran into a major snag ever September. Finding summer work was never an issue, but when school started back up, that’s when life would get interesting. If you have ever worked at a place that has seasonal pay and is bi-weekly pay, your first paycheck generally does not come in for about four weeks. So every summer, when my summer job would end and my teaching job would start, I would not receive a paycheck for four weeks. Every fall became a very stressful time. At one point in August of 2011, I thought I had everything paid up for bills and then BOOM random car problem and college financial aid did not come through. I was in trouble. I do not recommend this, but I ended up skipping my credit card bill (which did result in getting a lot of phone calls) to have food for the month. I was buried in debt and saw no way out. I kept

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forging forward with everything and then as He always does, God stepped in. I told you all that I had a summer job; I was a “manny” (that is a male nanny for those who don’t know) for two kids whom I knew from church. On the last day I was working there, knowing it was the last time I would get paid for a month, the mom paid me, gave me a card, and told me to read it later. I left and made my way to class that night. At a red light, I stopped and opened the card. There was a note that described how both the mom and dad of the kids whom I was watching got a bonus from work, and both of them decided that the best way to spend that money was to bless me with it. On Crooks Road, I sat at a red light crying my eyes out about what had just happened. That money enabled me to pay the credit card balance and help me with living expenses. The funniest thing was that I spent the last \$5 on the day of my first paycheck.

Now that was a long story just to tell you this; we have all experienced financial debt or money problems of some kind. Let’s all be honest that these are the hardest times for us all. Matthew 6:24 says, No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. If you are in a tight spot, never get in a spot where Jesus is not the Master of your life. During that time, I have never felt more of a strain in my faith in my life. However, I also have never felt God provide for me more than the moment I opened that envelope.

TAKE OFF YOUR GRAVE CLOTHES

Ryan Story | Student Pastor

He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” That is from the Gospel of John chapter 11. Hopefully, you have read the story of Lazarus, if not take some time to do so. When I started writing the devotions for this week, I am not completely sure, but for whatever reason the story of Lazarus kept popping in my mind. I went through and read it and for whatever reason the “unbind him and let him go” kept sticking out to me. Now when I read the Bible, I am an ESV guy, but I always look at what other translations say. The NIV has a very interesting way; it says to “unbind him and let him go.” The NIV says “Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go.’”

I always remember coming home after rock climbing with my shirt and shorts soaked in sweat. I am not even one of those guys who sweats like crazy, but I always remember I would get home, and my clothes would be rank. Now if you have ever done something strenuous or had a long day working, you know what it feels like to be too tired to even shower. Maybe that is just a dude thing, but I would get home, “carb up” after a good climb, and just sit in the living room. No less than two minutes into me sitting on the couch, my dad would come in the room and tell me to go clean up and take my smelly clothes off. He would always say something like, “I don’t understand why you would want to keep that outfit on when you have clean stuff downstairs.”

Now take a second and think about what Jesus is saying to those around Him and Lazarus, “take off those grave clothes.” Jesus

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is looking at Lazarus and telling him to take off the smelly rags that he had wrapped around him and to come alive. Lazarus was buried for four days. Jesus came and gave him life, and the first thing Jesus says for him to do is to get out of the smelly grave clothes.

Those of us who have a real relationship with Jesus know how He brought us from death to life. We all should be able to tell a great story about an amazing God saving every single one of us. The coolest thing to me is everyone's story is so different, but the one constant is that Jesus saved us and made us new. This is where I think it gets interesting though if we have been brought "to life" and we are no longer in the grave, why do we keep the clothes on in which we were buried? Why does it seem like the foul things that surrounded us before Jesus are the hardest things from which to walk away? Take a moment today and find out what clothes you are wearing. Are you wearing the fresh new clothes that Jesus gave you, or are you wearing your grave clothes still? Let us all make sure that we have changed out of our nasty smelly old self, and we live life in the newness that Christ brings.

BURIED HOPES & DREAMS

John Sanchez | Deacon of Operations

“The poorest man is not without a cent, but without a dream.”

– Unknown

Hopes and Dreams – They are the stuff that propels our lives forward. They define who we are, what we value, and what we aspire to become. Moving us beyond where we are, towards something bigger and better. Our hopes and dreams defy and reject the resistance of our reality, thrusting us toward what is yet to be. The fact is, all of us have hopes and dreams. George Bernard Shaw once said, “He who has never hoped can never despair.” I would add, “He who has never hoped has never lived.”

But what happens when life sucks the air out of our hopes? When the devastating storms of this broken world tear through our life and leave us despondent and dejected? Unable to make any sense of what is going on in our life, we search for answers only to find more questions.

Though God’s Word is rich in examples of men and women who have endured hope shattering circumstances, we look specifically to the story of Joseph, a young man given dreams by God. Dreams which leave him searching for answers, but wind up catapulting

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his life into a harrowing journey that leads him to his answer.

Genesis 37:1-11: *Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. 2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.[a] 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. 5 Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7 Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. 9 Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" 11 And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.*

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What details do we find about Joseph's family life in these opening verses? _____

Where does Joseph fall in the family birth order? _____

How would you define his relationship with his brothers?

As we learn about the dreams God gives Joseph, why do you think his family responds the way they did? _____

Have you ever experienced God-given dreams or inspiration?

Have you shared it with others? _____

How have people responded to you? _____

Joseph's half-brothers already distrusted him, and it eventually grew into hatred. Sin is insidious that way. When we feed it, it only grows and becomes stronger. What do their feelings eventually drive them to do with Joseph?

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Genesis 37:18-28: *They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. 19 They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. [b] Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.” 21 But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” 22 And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. 24 And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. 25 Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. 28 Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels[c] of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.*

Joseph experienced unbelievably harsh treatment from the hands of his own family. Have there been times in your life when you've felt misunderstood by someone close to you? _____

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Have you ever experienced unjust consequences? Or maybe your consequences did not fit your transgressions? _____

These are the circumstances Joseph found himself facing. In the end, he finds himself sold as a slave, carried off to a foreign land away from his family and friends.

What would be going through your mind at this point if you were Joseph? _____

In Genesis 39, we find Joseph arrives in Egypt, and his captors wind up selling him to Pharaoh's Captain Potiphar. While "employed" in Potiphar's house, God prospers Joseph in all his work and finds favor with Potiphar. We find Joseph also finds "Favor" with someone else.

Genesis 39:4-20: *So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7 And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and*

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he has put everything that he has in my charge. 9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" 10 And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. 11 But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, 12 she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. 13 And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, 14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. 15 And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." 16 Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, 17 and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. 18 But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house." 19 As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. 20 And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

How does Joseph deal with the temptation that persistently came against him? _____

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Joseph again endures injustice and misunderstanding during the episode of his life. When all seems to be getting better, things take another turn for the worse.

Everyone experiences tough situations in life, but how do we deal with what seems to be continually recurring challenges?

Did Joseph develop a victim's mindset? _____

I love the very next verse in the story...

But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison (verse 21).

What does this tell us about how God thinks about us in our struggles and challenges? _____

In Genesis 40, we find Joseph managing the affairs of the Prison Guard. In the course of his dealings, he encounters the Pharaoh's former cupbearer and baker who have been imprisoned. They have dreams which they cannot understand the meaning. God uses Joseph to interpret their dreams and his interpretations prove to be true. For the cupbearer, who is restored to his position in Pharaoh's court, Joseph asks that he remembers him and speaks on his behalf to Pharaoh. Despite the cupbearers promise, he soon forgets as he ascends back to his position of privilege. Yet another injustice in the life of Joseph.

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At this point in the story of Joseph's life, how many recorded offenses and injustices can we count against him? _____

Briefly, put yourself in Joseph's shoes, and think about what you might think about your life up until this point? Would your 'Hope Tank' be running pretty low by this time? _____

Could Joseph have grown cynical and jaded by his life experiences?

Two years later, someone else has a vexing dream for which they searched for its meaning. Pharaoh is troubled with several dreams that seem to haunt him, and none of his wise men could interpret them. It is then that the cupbearer remembers his promise to Joseph, and tells Pharaoh of his previous experience with this man Joseph and his gift of interpreting dreams. Joseph is summoned to Pharaoh's presence, and Joseph experiences God in a way even Joseph could never have foreseen.

Genesis 41:25-36: *Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 26 The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. 27 The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine.28 It is as I told Pharaoh;*

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God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do.²⁹ There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt,³⁰ but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land, ³¹ and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. ³² And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. ³³ Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.³⁴ Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land[b] of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. ³⁵ And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it.³⁶ That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.” Joseph not only interprets Pharaoh's dream as God intended, but also has a plan to address the calamity to come. What Pharaoh's wisest men in all of Egypt could not achieve, God accomplished through a young Hebrew summoned from the caverns of a prison. With that, Pharaoh immediately promotes Joseph to be the man charged to “make it happen”.

Genesis 41:46 tells us Joseph's age when this occurs.

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt.

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How old was Joseph when our story began? _____

How many years have transpired in his life until his circumstances seemed to improve? _____

What does this tell us about the contextual timeframe from where we need to view our specific situations? _____

It's during this time of national crisis when God's plan and purpose begins to crystallize for Joseph, but the best part of the story is about to unfold. For after the years of plenty, when Joseph's savings plan is put into place, the years of severe famine hit the land of Egypt. The ensuing years bring the masses of the surrounding region to Egypt in search of food. For word has reached far and wide that there are stores of grain in Egypt. Among those masses of people, we find Joseph's family again.

Genesis 42:1-3, 6-9a: ***When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" 2 And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." 3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 6 Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. 7 Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." 8 And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 9 And Joseph***

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remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them.

Do we see what happens in Verse 6? _____

Do you think Joseph understood the full significance of what happened at that precise moment? _____

Do the math. At this point in our story, Joseph has been in Egypt longer than he was living with his family in his homeland. The sudden appearance of his brothers triggered something in his heart that may have been long dormant, which was to be reunited with his family. Through some cunning manipulation of events, Joseph demands that his brothers (who still are unaware who Joseph is) return to their land and bring back the younger brother. As the story continues, we see Joseph apparently testing his brothers' integrity. Perhaps he was probing for any signs of remorse or repentance on their part. Towards the end of this game of charades, Joseph is overwhelmed with compassion for his brothers and he reveals himself to them in an emotional climax to the story.

Genesis 45:1-11,15: *Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. 4 So Joseph*

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said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. 10 You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.' 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

We find Joseph realizing his dreams in a way he could never have foreseen. It is a fantastic story that speaks so many rich truths about God's love, His purpose, and character.

What was God's ultimate purpose in bringing Joseph to Egypt?

How did this impact his family? _____

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How did this impact our life today? (Think about God's purpose through the nation of Israel) _____

Do we see the obvious conflict in Joseph's story? His life experiences were born out of unfairness, injustice, and evil intent. God uses these very same elements of our broken world to bring about His divine purpose in Joseph's life. Can you relate to situations in your life when things went sideways but ultimately proved to be crucially important in your growth and maturity in your walk with God? _____

The story of Joseph is an incredible account. It is my all-time favorite story in all of the Scripture. If anyone has experienced injustice or pain in life, only to see those same experiences used by God to accomplish something good and meaningful then Joseph's story will always hold a special place in your heart. You see, Joseph's story is our story. Without his enduring hardship, the life of his family was at stake, which meant the Nation of Israel would not have existed. Which meant Jesus would not have been, and we would still be hopelessly lost without a Savior.

In John 12:24 Jesus said, speaking of Himself, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Sometimes hopes and dreams are like that. God births them in our hearts, and as we nurture them to grow, they die. God, in His sovereign Will, Way, and Time, resurrects them back to life. It's the picture we see in Jesus through His death and resurrection,

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and we see it in Joseph's life experience, too.

Joseph's story is our story, in so many ways and on so many rich levels. Read through the story in its entirety, and let it remind you of the indisputable love, grace, and purpose of God at work in our lives. Even when all feels hopelessly lost, God is working in ways we don't understand.

PURPOSE

Noble Baird | Guest Services Director

Purpose. As we continue to press forward in this life, there are few words that hold such weight as “purpose”. It is a word that we all encounter at some time during our lives. Whether it is after high school or college graduation, maybe at the end of an annual review at work, or even as you begin a new relationship with that person you have had feelings for a while now. Whatever the case may be, purpose is a part of life and an important part that we all must face.

In 1 Samuel 9, we are introduced to the first king of Israel, Saul. The people of Israel had cried out to God wanting a king, and so this is who God sent. After he had rallied together the men of Israel to defeat the Ammonites, Saul was made king in Gilgal. However, during his rule as king, Saul lost sight of his calling. Instead of heeding the word of the Lord and following what He had commanded, Saul did what he thought was right. Because of this, God found a new man to become the king of Israel.

Sometimes, as we get busy with life and work, we can lose our true focus. We begin to slowly lose focus of the purpose that God has called us to. However, God’s plan will not be hindered by our disobedience. Saul was disobedient; he did not follow the purpose for which God had called him. So, God called a new king to fulfill that plan which was already set in motion, David. As you continue through the business of the day, week, and this Easter season, I challenge you to take a step back. Take a step back and evaluate your purpose. Are you following after the calling that He has placed in your life, or have you strayed off course and need to get refocused?

FOCUS

Noble Baird | Guest Services Director

As a child, I always loved the story of David and Goliath. To hear about this mammoth of a man be struck down by a mere child continually left me in awe. The courage and focus that David had was insurmountable. We all face giants in our lives. For some, it's the report that is due at the end of the year that takes countless hours and sleepless nights to prepare. Others will find these giants in the form of a final exam or championship game, both of which take time and countless hours of preparation. Whatever the case, you fill in the blank; we all have giants in our lives.

When Samuel anointed David, he was a mere shepherd boy. Jesse, his father, didn't even think about him when Samuel asked him to bring out his sons. However, once Samuel saw David in 1 Samuel 16, God told him that he was the one. David, the youngest son of Jesse, a simple shepherd boy, was chosen by God to be the next king of Israel. Up until this point in his life, all David did was take care of the sheep and be the best shepherd he could be. Some of his brothers had gone off to battle to aid King Saul in his fight, but David stayed with the flock. God was preparing him to be the next shepherd of the people of Israel - A people who were in need of a courageous and focused king, who would guide them in the plan God had for them as a nation. Even though David was anointed, he had to wait. He had to wait on God's timing to become the next king.

We don't always know what God's timing is. Sometimes these giants will come and go within a matter of hours, days, or weeks. Other times, those giants will last a couple months or years. No matter how long they last, we must have insurmountable focus and courage like David. We must remember that God has a purpose for us and that His timing is perfect.

“I GOTTA BE ME”

Noble Baird | Guest Services Director

One of my most favorite movies of all time is Star Wars. I can pretty much quote the original three verbatim. So, this past Christmas when the new movie came out, to say I was excited is an understatement. Of all the characters, my favorite is the smuggling, gunslinger Han Solo. For the role of this character, George Lucas cast Harrison Ford. Maybe it is because of this role alone, but Harrison Ford is without a doubt one of the most talented actors I have ever seen on the big-screen. From being president of the United States to being an archeological professor searching for ancient relics, or being a fugitive on the run, he has truly become one of the most versatile actors ever. One thing about Ford that many may not know is that he has a son, Ben. Obviously, through seeing his father’s success as an actor, it would only make sense if Ben were to follow in his footsteps. However, this is not the case at all.

After David’s anointing, he quickly becomes friends with a man named Jonathan. We read about their friendship in 1 Samuel 18:1 as it reads, “The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” David and Jonathan were not just friends; they were best friends and considered each other brothers. Jonathan was a great warrior, but Jonathan was not known for his skills as a warrior, he was Saul’s son. Naturally, being the son of a king meant that Jonathan was next in line for the throne. Certainly, this was what many of the people of Israel expected of him, to become the next king. However, God had other plans for Jonathan.

Jonathan’s purpose was not to go on and become king. As we read in God’s Word, Jonathan’s best friend David filled that position. Just like Jonathan, Ben Ford did not follow in his father’s footsteps as many expected. In fact, Ben Ford is a very

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successful chef and owner of Ford's Filling Station in California. Jonathan and Ben were expected by many to fulfill a purpose that was simply not the one planned for them.

Often, people are going to say what you need to do or should do with your life. There are those people whom God has placed in our lives that will help guide and instruct us in the path He has planned. However, just like Jonathan and Ben, they had to find their purpose and not the purpose that was expected by the world. Whose purpose are you hearing? Are you listening to what others expect or what God has planned?

ONE WAY

Noble Baird | Guest Services Director

Whenever I am driving around, I always look at all the signs on the roads. Of course, you always see the “Stop” sign, the “70 mph” sign (which no one in Michigan follows), and the numerous railroad crossing signs that seem to be in almost every town. One sign in particular that has always caught my attention whenever I am driving is, “Wrong Way”. Sometimes it is posted on a one-way street or a ramp off the highway. Other times, it is posted on a road attached to another sign that reads, “Do Not Enter”. Even though these signs can be annoying at times, they are a blessing to have. They help guide us and keep us safe on the roads.

In 2 Samuel 15, we see the decline of Absalom, David’s third oldest son. Absalom had decided that he would take the throne from his father. He conspired a plan, which would aid him in overthrowing his father and becoming the next king of Israel. After rallying the help of the men of Israel, Absalom went to battle against David and his men. However, Absalom and the men of Israel did not stand a chance against David’s army. Over 20,000 men were killed as David’s men pursued Absalom. As Absalom fled, his hair was caught in a great oak tree, and Joab struck him down. That day, Absalom was killed, and his conquest for the throne came to an end.

Absalom had lost his purpose. He saw the “Do Not Enter” and “Wrong Way” signs, yet he did not heed the warning. He continued down his path of destruction and sin, which ultimately led to his death. Often, God will place these signs in our lives to help guide us and keep us safe, as we pursue the purpose He has created for us. Just like Absalom, we have a choice. We can heed the warning sign, see we are going the wrong direction, and get back on course - Or we will simply ignore the signs and continue to stray from the

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purpose God has laid before us. So, are you watching for the signs God is placing in your life or are you ignoring them and going the wrong way?

THREE WISHES

Noble Baird | Guest Services Director

I have always loved the old, animated Disney movies. Whether it was Simba and his father, Bambi and his mother, or the Seven Dwarves just hanging out, I love it! One movie in particular that I could watch time and time again is Aladdin. It is a classic tale of the underdog, Aladdin, winning over the girl he loves, Princess Jasmine. Along his journey, Aladdin meets some new friends, one who he finds trapped in a lamp, Genie. Genie tells Aladdin that he will grant him three wishes. Aladdin has the opportunity to choose whatever he wants in the whole world, and Genie will grant it.

Although Aladdin is a fiction tale, I have always wondered what it would be like to have the opportunity to be granted three or even just one wish, for anything. In 1 Kings 3:5, God asks Solomon what he wants. In response, Solomon simply asks for one thing, wisdom. Solomon does not ask for a big house, a new car, the winning Powerball numbers, or even long life. What he selflessly asks for is the ability to discern good from evil. He wants to be able to be guide and rule over the nation righteously, and with the Lord's wisdom.

I am honestly not sure if I would've done as Solomon did. Solomon knew what his purpose was. He was called to rule over the nation of Israel, and he knew that he couldn't do it without the Lord's help. His purpose was clear to him, but he had a weakness. He asked God to supplement that weakness with His strength and that is just what He did. Now, Solomon is known as the wisest man to ever live. Are you letting your weakness hinder you and hold you back from chasing after that purpose you were made, or are you seeking after God and asking Him to fill that weakness with His strength?

GOOD ADVICE

Noble Baird | Guest Services Director

When I was eight years old, I broke my arm. I was over at my cousin's house playing around outside when I decided to jump off the swing set. My parents had always warned me not to jump off the swing, but my cousin told me it would be fun to do. Well, as you can tell, I listened to my cousin. As a result, I spent most of the summer in a cast and not able to use my right arm.

King Rehoboam, was the son of Solomon and became the king of Israel after his father's death. During his reign as king, Rehoboam sought counsel on how he should treat the people of Israel. In 1 Kings 12, we read how he first spoke to his father's older advisors, then went to his younger friends who he had grown up with, for guidance. His father's advisors told him to be a servant to the people, whereas his friends told him to be harsh and unrelenting with them. Foolishly, Rehoboam took the advice of his young friends and abandoned the advice of his older, wiser advisors. Because of this decision, the kingdom of Israel became divided between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

If I had listened to my parents' advice about jumping off the swing set, I would've never spent all that time in a cast or went through the pain I did. Likewise, if Rehoboam had heeded the advise of his father's advisors the people of Israel would have been loyal to him as their king. Rehoboam was called to be the king of Israel, but he foolishly buried his purpose by not listening to those who were older and much wiser than him.

All week, we have been going through the first kings of Israel as we take a look at our purpose. It is not always easy to find our purpose and, at times, it can be even harder to stay on task. However, as we continually chase after Him in all we do, He will make our purpose and the path toward that purpose so much

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easier and clearer. I challenge you to continue to chase after your purpose. Do not lose sight of the calling God has placed on your heart. Remember that God has the perfect timing, even when it doesn't make sense to us. Listen to God for your purpose in life, not what others think you should do. Continually look at the signs He has placed in your life so that you are not going down the wrong way. Pray for that weakness to be filled with His strength. Finally, seek the advice of those who are older, wiser, and further in their walk with Christ, don't abandon their advice.

BURIED IN SORROW

Scott Johnson | Connections Pastor

Sorrow is described as a feeling of deep distress caused by loss, disappointment, or other misfortune suffered by oneself or others. This can include grief, sadness, and regret.

Every one of us has felt some degree of sorrow. In this world that we live in, it is inevitable that we will face it.

John 16:33b says, In the world you will have tribulation.

Describe a time when you were sorrowful. _____

King David dealt with sorrow much like us.

Psalm 13:1-2: How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

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What do you think some of David's emotions were from verses 1-2? Can you relate to these feelings? _____

Psalm 13:3-6: Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, 4 lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. 5 But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. 6 I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Notice the progression of David in this chapter. How did David respond to these feelings? Where did he seek his help? What does David conclude? _____

Sorrow happens to us all, but it can often be much heavier. Many of us have had a time in our life where the pain and the hurt were so deep, we couldn't see past the hurt to even know how to carry on through tomorrow. We have become buried in it. The sorrow controls us.

This can be a scary place to be. You feel trapped and alone. Fortunately, there is hope.

Hebrews 4:15: For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Matthew 11:28 -29: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you,

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and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

What do these two passages show is in regarding to our sorrow?

Is it comforting to know that we serve a God who cares? Why or why not? _____

We know that sorrow is often out of our control. How we respond and what we turn to for hope can be controlled. It is important for us to know how to handle this.

In John 16, Jesus speaks to his disciples about this very thing:

“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” 17 So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father?’” 18 So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” 19 Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’? 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. 21 When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has

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come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. 23 In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Do you think the disciples fully understood what Christ was saying? In what way can this be comforting to you?

Did Jesus tell them that they would never endure sorrow? Do believers today truly realize this? Is this permanent?

Verse 21 is a great example to help us understand what Jesus was teaching. In what ways can you relate (as humans, not necessarily mothers) to this? _____

How can the last verse of this passage help you see past any sorrow that you may endure? _____

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This passage has a lot of amazing truths in it. Jesus was speaking to His disciples before His ascension and talking about the promise of the Holy Spirit. Even though they didn't understand everything at first, He was teaching them that He will always be with them and that their sorrow is only for a season. The same is true for us.

At the end of the chapter (John 16), Jesus concludes with an amazing promise! One that every believer can hold onto when facing grief, pain, struggle, or the feeling of being buried in sorrow.

Verse 33: ***I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.***

Sorrow will come

Sorrow is inevitable

But Jesus has overcome

If you feel buried in depression, grief, or sorrow of any kind, you must know that there is an escape from the darkness. The refuge and comfort are in Christ alone.

EMPATHY

Philip Piasecki | Worship Leader

Life can be a difficult thing. It may seem like more often than not, we find ourselves in the valleys of life. When the difficulties of this world continue to pile on our shoulders, sometimes we find ourselves buried in sorrow. This whole month we have been talking about the idea of being “buried”. Sorrow is something that many of us are currently buried in, without an escape in sight. For some of us, when we are filled with sorrow we feel guilt as well. We need to understand that sorrow is a natural emotion and one that Christ dealt with as well. It is essential that when we are dealing with anything in our lives that we look to Scripture to see what it has to say on the subject. This whole week we will be looking to Scripture to learn what it has to say about sorrow, and what our response as believers should be towards it.

We see in the Scripture that even Jesus was filled with sorrow at different times in His life. Luke 19:41 says, “And when He drew near and saw the city, He wept over it.” This Scripture is taking place during the Passover celebration. People were waving their palm branches celebrating that Jesus had finally come. The only problem was these people misunderstood why Jesus had come; they believed He was there to overthrow the Roman government and rule Israel right then and there. When Jesus witnessed this, it broke His heart. He wept because all of these people had completely missed the point of His ministry. Jesus knew that soon these people would revolt and crucify Him, many of them never coming to trust in Him as their true savior.

Christ came to this earth to pay the penalty for our sins so that we could one day experience eternity with Him. Many of the Jewish people did not understand this, and it filled Jesus with

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sorrow. Sorrow is a natural and okay emotion to have at times. Ecclesiastes 3 tells us that there is a season for everything, a time to weep, laugh, mourn, and dance, just to name a few. Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem on His way into Passover because those people did not understand the true gospel. All of us can think of times when we felt like we were buried in sorrow, many of us may feel like that right now. Maybe you recently have lost a loved one, lost a job, been hurt by a friend, and you feel that weight of sorrow. Understand that Jesus understands what you are going through, He has experienced it Himself as well. Jesus wept when His friend Lazarus died, He was betrayed by one of His disciples, and He knows what you are experiencing in your life! In your times of sorrow trust in Christ that He can and will comfort you in your time of need.

THE OVERCOMER

Philip Piasecki | Worship Leader

In America, we commonly hear the question “Why do bad things happen to good people?” The first issue with this question is that there is no such thing as a “good person”. The Bible tells us that there are none who are righteous and all have sinned, and that subject could be a whole weeks worth of other devotionals. The one thing that we do know is that bad things do happen in the world. Many times these bad things impact us directly. I’m sure we all have asked at different times in our lives questions like “Why is this bad thing happening?” “How could God let that happen?” These bad things have the ability to bring intense sorrow into our lives. We need to look into Scripture to understand what the Bible teaches about experiencing hardships in our lives.

There is an unfortunate teaching that has infected churches in America. It is being taught that once you give your life to Christ and become a Christian, you will be blessed immensely and no longer experience hardships. There are many blessings promised in the Bible, but there are also promises of pain and suffering in this world. When we look to Scripture on the subject of sorrow, we see that it is not something that we can escape in this life, but it is something that Christ promises us deliverance from one day. John 16:33 says, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” Jesus takes time before His impending crucifixion to talk to His disciples and encourage them. He tells them that they are going to face tribulation in this world, but they can have hope because He has overcome the world. This Scripture still applies to us as disciples of Christ today. We live in a broken sinful world, because of this sin, bad things happen. We

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will experience hardships in this world, but we can be encouraged because we know Christ has overcome the world.

We all feel buried in sorrow at times in our lives. This sorrow that we feel is the direct result of hardships that we experience. Christ tells us that we will experience hardships in this life. He does not want us to be naïve to the brokenness of this world, but God sent His Son to heal that brokenness. Christ has overcome the world and we can rejoice in that truth in the midst of our sorrow. Jesus did not warn us of the hardships of this world, and then do nothing about it. He warned His disciples about hardships, then went to the cross to give us a way at salvation. Jesus says on the cross “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me”. Christ experienced the greatest sorrow of all when God had to turn away from Him because He was carrying the sins of humanity. Christ made this sacrifice for you and me. Hardships and sorrow are going to come, but when we face the hardships of this world we can take heart because He has overcome the world.

STIPULATIONS

Philip Piasecki | Worship Leader

Nobody likes the idea of experiencing sorrow. It's not something that is a common topic of discussion at parties. When someone asks us how we are doing, we are much more likely to just say we are good instead of actually being honest about sorrow we are experiencing. While sorrow is obviously not a popular thing, it is something that all of us have in common. We all, at one point in our lives, have been filled with sorrow. We've seen in Scripture how Christ also experienced sorrow in His life. Also, while looking to the Scriptures, we have read that as believers we are promised sorrow by Christ. What is happening in our lives as we are going through sorrow? It's logical to ask how Christ uses sorrow as a tool in our spiritual lives. We want to know that what we are going through isn't for naught, but, that there is something positive that will come out of it.

In Romans 8, we see Paul discussing suffering in this life. We find one of the most famous (and misquoted) Scriptures in the whole Bible. Romans 8:28: ***And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. Most people quote that verse and leave off the second half for those who are called according to His purpose. However, when understood correctly, this Scripture can be so encouraging to those who are buried in sorrow. Those of us who are believers are called according to His purpose.***

When we go through trials, we can have confidence that Christ is using that trial for good. We may not know what good it is doing at the moment, but one day we may look back at that sorrow and see what Christ did through it. For some of us, in this life we may

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never see how God used a trial in our life, but we trust that God is sovereign over all.

We live in a broken world, where bad things happen, but God is in control at all times. As believers we need to trust in Romans 8:28, understanding that God is working all things together for our good for His purpose. It is natural for us to want to know why something is happening, but we need to trust in God's sovereign plan when life does not make sense to us. When you find yourself buried in sorrow, I hope the understanding that there is a purpose behind your circumstances can be an encouragement. We need to trust in the truth of Scriptures, God's children are called according to His purpose, and He is working our sorrow for good.

THE HOLY SPIRIT PRAYS

Philip Piasecki | Worship Leader

In my life I have been very blessed, but I have also gone through a couple very difficult situations. Those situations brought about some great sorrow in my life. During these times, I tried my best to lean on God as much as possible, but at times I found myself not even knowing what to pray. Many of us have been in a situation where we are so broken we can't even think of the words to say when we go to cry out to God. The beautiful thing is we are not alone during these times of great sorrow. When Christ ascended into Heaven, He promised His disciples that He would send a Helper. God sent us the Holy Spirit to walk along side us in our daily lives to guide our every step.

Romans 8:26-27 says, ***Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.***

When we find ourselves in those times of great sorrow, when we do not even know what to pray to God, we can rest in these words from the Scriptures. Romans tells us that when we do not know what to pray the Holy Spirit intercedes for us! What an incredible encouragement to know that the Holy Spirit knows what we need even when we do not have the words to pray it.

We all will have times where we feel buried in sorrow. During these times, it is so important that we talk to God and tell him our thoughts, fears, and struggles. We can be encouraged knowing that in the times that we cannot think of what to pray, the Spirit is

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interceding on our behalf to God the Father. We can rest knowing that the Holy Spirit is interceding on our behalf. Scripture also tells us how God is the God of all comfort and comforts us in every affliction. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, ***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.***

The whole Trinity plays a part in taking care of us through our sorrow; this is something we can rejoice in. When we receive that comfort in our sorrow, we are not supposed to keep it to ourselves either. We are given comfort from Christ so that we can comfort those who are in affliction also. When we find ourselves buried in sorrow let's trust in the work of the Trinity to comfort us and pray on our behalf, and let's take that comfort and share it with others.

MY WEAKNESS + GOD = STRENGTH

Philip Piasecki | Worship Leader

We live in a culture where we are taught that we are not supposed to show weakness. Admitting that we are too weak to do something is seen as embarrassing. At all cost, we are expected to be tough enough to handle every situation that comes our way. We are supposed to be strong enough (both mentally and physically) to handle anything we may have to handle. When we aren't able to do something, many times we are too ashamed to ask for help. I think of the classic example of men and directions. We men always know where we are going, and even when we are lost, many of us would rather keep driving then ask for directions. It is incredible that even in the age of the GPS some of us still manage to get ourselves so lost, and many times we are too prideful to ask for help. When we deal with sorrow, many of us feel like we can't handle it on our own but are too prideful to look to Christ for help. If you feel like you can't do it on your own, you are right! We cannot deal with the hardships of this life alone. The good news is, Christ knows this, and He is ready and willing to strengthen us in our times of need.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 says, ***But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***

When we are deep in sorrow, we get to see the power of Christ at work. It's incredible to think that we can celebrate our sorrow because it is an opportunity to see the power of Christ. When we

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look to Christ in our times of sorrow people will see us wonder how we are still standing. We can joyfully explain to them that it is only by the grace of God! So many of us have made it through difficult times in our lives and looking back on them now we know that it was the power of God holding us up through those dark times. Even though the sorrow may be great, we can take comfort knowing that Christ's power is made perfect in our weakness.

No matter how buried in sorrow you may be, understand that the power of Christ can work in your circumstances. When we are weak, we are strong because of the strength of Christ. This example of Christ's power can be a witness to people we know that do not know Christ. Times of sorrow will come, but the power of Christ will always be there to lift us up.

FUTURE

Philip Piasecki | Worship Leader

My wife absolutely hates flying. There is just something about it that scares her to death. The good news for me is that it doesn't keep her from flying. She is able to put up with the difficulty of the flight because she knows that there is an end in sight. Also, she knows that the destination is going to be worth the trouble she goes through to get there. I think of this example when thinking about sorrow. This whole week we've discussed being buried in sorrow. We've looked to Scripture to see what it has to say about the subject and to get direction on how to deal with the sorrowful times in our life. The final aspect of sorrow that I want us to deal with is the truth that one day sorrow will be no more.

Revelation 21:1-4 says, *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'*

This passage is one of my favorites in all of the Scripture. It paints such a beautiful picture of what eternity is going to be like for God's children. One day God is going to wipe every tear from our eyes, no more death, no more mourning, and no more pain. When

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we feel buried in sorrow, we can rejoice knowing that one day it will end. One day we won't have to deal with a death of a loved one, we won't have to hear a bad diagnosis from a doctor, and we won't have to experience emotional pain inflicted on us by a friend. God sent His Son to pay the penalty for our sins, allowing us to spend eternity with Him in a perfect place.

When we are buried in sorrow, we need to keep pushing forward in life. We need to honor God with our every word and action even in the difficult times. God has promised us that one day all the terrible things in this world will pass away. Let's allow that truth to sustain us through our difficult times. Let's keep our eyes focused on Christ and the eternity that He has promised us, knowing that one day our sorrow will be no more.

BURIED NO MORE

Caleb Combs | Gathering Pastor

We have spent the last three weeks discussing being buried in sin, having our hopes and dreams buried, and being buried in sorrow. In all these studies, we were shown that our feelings, thoughts, and experiences were real and that others faced them too.

In Lesson One, what were some suggestions to avoid being buried in sin? _____

In Lesson Two, how does Joseph's story encourage us when we encounter the detours and potholes of life? _____

In Lesson Three, is sorrow wrong? What advice could you give someone who is buried in sorrow? _____

Again, Happy Easter!

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Mark 16:1-7 records:

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3 And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” 4 And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. 5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. 6 And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

Why do you think Jesus singled out Peter (verse 7)?

What was Peter’s last interaction with Jesus? _____

Luke 22:54-62 says:

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. 55 And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. 56 Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” 57 But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do

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not know him.” 58 And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” 59 And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” 60 But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

How was Peter buried – in sin, lost hopes and dreams, or sorrow?

Going back to Mark 16:7, how could Jesus’ resurrection and specifically singling out Peter help him be “buried no more”?

It is Easter, and typically instead of our typical greetings, “Hello”, “Hi”, or actually “Greetings”, Christians say, “He has risen!” The anticipated response is “He has risen, indeed!” This traditional greeting is taken from Luke 24:34, ***The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!***

Why do you think the disciples responded that Jesus “even” appeared to Simon (Peter)? _____

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Let's go back to the cross for a moment. John 19:30 says, When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "***It is finished,***" and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

What did Jesus mean by it is finished? _____

At the cross, Jesus "buried" our sin. In His resurrection, He allows us to be "buried no more". Jesus completed His assignment. He paid the price for our sins. He made it possible for us to be restored and reconciled to God. His work on earth was finished.

2 Timothy 4:7 uses the same Greek word for "finished",
I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

What "good fights" do we need to take on individually and as a Christian community? _____

What does finishing strong mean to you? _____

What does it mean to "keep the faith"? _____

Revelation 21 (the second to last chapter of the Bible) says:
And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for

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these words are trustworthy and true.” 6 And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (verses 5-8).

Jesus again refers to completion by saying It is done! (verse 6) Everything will come to an end. Only two places will remain. What are they? _____

What determines our destination? _____

John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 6:4-11: We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8

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Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Summarize verses 5 and 8. _____

Our circumstances, reputation, past, and sin don't have to make us feel buried. They don't have to hold us back. Jesus offers life.

He is Risen!

We will Rise again.

THE RESURRECTION BRINGS HOPE

Ty Woznek | Pastor's Academy Lead Professor

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Our view of death is life

Every culture and worldview operate based on his or her view of death. Ancient Greeks believed that if they were forgotten, they ceased to exist. Others believe in a treadmill called reincarnation. Some don't believe in death at all. The Christian view of death isn't death, but resurrection. We believe in life. Our story is not merely we die and go to Heaven. Our story includes being resurrected and forever living with Jesus!

Jesus is coming back

A massive theme in the New Testament is that Jesus is coming back. He will not be sending a representative. Jesus Himself will return. Christians have differing views on how Jesus' return will appear. Sadly, some tend to ignore a critical teaching in the Bible.

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Regardless of our view of Jesus' return, the Spirit makes it clear his returning establishes hope. This hope is founded on Jesus rising again and conquering death.

Death is temporary; Life with Jesus is forever

God designed us to have a relationship with Him. Death is an unnatural state that resulted from sin. Death brings mourning because death is a tragedy. The Thessalonian believers thought that their loved ones who died missed Jesus. Paul encourages them by saying, "No, our loved ones who died get to go first." Death is a temporary state who was defeated by Jesus. Like God designed us, one day we will live forever in relationship with Jesus.

Be comforted

Holidays are challenging times for those who recently suffered loss. The first year is the hardest and after that mourning is just hard. What I love about this passage and others like it, is Jesus gave mourning an end date. This is why Paul later says that we do not mourn like those who have no hope. However, there is more than just comfort in life after death...

THE RESURRECTION BRINGS FORGIVENESS

Ty Woznek | Pastor's Academy Lead Professor

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

No mistake is too big for Jesus

Denying Jesus is a big deal. Peter had foot-in-mouth disease. He often spoke first without thinking. When Jesus describes what would happen, Peter said he would stick by Jesus. Even after being warned, Peter denied Jesus three times. Peter was ecstatic that Jesus rose from the dead. Feeling guilty about scattering and abandoning Jesus, they went back to what they knew, fishing. Then, a living Jesus shows up and cooks breakfast.

An elephant feast

Too often you and I like to dismiss the elephant in the room. We are scared by conflict, scared by reconciliation. You and I are afraid of rejection. If the Bible included a heart rate monitor, Peter's pulse would be pretty rapid at this encounter. Jesus engaged Peter in conversation and slaughters the elephant in the room. In this brief story, Jesus not only reconciles but also restores Peter.

Band of brothers

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There is much commentary about what the word love means in the Bible. Jesus asks Peter twice using one word for love; Peter responds with a different word all three times. Phileo commonly referred to as “brotherly” love also carries the idea of men together in combat. Think Band of Brothers. For some, this kind of love was actually higher than the commonly used term agape for love. Peter said three times he was all in. The third time Jesus asked, He was seeking if Peter was all in.

Stop “fishing”

Jesus tells Peter to follow Him. He is telling Peter to stop going back to his old life of fishing and to live the life God called him to. We all struggle with sin. It is not a matter of if we struggle with sin, but what sin is the struggle. Some of us failed horribly, and we think that God is done with us. We may attend church, but our life and purpose is back to our old “fishing.” It is time we stop fishing. Let me be clear: Jesus conquered the grave. Our sin is pretty small in comparison to that. Jesus restored the denier Peter, the skeptic Thomas, the murderer Paul, the IRS agent Matthew, Zacchaeus, and His desire is to restore you. However, there is more than just the healing He brings...

THE RESURRECTION BRINGS A MISSION

Ty Woznek | Pastor's Academy Lead Professor

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus saves, Jesus sends

Jesus didn't just save us so we could escape hell, have hope, and be restored to God. Jesus saved us to send us to be a blessing to others. This is a pattern we see throughout the Bible. God saves someone and then commissions him or her. We do not have to earn God's favor or His love. He pours it on us, and then He sends us out with that incredible news.

Make disciples

A disciple is one who follows Jesus to become more like Jesus. This is not a solo effort, but a family activity. Our focus on reaching the lost, gathering with the saints, and growing in the Word comes from here. Your job and my job is to make disciples as well as be a disciple. The disciples couldn't help but share the truth that Jesus is alive. It transformed their lives, and it should transform out lives as well.

Here's how:

- Define your mission field

Where you are is your mission field. Be intentional about it. First, pray. Seek who God wants you to connect with, how to connect

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with that person, and for open doors. Second, get others to pray with and for you. Third, figure out how to be around people who do not know Jesus in meaningful ways. Presence comes before friendship. Fourth, build genuine friendships with those who don't know Jesus. Relationships are the glue of truth. Fifth, have the courage to share the Gospel with your friend. Presence comes before friendship and friendship before truth.

- Identify with Jesus

Baptism is a symbol, like a wedding ring, of our love and devotion to Jesus. Baptism also pictures Jesus' death, being put into the water, and resurrection, coming out of the water. It is identifying. The word baptism was used for dying cloth. It carries the idea of being put in but never coming out. Once a part of Jesus, always a part of Jesus. The Bible also talks about how we are baptized with the Holy Spirit when we accept Jesus died and rose again for us. God Himself resides in and identifies with us. Baptism is a symbolic act followed by living a lifestyle that says we are all about Jesus.

- Grow in the Word

We are all to be teachers. Our audience sizes may be different. A key part of discipling people is teaching them to be like Jesus. This comes from serving with them, from discussing what they learned about the Bible, and even taking them with you as you share the Gospel with others. Studying the Bible is not just for our information or for us to live better lives. Studying the Bible is also about teaching others what we've learned. However, there is more to making disciples...

THE RESURRECTION BRINGS LOVING SACRIFICE

Ty Woznek | Pastor's Academy Lead Professor

R*epay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Romans 12:17-21).

We need to die to self

You are reading this because of sacrifice. All that you benefit from The River comes from sacrifice. Starting with Jesus, people gave their all to share the hope we have in Him. Jesus died and rose again to give us hope. The Apostles, with the exception of John, were martyred for their faith. Many throughout church history died so you and I would know the truth of the resurrection. In fact, many died and suffered so you and I could read the Bible in our own language.

First offering was 100%

We get scared when people talk about money, and we get frustrated when people put demands on our time. When the church started in Acts chapter 2, the saints sold all that they had and had all things in common. Why? Pentecost was a pilgrimage feast. People from all over the known world would gather in Jerusalem to celebrate the receiving of the Torah (law). Suddenly there were a bunch of weirdoes speaking about a risen Jesus in their own language! They showed up to celebrate a feast, and they left as

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missionaries. The truth of Jesus rising from the dead radically altered the direction of their lives. Tradition tells us that a group of believers at Pentecost were the ones that started the church in Rome.

Loving our enemy to life

John tells us the world hates us because the world does not know the Father. Paul says whoever desires to live a godly life will be persecuted. Following Jesus could cost us a dream, our time, our job, friendship, and for some even our life. This sounds hard and unfair. This often seems foreign to us because our country is an exception to the historical rule. We have freedom of religion. What becomes radical is not to stand up for our rights, but to stoop down and serve. The pathway to winning people to Jesus is not bolstering our rights, but in lovingly serving our enemy.

In the end, we win

At summer camp, a pastor told a story of a girl who made a commitment to win her peers to Jesus. Her freshmen year they made fun of her and bullied her all year long. Sophomore year she made the same commitment. The suffering increased. Junior year she made the same commitment, and the bullying got even worse. Ridiculed by the school, stuffed in lockers, books knocked out of hand, and she got back up. Senior year she made the same commitment, and the persecution started until she got yelled at by a classmate. She could not understand why after all these years she would not give up. Why?! The girl shared why and who once bullied her became a sister in Christ. One by one more got saved and a profound work of God came upon that school. She endured years of suffering because she knew in the end we win...

THE RESURRECTION BRINGS REWARD

Ty Woznek | Pastor's Academy Lead Professor

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:10–15).

Stay humble, friends

Corinthians describes a church of growth, not problems. We often play hard with the book, but we forget that our lives are messy, too. Sorry, River, but we are not perfect. The first part of the book Paul addresses concerns he has, and the last part of the book he addresses concerns they brought up. Yes, it's messy. Paul starts off by warning us to stay humble and focus simply on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Then he gives an illustration about rewards in heaven.

Just passing or A+?

I remember high school graduation. A classmate was ecstatic that he passed. He just barely passed a class, and his score was a 64.5, the bare minimum to pass. Others gave speeches because they had the top grades in the school. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are saved for life. Our sins are not brought up before us.

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However, the quality of our ministry will be judged.

We will be tested

Paul compares our works to two categories: those things that will burn up and those things that will be refined by fire. This builds on the concept of the church being a building. The foundation of that building is Jesus. Everything we do must be built on that foundation. The idea of being careful does not mean fear as much as being intentional. A builder respects the tools and the dangers he faces. He methodically and intentionally builds in such a way that the structure will last. This is the mindset we bring to serving Jesus - A builder.

Always Jesus

The resurrection brings out our best when we are careful “how we build.” It means living with an eternal perspective. One where a loving approach is founded on built on a solid foundation. The foundation should always be Jesus.

THE RESURRECTION BRINGS HEAVEN TO EARTH

Ty Woznek | Pastor's Academy Lead Professor

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Romans 8:18-25).

The Resurrection is our hope and salvation

The Hope Paul is referring to is how Jesus conquered the grave. As Jesus rose from the grave, so shall we. This incredible truth is not to be lost in our thinking. It brings both comfort and compulsion to serve Jesus. In Romans 7 Paul describes how the Old Testament Torah (law) cannot save us or sanctify us. As a result, we are stuck in our sins. Romans 8 describes how Jesus did what the law could not do, how the Spirit enables us to conquer our sin, and how God provides in our current sin struggles. A key provision is hope. Our struggle with sin has an end date!

For God so loved the world

Jesus didn't just die for us, but to one day restore all creation. In

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Revelation the phrase Jesus uses is making all things new. Ancient Greek and Roman thought viewed the spiritual as good and what was earthly as bad. This unbiblical viewpoint also crossed into the church creating the false sacred versus secular view. God sees truth, brokenness, and, because of Jesus, redemption. Creation itself is awaiting Jesus' return. Natural disasters, pain, cancer, and deformities all have an end date.

Heaven is God on Earth

Heaven is not you and I playing some stringed instrument on a cloud while wearing an organic cloth diaper. Today's passage, as well as Revelation, describe something way way WAY more awesome. Ultimately heaven is where God resides with us on Earth. Creation will be restored and made new in a way that will be much like Eden, but better. Life will be like now, but no suffering. Life on Earth will involve work, but without toil. Life on Earth will involve friendship, without fear of rejection. Heaven and Earth become one, and we live according to the purpose God gave to work and be His friend in perfect peace.

The bottom line

There is sin, suffering, and anguish today. Tragedy's end date is fixed in time because Jesus rose from the dead. With this message of hope and healing, what are you going to do with it? What have you to lose? What do people lose if you keep silent about this incredible message and truth of hope?

BURIED ANY DOUBT HE WAS ALIVE

Dr. Randy Johnson | Growth Pastor

Jesus' last words on the cross were *It is finished* (John 19:30). Jesus came to earth to mend the relationship between God and man. Man's sin had brought a price they couldn't afford. Only Jesus could pay it, but it would cost Him His life. He died for our sin. He came to earth to die. He was born to die. Finally, when He is about to die, He says, It is finished.

However, He doesn't stop there.

Jesus rose from the dead. Being God, the grave couldn't hold Him.

However, He doesn't stop there.

He stays on earth proving He is alive and therefore, God.

"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead." Timothy Keller

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Acts 1:1-3

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

How long was Jesus on earth after the resurrection?

Why did Jesus stay on earth so long? _____

John 20:11-17

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling

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to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Which Mary is this? _____

Why do you think a woman was the first person He appeared to?

Matthew 28:9-10

And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

1 Corinthians 15:5

and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Why do you think Cephas (Peter) is singled out from the twelve?

Luke 24:13-19

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing

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together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.

This is three days later, why do you think it is still the talk of the town? _____

Was Jesus the only one crucified that day? _____

John 20:19-20

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

Acts 1 spoke of Jesus giving many proofs that He was alive. What are some of them here? _____

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John 21:1-6

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." 6 He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.

1 Corinthians 15:6

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

How many total people would this be if you add an estimation for women and children? _____

1 Corinthians 15:7

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Why is James singled out from the apostles? _____

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Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

What did Jesus call them to do (hint: reach, gather, grow)?

What do Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, and Karl Marx all have in common? _____

If signs marked gravesites, their's would read, "occupied". Only Jesus' grave rates a vacancy sign.

The eleven disciples believed Jesus rose from the dead so much that they were willing to die for it. Historical writers documented how each disciple died:

Matthew – killed by the sword

James – thrown from the pinnacle of the Temple and then stoned.

James, son of Zebedee – killed by sword

Bartholomew (Nathaniel) – crucified

Andrew – crucified

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Thomas – speared and dragged by horses

Philip – crucified

Thaddaeus – killed by arrows

Simon – crucified

Peter – crucified upside down

John – unharmed by boiling oil, sent to Patmos

Why was Peter crucified upside down? _____

They tried to kill John in boiling oil, but he was unscathed. What other Bible story has men untouched by the elements?

Some have accused the disciples of stealing Jesus “dead” body and hiding it. This would be an amazing prank. It has some obvious problems:

How would they account for all His appearances – 40 days?

What would they have gained from hiding His body – money, power, women? _____

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How great does a “prank” have to be for one to be willing to die for it? _____

Even if you were willing, are you sure your ten friends will keep the secret to the grave? _____

Sometimes it takes more faith to believe Jesus isn’t God than to believe He rose from the dead.

Acts 1:7-9

He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

These are Jesus’ last words on earth. Then He was lifted up (Ascension). Last words normally hold a little more emphasis.

What was Jesus leaving with His followers? _____

What was Jesus’ final calling to His followers? _____

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Is there any potential significance of the order of the locations listed? _____

How do these locations relate to your region? _____

How are/can you help reach these areas? _____

“Few people seem to realize that the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone to a worldview that provides the perspective to all of life.”

Josh McDowell

“IT IS FINISHED” OR IS IT?

Tommy Youngquist | Children’s Pastor

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:28-30).

Of all the sayings of Christ on the cross, none is more important than, “It is finished”. (And if you’re reading this devotion you have to make me a promise – every time you say, “It is finished,” you have to read it super loud and with conviction in your head. Like you are declaring it to the world from a mountaintop. OK?). When Christ uttered these words while suffering in extreme pain, He was declaring to God that OUR debt was paid in full! Think about that River Church, when Jesus uttered those words, He was declaring the debt owed to His Father was wiped away completely and forever. Not that Jesus wiped away any debt that He owed His Father; rather, Jesus eliminated the debt owed by all of mankind – the debt of sin - My sin - Your sin - All sin! In every stage of Jesus’ life, He valued us over everything else.

Then, three days later, Jesus was not found in His tomb. The stone was rolled away, and the tomb was empty. Jesus was alive! He defeated death and made good on His promise to us to be “with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). When Christ rose from the dead, He charged humanity with a task, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded**

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you” (Matthew 28:19-20). When Christ declared, “It is finished,” on the cross, something else began - a new age, where humanity could have a more intimate relationship with their creator.

We all know that when one thing ends, another begins. You can apply this concept to anything in life. For example, most of us just completed our 2015 taxes. Yay! That horrible process of taxes is over... or is it? Directly after you finish your 2015 taxes, the process of accounting, saving receipts, looking for extra deductions, etc. begins for 2016. When one thing ends, another begins. When Jesus declared, “It is finished,” the debt of our sin was complete, but now something else begins. In this new beginning, all of humanity has a decision to make: Believe in Christ, or don’t believe.

What are you going to decide? If you have put your faith and trust in Jesus, what are you doing with your new beginning? Christ completed and satisfied our debt. Then began our life! Are you going to make the most of it and do what Jesus commanded us to do? Are you going to tell others about Jesus and help them learn more about Him? Or are you just going to waste another evening doing the ole’ Netflix and chill tonight? Something has begun for you if you have decided to believe Jesus died and is risen. You have to choose what to do with that beginning.

PROOF

Tommy Youngquist | Children's Pastor

Jesus is alive! Can you just imagine having a close friend pass away and then three days later, you're just hanging with some other friends talking about "the good ole' days" and how it used to be with them around, and another friend comes running into the room screaming that your friend that died was alive?! How would you react to this person? I would probably react the same way the disciples did in Mark 16:9-11:

Now when He (Jesus) rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

Jesus had to prove to those who did not believe that He had actually risen from the grave and defeated death. This is how He did it (it's super cool):

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, 'Peace to you!' But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them (Luke 24:36-42).

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Now come on... before you go judging those people for making Jesus prove to them that He had risen, think about how many times you have said to God (under your breath, of course) "Prove it... God." "If you're such a loving and wonderful God, how come this happened to me?" Now I know none of you have ever asked that question, but I have. So many times in my life I have felt extremely distant from God and have thought to myself, "If God really wants this for me, He will give me a sign. He will prove that He is in control and show it to me." But is that true belief? You see, what I have finally realized about the proof of Jesus and His resurrection is that He will show us when we are ready and on His terms. It is our job to have faith, trust, and believe. No matter what. It is His job to make good on His Word... and He will...when He is ready.

River Church, does God have to continually prove Himself to you for you to believe in Him (And by prove himself I mean constantly allowing good things to happen in your life)? Or are you going to believe in Him no matter what and wait for moments in your life where God chooses to show you that He is with you? Are you going to believe He is King of all when you lose that good job? Or when one of your kids won't obey? Or when a family member is tragically taken from this world? Believe in your heart that God is God, no matter what, and He just may let you touch His hands and feet one day!

PETER'S RESTORATION

Tommy Youngquist | Children's Pastor

Peter's restoration after the resurrection is my favorite account in the Bible. It's my favorite because it reassures me, every time I read it, that God will restore me as many times as I need (and it's a lot!). Aren't you glad that God will forgive us as many times as we deny Him?

Let's take a look at this account:

- Jesus predicts Peter's betrayal

Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus answered him, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.' Peter said to him, 'Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' Jesus answered, 'Will you lay down you life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times' (John 13:36-38).

- Peter does deny Jesus three times

...Then a servant girl..., said, 'This man also was with him.' But he (Peter) denied it... And a little later someone else saw him and said, 'You also are one of them.' But Peter said, 'Man, I am not.'... still another insisted, saying, 'Certainly this man also was with him' ... But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about.' And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered... (Luke 22:54-62).

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- Jesus forgives Peter

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep’ (John 21:15-17).

After the resurrection, Jesus went out of His way to restore Peter. Can you imagine the guilt and shame Peter must have felt after he denied Jesus? Can you imagine what was running through Peter’s head when he saw Jesus after the resurrection knowing what he had done before Jesus died? Some of us, including myself, don’t have to imagine too hard because we have betrayed Jesus. We have acted in a way that denied we even know Him. We have said something to someone that did not associate ourselves as a Christ follower.

There’s good news though, Jesus is willing to restore YOU as many times as you need. You don’t have to live in shame for what you have done in the past. Jesus will forgive you, and you can move forward without that burden of guilt and shame.

GO THEREFORE

Tommy Youngquist | Children's Pastor

The River Church is growing! For that, I commend you. You see, it's easy for us to be okay with a packed house at a football game, hockey arena, rock concert, or even at a play. It makes us happy knowing that so many people surrounding us have the same ideals, the same excitement, the same passion – exemplifying it by their presence and support (and at times their extreme enthusiasm and energy).

So why do the majority of Christians get uncomfortable and fidgety when the church gets huge? To say that it isn't God's will that the church grows exponentially is, in essence, to ignore The Great Commission.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20

What part of “all nations” do we think means small numbers? Jesus had passion for growth. He taught his disciples to have passion for growth. They prayed in the upper room and saw, in one day, over 3,000 baptized into the church.

River Church, we need to have the same passion for growing our church that the disciples had. After all, aren't we disciples, too? Jesus commanded us to go, tell, baptize, teach, and disciple other people. Are you doing that?

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If you are a parent, your commands to your children and their ability to understand and follow through can make the difference between family happiness and chaos. The commands Jesus gave us are just as important for us, His children, to understand and follow.

The making of disciples involves inviting people to follow Jesus. This happens individually as we invite others to church, share our stories, and tell people about Jesus. It also happens on a church level as the church funds the building of new locations and its own growth to make room for more people to join God's family. We can participate in making disciples on a church level by giving of our time, by volunteering, and by giving tithes and offerings.

When we understand that God wants us to make disciples in these ways and begin to follow through on that command, our happiness will grow as we see people meet Jesus. The best part of all is that Jesus will be helping us the whole time. His command in Matthew 28 ends with a promise that He will be with us, even to the "end of the age." So, how are you 'making disciples' as an individual? How are you 'making disciples' as part of the church? Let's keep the River Church growing. Let's keep seeing people, who are lost, find Jesus.

THE PLACE OF HONOR

Tommy Youngquist | Children's Pastor

After His resurrection, Jesus returned to heaven to prepare a place for us, to intercede on our behalf with His Father, and to send the Holy Spirit to us. His work to reunite us with God (the only way that could've happened) was done. He returned to "the Place of Honor."

When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. And the disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked through them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs. Mark 16:19-20 (NLT)

Today, Jesus is in heaven preparing a place for us to reside with Him. He is completely aware of what is going on in each of our lives and intercedes for us with God the Father. He has also sent the Holy Spirit to reside in every believer's heart to help build Christ-like character, deepen our faith, and equip us for service.

Think about that River Church, after we (humanity) crucified Jesus, His next step was to sit beside His Father interceding on our behalf. Even though we continually disappoint Him, He never stops that intercession. When I think about it, it brings me to tears. I think about how undeserving I am to have someone love me so much. To have someone love me in a way, that no matter what I do to disappoint him or her, they still love me. I can't even comprehend it at times.

A little 6-year-old boy asked me one time "If he could ever do anything that would make God stop loving him." I got the

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opportunity, right then and there, to tell him about God's grace. I read Romans 8:1-2 to him which says,

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”

I went on to explain to him that grace covers all our sins: past, present, and future. He could never do anything that would make God “not love him.” Then, he asked me what it meant to be “in Christ Jesus,” like the verse says. I told him, “It’s simple. Romans 10:9 says that if we declare that Jesus is Lord and believe God raised Jesus from the dead, we will be saved. Jesus’ invitation to salvation is for everyone, even you! If you accept that invite, you are ‘in Christ Jesus’ and He will always love you no matter what.”

River Church, in case you haven’t heard this, Jesus died for you! If you believe that, He is in the place of honor, on the right hand of God, interceding for you still. Every time you feel guilt or shame for doing something that you know dishonored God, all you have to do is ask Jesus to petition God for you. Your sin is forgiven through Jesus. God’s grace is big enough to forgive all our sins; His power is big enough to conquer them!

OUR RESPONSE

Tommy Youngquist | Children's Pastor

This week, we have spent time learning about events that happened after the resurrection of Jesus:

1. It is finished – When Jesus declared, “It is finished,” the debt of our sin was complete, but now something else begins. In this new beginning, all of humanity has a decision to make. Believe in Christ, or don’t believe.

2. The Proof – Believe in your heart that God is God, no matter what, and he just may let you touch his hands and feet one day!

3. Peter’s Restoration – Jesus is willing to restore YOU as many times as you need. You don’t have to live in shame for what you have done in the past. Jesus will forgive you, and you can move forward without that burden of guilt and shame.

4. Go Therefore – When we understand that God wants us to make disciples and begin to follow through on His command, our happiness will grow as we see people meet Jesus.

5. The Place of Honor – Jesus died for you! If you believe that, He is in the place of honor, on the right hand of God, interceding for you still. Every time you feel guilt or shame for doing something that you know dishonored God, all you have to do is ask Jesus to petition God for you.

How are you going to respond to what you have read this week? If something in your life needs to be changed, are you going to change it? Are you just going to continue with the same thing? The Bible says in 1 John 1:9:

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“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

That is a promise that God has made to us! Jesus died to take away the sin of the world. After the resurrection, Jesus sat down on the right hand of God to help us with life. He wants us to be in full connection with the Father and is willing to do anything to make that happen (even dying for us).

It has been an incredible week with you River Church! My prayer is that you are embracing everything that Jesus did and is doing for us. We serve a living God that wants to help us from day to day. My prayer is that you want His help and are actively seeking it. Let's continue to be the church that God wants us to be. Let's continue to tell others about what Jesus has done and is doing for all of humanity.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20