STUDENT GROWTH COMMUNITY

SPRING 2025

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THE RIVER CHURCH

REACH | GATHER | GROW

CONTENTS

9 **LESSON ONE:** REACH IN EPHESIANS

17 **LESSON TWO:** WHY WORSHIP?

25 **LESSON THREE:** SPIRITUAL PREPAREDNESS PLAN

33 **LESSON FOUR:** THEREFORE

41 **LESSON FIVE:** FAMILY DONE DIFFERENTLY

49 **LESSON SIX:** INTENTION VERSUS OUTCOME

57 **LESSON SEVEN:** PROTECTON AND PREPAREDNESS

67 **LESSON EIGHT:** GOD CANNOT TELL A LIE

73 **LESSON NINE:** HE WILL PROVIDE YOUR NEEDS

81 **LESSON TEN:** HE WILL RETURN

87 **LESSON ELEVEN:** HE WILL GIVE YOU REST

95 **LESSON TWELVE:** HE WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU

103 **LESSON THIRTEEN:** HE WILL PROVIDE A WAY OF ESCAPE

111 **LESSON FOURTEEN:** RESCUED

119 **LESSON FIFTEEN:** ROMANS 101

127 **LESSON SIXTEEN:** THE NEED OF THE WORLD

PREFACE

If you are reading this, you are most likely in middle school or high school (or the parent of someone who is). Whether you are a Christian or not, being a teenager comes with its challenges. There are low moments where you get left out, fail a big test, or receive bad news. But there are mountaintop moments too; moments where you get good news about the team or role you were hoping to make and the feeling of accomplishment that comes with it! Wherever you are right now, God's Word has something to say about it.

This semester we will explore family dynamics, examine the promises of God, and begin our church-wide Sermon Series on the book of Romans.

Come along on this journey by joining us every week for Student Growth Community at any of The River Church locations!

LESSON ONE

REACH IN EPHESIANS

PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

I remember hearing a story that greatly impacted my life a number of years ago. I was around 18 years old and getting ready to join the prison ministry team that The River Church had at the time. They would go on prison trips to many different places to show God's love to the inmates and preach the Gospel to them. In order to go on these trips, we had to go through some training to make sure we knew how to talk with them, how to be safe, and other various things. While I was going through this training, I remember the speaker talking about why we were doing these prison trips. He began this section of his talk by giving us this fake scenario. He said, "I want you all to imagine, right now, that somehow you came across the cure to cancer. You are the only one in the world who has come across this cure. You have the ability to heal anyone who has cancer with the medicine that you came across. What would you do with it?" Of course, in my head, I am thinking, "Obviously, I would go to every hospital in the world and start healing people." Then he said, "Now I want to ask you another question. You have the hope of the world, the Good News of Jesus Christ that can save anyone from their sin; what are you doing with this great cure?" That question has been running through my head ever since.

1. Do you think, as Christians, we have the cure for the world's greatest disease?

_____

_____

_____

As a church, we are going through our Reach, Gather, Grow series again, starting with Reach. The story I just gave you is one that I hope puts a motivation in your life to go out into the world and to share the Good News. We have the world's greatest cure, and one that every single person needs. We need to have an urgency to go out and to share this Good News.

Read Ephesians 2:1-3.

2. What is the condition of every human according to these verses?

_____
_____
_____

3. What do you think it means to be ***"dead in your tresspasses and sins"***?

_____
_____
_____

4. Verse 2 mentions ***"the sons of disobedience,"*** who were we being disobedient toward?

_____
_____
_____

When it comes to reaching the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ, we need to start with the bad news. In order for us to understand why the Good News is so good, we need to understand the bad news first. The bad news is that all of us have ***"sinned and fall short of the glory of God"*** (Romans 3:23). All of us have sinned against God, rejected His goodness, and are deserving of punishment.

Here are some other verses that I want you to read to understand why we need the Good News. Read the following verses as a group:

- Romans 3:10-18
- Romans 3:23
- 1 John 1:8-10
- Psalm 51:3-5

These verses, and many more in the Bible, make it abundantly clear that we have all sinned against God. None of us are good apart from the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. However, there is one

more aspect of our sin that we must realize to be able to understand how amazing the Good News is.

The first half of Romans 6:23 says, ***"For the wages of sin is death."***

5. What do we deserve because of our sin? Is that scary to you?

_____
_____
_____

To appreciate the Good News, we need to understand the bad news first. We are sinners deserving of eternity in Hell. We have rebelled against the Almighty God and have disobeyed His commands. Thankfully, all of our stories do not have to stop there.

Read Ephesians 2:8-9.

6. What is grace?

_____
_____
_____

7. What did Jesus do that allows for us to receive this grace?

_____
_____
_____

8. Make it personal. Have you received this grace?

_____
_____
_____

When we talk about the hope of the world and, as I mentioned earlier, the greatest cure for the greatest disease, this is what I am talking about. God sent His only Son, Jesus, into the world to live a perfect life for us. He then went to the cross and died the death that all of

us were supposed to die. He took our punishment upon Himself. He was buried and rose again three days later so that if we put our faith in Him, we will be saved. This is the greatest news anyone can ever hear! There is hope for everyone that if they believe in what Jesus did on the cross, they will be saved from their sin and the punishment they deserve! The question for us becomes, “What do we do with this Good News?”

Read Matthew 28:19.

9. What are you doing to go into the world and spread this Good News?

_____
_____
_____

10. When was the last time you told someone about Jesus?

_____
_____
_____

11. How can you have a greater urgency in spreading the Good News?

_____
_____
_____

12. Who is someone in your life that you need to “reach” with the Good News of Jesus?

_____
_____
_____

Reaching the world can be a daunting task. We hear how everyone in the world needs to be saved, and it becomes overwhelming. I want to encourage you, today, to start with those around you. Go to

your friends, family, and school mates to make sure they know what the Good News is and that Jesus is able to save them from their sin.

As a group, this is something you all should rally around. I want to challenge you all with this: Tell one another who that one person is in your life that you need to reach, pray for that person as a group, and encourage each other to do all you can to tell them about Jesus. When you tell that person and they surrender their lives to Lord, then, guess what? Do it again with another person. That is how we reach the world.

Charles Spurgeon said, “If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for.”

NOTES

LESSON TWO

WHY WORSHIP?

PASTOR PHILIP PIASECKI

When I was growing up, my family and I attended The River Church, Waterford location. I was there from the age of 5 to the age of 22, when I left with my wife to become the Worship Director at what is now The River Church, Grand Blanc location. When the Lord brought us back to the Waterford location in 2020, it felt like a blast from the past. I have distinct memories of being in late elementary school and early middle school, singing on the stage in the Waterford auditorium to a track on tape at our Saturday night gatherings. I would be a rich man if I had a dollar for every time I sang *"I Can Only Imagine."* I remember being so awkward and probably not the best singer, but it is still where my love for worship music started to grow. Now, here I am in my mid-30s, leading from that same stage, trying to help us all understand just what this whole "gathering" thing really is and why it always seems to involve singing.

1. Have you ever been involved in singing at church, school talent shows, or plays? What is your best memory from those things?

_____

_____

_____

When the Church gathers together, there are certain activities that go together like little Lego bricks to complete what we call a "gathering." Normally, we always have the preaching of God's Word, prayer, musical worship, and some form of offering. Periodically, we will take communion, have baptisms, dedicate children, and that list could go on and on. I think the idea of preaching being a part of a church gathering makes sense to everyone. I have never heard anyone ask, "Do we have to have a sermon today?" However, what I have heard is that people question why we sing at our gatherings. We are going to look at a few different reasons in Scripture why we are commanded to sing in worship to the Lord. When writing to the Church in Ephesians 5:18-21, Paul says, ***"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,***

giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

2. Have you ever questioned why we sing in gatherings?

_____
_____
_____

3. How are we commanded to sing in this Scripture?

_____
_____
_____

First, it is simply because God has commanded us to do so. I know nobody likes to hear the answer, "Because I said so." We are going to look at the reasons why God commands us to sing, but first, we have to trust that when God tells us in Scripture to do something, it is ultimately for His glory and for our good. According to the book *"Sing"* by Keith and Kristyn Getty, the word sing appears in the Scriptures over 400 times, and at least 50 are commands. As Paul addresses the Ephesian church, he tells them to sing and make a ***"melody to the Lord."*** Our praise comes out of the overflow of our thankful hearts for what Jesus has done for us. It is assumed in Scripture that when we really understand what Christ has done for us, what He has truly saved us from, that we will not even be able to contain our worship of Him.

Psalm 145:2-3 says, ***"Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable."***

4. Do you find yourself often in awe of God and who He is?

_____
_____
_____

5. If you believe this Scripture to be true, that He is ***"greatly to be praised,"*** what stops you from praising Him?

_____

_____

_____

Looking back at Ephesians 5:18-21, we see that we are commanded not only to make a ***"melody to the Lord"*** but to actually address ***"one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs."*** When we sing, we actually encourage those who are around us. We are singing the truths of Scripture together and collectively being reminded about who God really is. One people, with one voice, lifting up a song to Jesus strengthens each person in that room. As you sing about God being faithful, someone in that room needed to be reminded of that, and you contributed to encouraging them! This Scripture should encourage us to actively engage in our gatherings. Gatherings are not a spectator sport. I promise you there are much better singers and bands you can go sit and listen to; what we do is collectively come together to worship at the feet of Jesus and be encouraged by one another through those words.

6. How has the singing of other people in a gathering encouraged or impacted you?

_____

_____

_____

Matthew 26:30-32 records, ***"And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.'"***

7. Why do you think Scripture mentions that the disciples and Jesus sang together?

_____

_____

_____

Worshiping God through song prepares our hearts for what God is going to do. Here in Matthew, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn of worship to God before heading out to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus would warn them about what was about to happen with His crucifixion. When we worship through song during a gathering, the Holy Spirit is working on our hearts, preparing us to hear from the Lord through the songs and the preaching. As worship leaders, we understand that each person is bringing in their own baggage from the week or even from that morning. The whole world is competing for our attention. It is easy to come to gatherings distracted, so we worship through singing to bring the attention of our hearts and minds toward Christ. My hope each Sunday is that even if you do not feel like you want to sing at the beginning of the gathering, by the end of the gathering, you are thankful that you submitted to the Lord's commands and worshiped Him even when you may not have felt like it.

8. How have you experienced Christ use corporate worship through singing to change your heart?

_____

_____

_____

In Acts 16:25-26, we read, ***"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened."***

9. Why do you think singing in worship can have such an effect on our attitude and perspective?

_____
_____
_____

10. Why do you think Paul and Silas were singing hymns to God while in jail?

_____
_____
_____

Maybe Paul and Silas were singing praise to the Lord because they knew the Scriptures that tell us to praise God in the good times and the hard times. They could have been singing because they needed to be reminded of the truths of God that they were struggling with at the time. I know that through their worship, God prepared their hearts for what was going to happen next. God performed a miracle to release them from prison and save the soul of the jailer. I want to warn all of us as well, that a hard and bitter heart will reject worshiping the Lord through singing. Paul and Silas could have been angry with the Lord for their circumstance, instead they worshiped Him! If you find yourself more focused on critiquing the songs, the gathering, the ability of the band, or the hundreds of other things we can find to be critical about, I would ask you to search the condition of your heart. If your life is rooted in Christ and being filled with the Spirit of God, then your heart should desire to worship the Lord by singing His praises. Let us lift up a joyful noise to the Lord together each and every time we gather together.

"Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day." Psalm 96:1-2

"Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!" Psalm 150:1-2

NOTES

LESSON THREE

SPIRITUAL PREPAREDNESS PLAN

PASTOR FERDINAND SANDERS

Football has always been a huge love of mine. For those of you who may not know as much about football, Taylor Swift's boyfriend is playing football for an NFL team. While driving, I regularly listen to a fantasy football podcast and I am in more fantasy football leagues than any human should be in (I won 2 championships last year, in case you are wondering). I could not even begin to tell you how much time I have spent talking about, playing, listening to, watching, and reading up on football-related content. You either get this completely, or you have no idea the level of obsession I have with football!

I had played flag football growing up, but my first year of playing tackle football was when I was in 7th grade. I remember going through sign-ups my first year and getting all of the pads and equipment that I would need (it took some time for me to feel comfortable wearing all those pads). At that age, the type of offense and defense we ran or the "quality" of football was very basic. However, year after year, things improved. I got more comfortable wearing all the pads, my knowledge of the game grew, I got stronger, I was getting in better shape (totally lost now), and the overall quality of the sport was better. I played all four years in high school and ended up being one of three team captains my senior year. More than reminiscing on my glory days, I thought that this concept was a perfect example of what we will be looking at today.

1. For someone who is a follower of Christ, what are some things that you would expect to see in their life in a given week?

_____

_____

_____

We have been in the book of Ephesians, and this week we will be focusing on the aspect of Grow. Today we are going to be examining some passages in the book of Ephesians to get a look at what the Apostle Paul has to say about what our lives should look like as we grow in the Lord.

Ephesians 1:15-20 says, ***"For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places."***

2. What reputation did the Christians in Ephesus have?

_____
_____
_____

3. Paul's prayer and hope in verse 17 is that the Christians of Ephesus would receive the ***"Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him."*** What do you think this means?

_____
_____
_____

4. What is there to be gained by growing in ***"knowledge of him"***?

_____
_____
_____

Paul's hope is that this group of Christians that he is writing to would receive the ***"Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him."*** Though it may seem like a complex term, Paul is essentially expressing his hope and prayer that these Christians would grow in their faith, knowledge, and love of God. By doing so, he writes

in the following verses that we would come to know (or grow in our understanding) of three things.

- ***"The hope to which he has called you."***
- ***"The riches of his glorious inheritance"***
- ***"The immeasurable greatness of his power"***

When you see this list, do you begin to feel comforted, hopeful, and peaceful? Do different passages of Scripture or memories of God's faithfulness start to come to mind? My guess is that the more you have "grown" in your faith, the more comforted, hopeful, and at peace, you feel. The evidence of this is put to the test, along with our response when we face trials.

I firmly believe that the nature of the content that we intake drastically impacts our view of ourselves, the world, and even who God is. For anyone who may be struggling in their walk or their faith in Christ, I might begin to wonder where they are spending their time and the nature of the content they are being filled with.

5. Spend some time discussing different types of content in our world today (both good and bad) and how it impacts our hearts and minds.

_____

_____

_____

Just like football, or any sport or hobby for that matter, we will never meet our goals if the effort we put in does not match what we are hoping to get out. This concept is not foreign to our spiritual growth and is actually one that we find in Scripture.

Galatians 6:7-8 says, ***"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."***

6. What does it mean or look like to mock God?

_____
_____
_____

7. How does this message in verse 8 correspond to Paul's message in Ephesians chapter 1?

_____
_____
_____

You would think it would be absurd for anyone to sign up for the football team in their senior year of high school with expectations of being at the same skill level as someone who has been playing for a number of years. I would also hope that you would think it is just as absurd for someone to jump into a game without proper preparation and equipment. This is just as applicable to our spiritual walk.
In 1 Peter 5:8, we read, ***"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."***

8. What does it look like to be ***"sober-minded"*** and ***"watchful"***?

_____
_____
_____

Ephesians 6:10-17 records, ***"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,***

and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

9. Fill in the blanks below:

    Belt of _____
    Breastplate of _____
    Shoes of the _____
    Shield of _____
    Helmet of _____
    Sword of the _____

When thinking about the enemy, how ready or prepared do you feel to put up a fight? Factors that we have looked at today, such as growing in the knowledge of Him and putting on the full armor of God, are essential to fending off the schemes of the enemy; but too often, they do not get the proper priority or attention that they deserve. Whether or not we are ready, the enemy is fighting to bring you down. I have often heard the phrase, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." It is crucial for us to be aware of this, but also to build and develop our spiritual preparedness plan.

10. Spend some time either individually or as a group discussing your spiritual preparedness plan. What things do you do well? What are some areas of improvement? How equipped are you for the battle?

_____
_____
_____

NOTES

LESSON FOUR

THEREFORE

PASTOR JOSH COMBS AND PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

I love the word “therefore” in the Bible. It tells us essentially, because of this, do that or do not do those things or think this way or do not think that way.

Toward the end of Ephesians chapter 4, we find a big ***“therefore.”*** Paul is pivoting from the theological truths of the first few chapters to the issues of practical Christian living. He is going to talk about the nuts and bolts of Christianity or the “rubber meets the road” stuff. Notice the order of the letter, though: the foundation of theological truth, then practical living (not the other way around). Because of the profound mystery of Christ, because of the Gospel, because you have been made new, and because you have been created (or recreated) in Christ Jesus, ***“therefore.”***

If that Gospel transformation has happened, here is what your transformed or renewed life will look like. The Apostle Paul seems to focus primarily on how our relationships will change. Parenting, co-workers, bosses, classmates, neighbors, and others are all addressed. Chapter 4 is a rapid-fire sequence of how Jesus transforms the way we treat people.

- 4:25 - We do not lie, but we tell the truth.
- 4:26 - We get angry, but we do not hold a grudge.
- 4:28 - We do not steal but work hard and share.
- 4:29 - We do not gossip, but we encourage.
- 4:30 - We are not bitter, resentful, or malicious but tenderhearted and forgiving.

For this lesson, we are going to focus on one of these relationships. Ephesians 4:28 says, ***“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”***

1. Have you ever been the victim of a thief? If so, what happened?

_____

_____

_____

There are whole industries that have been started to try to combat stealing. Think about the amount of scams and identify thefts that take place on a daily basis.

Stop and think: what have you done today (out of habit, without thinking about it) to combat somebody stealing from you? Can you list ten things?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Sadly, if we keep thinking about it, we could come up with dozens of things that we do, without even noticing, that are meant to keep us from being stolen from.

2. Tough question: Have you ever stolen (took something that was not yours)? If so, what was the situation? (Avoid the “I stole a candy bar when I was a kid” stories. Be honest.)

_____
_____
_____

The Good News of Jesus changes us. We have a ***“such were some of you”*** moment (Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We are not thieves, swindlers, or con artists anymore. We have been made new.

In his letter to the Christians at Ephesus, Paul says, ***“Did you use to make ends meet by stealing? Well, no more! Get an honest job so that you can help others who can’t work”*** (Ephesians 4:28, MSG).

We do not steal anymore; we work. We do not cheat in school; we do the work.

Read Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:22-4:1.

3. What does work look like for a Christian?

_____
_____
_____

Christians should not steal or cheat. We should be the best employees and students. That means we do not steal from our boss or teacher.

That seems basic, but why is this important? Why should we be good workers? It is more than just to provide for our family and get through school. That is a good thing. See the progression of Ephesians 4:28. We do not steal from people anymore; we work, ***"So that we…have something to share with anyone in need."*** Outside of Christ, our needs were more important than others. That is the mentality that leads to stealing, but it is also the attitude that leads to greed. If we just say, "Okay, I will not steal anymore. I earn what I have," we would still fall short of what Jesus wants for us. We work so we can give it away! Whoever said, "Sharing is caring," was right.

4. How has someone shared with you at a moment when you were in need?

_____
_____
_____

5. Have you ever thanked them?

_____
_____
_____

(If not, pause right now and text them, call them, or write them a thank you note.)

6. Do you have somebody you need to share with? Who? How?

_____
_____
_____

7. How did the early church in Acts practice sharing? Read Acts 5:32-37.

_____
_____
_____

Because of what Christ has done, ***"therefore"*** stop stealing, start working, and start sharing. Why? It is because of Christ's great gifts to us! He is the ultimate example of sharing.

8. From Ephesians, what has Christ given to us?

   1:17 _____
   2:8 _____
   4:7 _____
   4:11-12 _____
   5:2, 25 _____

Our giving is a reflection of what Jesus Christ has given to us. How and how much we give is directly related to how we see the gift of God. When we are stingy, greedy, selfish, or cheating, we must return to the cross to see the greatest gift, given by the greatest giver and be inspired once again. That is the ***"therefore"*** moment we regularly need.

NOTES

LESSON Five

FAMILY DONE DIFFERENTLY

PASTOR RYAN STORY

As a child, I remember watching shows with quite a variety of plots: *"Family Matters," "Full House," "Home Improvement," "Fresh Prince,"* and *"Step by Step."* Every one of those sitcoms, portrayed to me what family was. I remember watching shows such as *"Little House on the Prairie," "Leave it to Beaver," "The Munsters,"* and *"The Brady Bunch"* and remember thinking how different the families were on those old-school shows to the newer sitcoms that I enjoyed watching.

1. What television sitcom or movie would you say most represents your family? What sitcom or movie would you say was the most different from your family?

_____

_____

_____

One of the realities that has always struck me as interesting was despite the fact that each show was very different, the value of family was there. Each show may have had a different target audience or portrayed the realities of a struggle in an era, yet the concept of a healthy family was there. Sadly for the church, these classic television shows can have more of an influence than the Word of God. We tend to look to Danny Tanner, Uncle Phil, or Carl Winslow as the model parent rather than those in the Bible. The hope is for Christian families to want to be different from the world. The person we are going to be studying is Abraham.

Genesis 11:27-32 records, ***"Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no child. Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to***

go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran."

2. Why were families so important in the days of Terah?

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There are always tons of details that get overlooked when reading the Bible. When we read something familiar, our brains tend to put information into context out of order. At this moment, when we read about Abram and Sarai, we can have the tendency to jump to the part of the story where they are living for God. At the moment the Bible introduces Abram, he is spiritually bankrupt. His family is living in a pagan city. They are surrounded by worldly ideologies and practices. In the book of Joshua, Joshua tells of the covenant that was formed and describes Terah and Abram as men who ***"served other gods"*** (Joshua 24:2). To make matters worse, while Terah and Abram were making the track to Canaan, they experienced the loss of Lot's father, Haran. While it is not explicitly said, Abram's family settled in the city of Heran, an area that would eventually house the worship of the false moon god, Sin. This soon-to-be "Father of a Nation" begins his family journey as an idol-worshiping, pagan wanderer.

3. Why is the beginning of our story always important to remember?

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_____

Abram's story starts with him settling in a place that was less than Jesus-honoring. While this is before Abram was called, so there is an element of us needing to withhold our judgment. The sad reality is that sometimes, those of us who are called redeemed believers of the work and person of Jesus, act like a "pre-called" Abraham, and settle into looking like the world in the way we "do family."

4. What are some ways you struggle to obey your parents?

_____
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Luckily for Abram (and us), God interrupts our settling.

Genesis 12:1-3 says, ***"Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"***

5. What did God tell Abram to do? What do you think these three areas might represent?

_____
_____
_____

6. What are some things God might be telling you to leave behind in order to do "family" differently?

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Abram was presented with the greatest opportunity any man has ever had. He was presented with the promise that the God of the universe would make a great nation out of his line. Abram's family would literally be a blessing to the world. When presented with the overwhelming wonder of this call from God, only a fool would say "no." The next nine words are the beginning of what made family different for Abram and what makes family different for us.

Genesis 12:4 says, ***"So Abram went, as the Lord had told him…"***

7. Why is Abraham's obedience to God so crucial to seeing family done differently? What does that mean for us and our families?

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_____
_____

8. What did Abram have to possess in order to be obedient?

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Hebrews 11:8-19 says, ***"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."***

9. Why is faith in God so essential to everything?

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_____

10. Why is it easier to do what we want rather than obey?

_____
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_____

This month, if family is going to be done differently, we have to look to Abram as an example. Abram was just like all of us. He was sinful, worshiped things over God, and lived in a world that idolized sin. Abram did what we have all done at some point; we settled and lived like the world. However, God called Abram out of a dark, purposeless place. If it is important to know where we came from,

why is it important to know what God can bless us with when we live for him?

11. How can you begin to do family differently?

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NOTES

LESSON SIX

INTENTION VERSUS OUTCOME

PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

In April of 2023, my wife, Haleigh, and I bought our first home. Up to that date, the largest purchase of my life was a used vehicle. The purchase of our home trumped the purchase of a vehicle by many thousands of dollars. The pressure that Haleigh and I felt when signing the documents for the title company was unlike anything I had ever signed before. The details of our mortgage were dizzying. Truthfully, I did not fully understand everything that I signed, but I trusted that our realtor had led us correctly. In signing our mortgage, we had committed to paying a large sum of money every month for the next couple of decades of our lives. There was a mix of nerves and excitement for us that day.

1. Share a contract that you have had to sign and some of the terms that you remember signing. What were your emotions toward the contract? Any nerves? What was at stake in signing the contract?

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Genesis 15:1-6 says, ***"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.' And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.' And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness."***

This is referred to as the Abrahamic covenant. One thing to note here is that this is not a *contract* between Abram (whose name has not yet been changed to Abraham) and the Lord. Rather, it is

a *covenant*. A covenant is different from a contract because it is still valid even if one of the people who signed it breaks their end of the deal. Whereas a contract is broken if one of the people who sign it breaks their end of the deal.

2. When is a time that someone broke a deal they made with you?

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_____
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3. If you know your Bible well, what other covenants do we see God make throughout Scripture?

_____
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Read Genesis 15:6 again.

Abraham believed the Lord. His faith was in the Lord and the commitment that the Lord had made to him. Because of this, God counted it as righteousness. Three times in the New Testament the writers recount this truth of Abraham's faith being counted as righteousness before the Lord (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23).

4. How were people saved before the earthly life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Have you ever thought about that before? (Leaders: search "*gotquestions.org*" for "How were people saved before Jesus died for our sins?" to go deeper into this question.)

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Romans 4:20-25, speaking of Abraham, tells us, ***"No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew***

strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.' But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

5. What similarities are there between Old Testament believers and Christians today? How are each saved?

_____

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As we look back at the Messiah (Christ) today, Old Testament believers looked ahead to the coming of the Messiah. They had to have faith that the Lord would be faithful to His promises. Today, we need faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9).

In a turn of events, the next chapter shows Abram's wife, Sarai's, unbelief in the promises of the Lord.

Genesis 16:1-6 says, ***"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, 'Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.' And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, 'May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!' But Abram said to Sarai, 'Behold,***

your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.' Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her."

Through a vision, the Lord made a covenant to Abram. Abram believed it but his wife, Sarai, was not as quick to put her faith in the word of the Lord.

Instead of trusting that the Lord would be true to His promise that they would have their own son and their heirs would ***"number the stars,"*** Abram and Sarai chose to make God's promise happen their own way in their timing. Whether it was their impatience, their shallow belief, or their lack of faith, Abram and Sarai chose to make their own path when God told them to wait and trust Him.

6. Why is it tempting to make things happen instead of waiting on the Lord's timing? What are some ways that this could backfire on someone?

_____
_____
_____

The actions of Sarai in giving her servant Hagar to Abram were normal in that culture. This was not wrong culturally, but just because is acceptable to the world does not mean it is acceptable in the eyes of God. Maybe Sarai's intentions were good, but the result of their actions showed a lack of faith.

7. What do you think of the saying, "It is the thought that counts"? Is it true?

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8. Does “the thought count” in the mind of the Lord? When or when not?

_____

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One of the first results of Sarai giving Hagar to Abram was that Hagar turned on Sarai once she became pregnant; maybe she was gloating or holding it over Sarai. The outcome that Sarai had hoped for was not what happened. Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar, and Hagar ultimately fled. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, doubting God’s words, Abram and Sarai try to make things happen in their timing and their way.

God had made a covenant with Abram. Because the Lord is the one holding that covenant, God came through. Even when Sarai tried to make their own path, the Lord still brought them to their intended destination in Genesis chapter 21 with the birth of their son, Isaac. Ultimately, God was fulfilling His covenant that He made to Abram in Genesis chapters 12 and 15.

NOTES

LESSON SEVEN

PROTECTION AND PREPAREDNESS

PASTOR RYAN STORY

Recently, my wife and I took our children to a waterpark resort for a family trip. Notice, I said trip, not a vacation. Vacations are restful and void of children. Trips involve children, waterparks, and no rest. Trips are not restful for parents. Despite that, all parents love trips with their kids. We were having a great time, then it happened. I was walking with my two older sons to one of the waterslides, and I watched a little girl run, slip, and fall on her back. Praise God she was uninjured and sprung right back up. However, this little girl's father (we will call him "Joe Every-parent") was very frustrated. I could hear Joe tell his daughter something I have, in fact, said to my own kids, "Haven't I told you, no running in a waterpark. You can slip and hurt yourself!" I walked by Joe, and we exchanged the "I get you man" glance. Joe Every-parent's heart may not have been 100% glorifying God at the moment, but there was something very familiar with his response. Every parent ought to want to protect their children, and every parent should want to prepare their child. These are not just good societal rules. A parental role that protects and prepares your children is biblical.

Matthew 18:6 warns, ***"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."***

We should never want anything to get in between anyone and a saving relationship with Jesus, especially our own children.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 commands, ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."***

Teaching and preparing our children to know Jesus' love, to love Jesus, to live for Jesus, and, best yet, to see our children teach the Gospel to their children is a daunting task. Literally, it causes chills.

We should desire to prepare our children to know and walk with the Lord and to walk in faith.

1. On a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being not at all, and 10 being totally:
   How prepared by your parents do you feel? _____
   How protected by your parents do you feel? _____

The story of Abraham and Isaac is one that has been preached, taught, and placed on felt boards for thousands of years. For most of us, when we think of the interesting dynamic between Abraham and Isaac, our brains go to the moment in Genesis chapter 22 when God calls Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on an altar on Mount Moriah. The truths that are found in Genesis chapter 22 are ones that every parent needs to heed and ones I wish I had known early in my parenting journey.

Protect

Genesis 22:1-3 says, ***"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."***

2. Why does God test us? What is the difference between a test and a temptation?

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_____
_____

3. How does God describe Isaac to Abraham? Why does this description make this test so hard for Abraham?

_____
_____
_____

In this moment, God revealed an idol in Abraham's life. The very son God gave to Abraham and Sarah became an object that distanced Abraham from God. God knew Abraham's faith, and God knew Abraham's heart. A part of this test was to see if Abraham trusted God completely. Sadly, sometimes, the most meaningful blessings God gives us in life become the areas in which we least trust God.

Every time I read this chapter, this request from God causes a massive struggle with its insanity. As parents, are we not called to protect our children from everything? It can range from skinned knees to horrible diseases that can be contracted if our child drinks out of the water hose. Were we not tasked with the never-ceasing worry of the "what if" scenarios?

At this moment, God is asking a parent to do something insane. God is asking Abraham to trust Him. At this moment, God is asking a father to realize that his love for his child is not the best way to protect the youth. The greatest protection a child will ever have is when their parent is fully obedient to God. Amazingly, at this moment, Abraham made the resolution to trust God, no matter what.

4. When is it hardest to trust God in your life?

_____
_____
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5. How does obedience to the Lord best help us receive the protection our parents give us?

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_____
_____

6. What practical ways can you show your relationship with Jesus to your parents in how you receive their protection?

_____
_____
_____

Prepare

Genesis 22:4-6ays, ***"On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.' And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together."***

7. If you were Abraham, how would you be feeling at this point of God's test?

_____
_____
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By the time this book is published, my oldest son will be nine. My youngest will be three. There will be an eight-year-old and a six-year-old in the middle. (Cue *"Cat's in the Cradle."*) There are so many times I know I have missed the opportunity to prepare my children for life because I wanted to protect them. There have been so many learning opportunities I have taken away from them because, in my impatience, I could not watch them struggle. I would rather protect my kids from any difficulty. I would rather wrap them in bubble wrap and not let them make any choices that could hurt them. This is tricky to navigate, but as believers, we have to protect our children from a real enemy, and we also have to prepare them for the fight that is at hand. We have to prepare our children to have faith in Jesus.

8. As a child, do you ever feel like overprotection has caused you to not be prepared for certain things in life?

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Abraham did a lot of things wrong. Sin complicated a lot of his life. However, one truth God seemed to put on his heart was to prepare and protect Isaac by keeping his faith in God.

Hebrews 11:17-19 says, ***"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."***

9. What is the best way to follow your parents to be prepared for life?

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The best way to protect and prepare the next generation to live for the Lord is to model for them what faith looks like. Your kids were given to you by a sovereign King. He did not bless you with children so you could stress all day or create a list of life lessons. God gave you children so you can love them as He loves you. God gave you children so you could be a minister of reconciliation, an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

We live in a broken, fallen world. We live in a world that needs to teach children how to grow up. The only way to do both is to ensure that they have a genuine relationship with Jesus. The best way for that to be fostered is them to see yours.

Deepak Reju said, “While only God can save children, God uses parents who raise their children ***‘in the training and instruction of the Lord’*** (Ephesians 6:4) as a means to pass truth on to the next generation.”

10. How can we get better at following our parents as they try to protect and prepare us for life?

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NOTES

LESSON EIGHT

GOD CANNOT Tell a Lie

CHRIS MONTVILLE

1. Who is the most trustworthy person you know? Why do you find them trustworthy?

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_____
_____

2. Is it hard for people to earn your trust? Why or why not?

_____
_____
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Trust is an interesting concept. It is something that everyone is familiar with, but no one can quite put their finger on its tangible value. I think the reason for this is because of our brokenness. We are in a world where we are constantly battling between lies and truth; our hearts are in the middle of it and often the reason for it! We have all lied, and we have all been lied to. This is why it can be hard at times to trust other people. Trust is hard to gain but easy to lose.

God, on the other hand, cannot tell a lie. Every word that comes from God is truth. It is not in His nature to lie, and God cannot go against His own nature. You have most likely heard of this idea before, but I want to take a look at Scripture that tells us of this fact with certainty.

Read Hebrews 6:17-18.

3. What is verse 17 referring to?

_____
_____
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4. Verse 18 tells us that God cannot lie and that this should give us ***"strong encouragement."*** Why is it a strong encouragement that God cannot lie?

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_____
_____

If God has promised something, then it is true. He cannot lie!

5. Can you give some examples of promises God has made to us in the Bible?

_____
_____
_____

Read the following verses:

- Hebrews 13:5
- Matthew 28:19-20
- Isaiah 41:10
- Deuteronomy 31:8
- Matthew 11:28

6. How should these promises impact our daily lives today?

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_____
_____

7. Has God made these promises known to us? If so, how?

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_____
_____

Jesus tells us in John 16:33: ***"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."***

Here, God tells us that Jesus has overcome the world. That's a pretty big claim!

8. How do we know that Jesus overcame the world?

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Jesus put the promise that God will never leave us nor forsake us on public display at the cross, and He put His complete power over sin and death on display through His resurrection. God does not promise things and then hide so that they will never come to fruition. No, He fulfills His promises. He means business!

God promised to never leave us nor forsake us, and He meant it so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to earth. He lived a perfect life that we could never live, and took the punishment for our sin that we deserved. He then rose from the dead three days later and appeared to people all over the place for 40 days. Then, Jesus ascended into Heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God.

Please re-read Hebrews 6:18: ***"So that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us."***

9. What is the hope set before us?

_____

_____

_____

God cannot tell a lie. Not only does He not lie, but He proves His words true over and over again. Jesus promised in Matthew 28:20 that He will be with us to the end of the age, and God cannot lie. Hold onto that strong encouragement from Jesus as you go through this week.

NOTES

LESSON Nine

He Will Provide Your Needs

Pastor Patrick Bicknell

Sometimes, it can be hard to tell the difference between needs and wants. Even if we know the difference we still confuse them in how we talk about things in our everyday lives. I have a couple of examples in my own life that stand out to me. For instance, I cannot tell you how many times I said the words, “I need that new skin,” when the game I play releases a new batch of skins. (No, it is not Fortnite. Please do not roast me yet.) Another example would be anytime I am at a thrift store, the first thing I do is go to the section where all their antique stuff is and search tirelessly until I find an antique mug. I go to Jasmyn, my wife, and I tell her, “I need to buy this,” even though I have ten of them at home that do not get used. I could go on and on about how I get these words mixed up, but you get the point. We sometimes get wants and needs mixed up.

1. What are some things that you think you need that are actually wants’?

_____
_____
_____

We are going to continue to walk through the promises of God. The next promise that we are looking at is the promise that God will provide for all of our needs. At first glance this may seem like a basic promise to us. However, I think there is more to this promise than we might first think. The verse that we are going to base this lesson on can be found in the book of Philippians.

Read Philippians 4:19.

2. Think about your life; what needs do you think God is providing for you?

_____
_____
_____

3. Do you believe there is a need that you have that is not ultimately provided for by God? Explain your answer.

_____
_____
_____

Jesus teaches us in the Lord's prayer to ask God to, ***"Give us this day our daily bread"*** (Matthew 6:11). Whether we believe it or not; it is a truth about God that everything we get in our life, from the greatest blessings to the everyday necessities like food, water, and shelter are provided by God. After saying these words, Jesus goes even further to show how God's love toward us is always making sure we have what we need.

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

4. Why did Jesus bring up how God provides for the animals and other life sources in the world?

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5. Do you believe you have more value than these things? Why or why not?

_____
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6. What does Jesus tell us to seek first above all things? What does that mean?

_____
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_____

I believe what Jesus is trying to teach us here is to see the value we have because we are created in the image of God. We have the mark of the Creator on our lives, every single one of us. This is a

rock-solid truth, and it means that no one, not even you, can take this value away from you. Jesus then says, therefore, that because you have this inherent value by being made in the image of God, you do not need to be anxious about the cares of this world. God will provide for you. All we need to do is seek the Kingdom of God. Seeking the Kingdom of God means making God's name known, telling people the Gospel, and living this out in love in our everyday lives.

However, knowing this truth and believing it in the midst of trials is a whole other thing. Jesus mentions anxiety because it is a real thing we face. He told us about the everyday things that God provides for us so that we will set our minds on the fact that no matter what we are going through, God will take care of us. It is hard to believe this when you are going through stress, anxiety, depression, or whatever else it may be. I want to look at one last place to see how we can go to our great God to provide for the needs we face.

Read Philippians 4:6-7.

7. Do you struggle with your mental health? (ie. anxiety, depression, or stress)

_____
_____
_____

8. What does verse 6 tell us to do when we experience these struggles?

_____
_____
_____

9. What do you think it means to have a peace that ***"surpasses all understanding"***?

_____
_____
_____

10. How can you all, as a group, use prayer to help one another with your struggles?

_____

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_____

God cares for us, and God loves us. He provides us with everything we need in life. We know this by what Jesus did for us on the cross. Romans 8:31-32 says, ***"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"*** God did not spare Jesus so that we can be saved. Now that Jesus is raised, we should have confidence that everything we need to get through the hard times of life, God will provide.

As a group, pray this prayer from Ephesians together right now.

Ephesians 3:14-20 says, ***"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith - that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."***

NOTES

LESSON TEN

He Will Return

ELIJAH EDWARDS

When I was in kindergarten, I remember my mom or dad always picking me up from the bus stop. In fact, there was a rule (I did not find until much later) that required a parent to be there to pick you up, or else you would have to go back to school! Well, one afternoon after school, my dad was not there to pick me up. I was terrified. I looked everywhere for him and could not find him. The bus driver did not let me get off the bus, and right when I was about to break down and cry, my dad came running up. I was so relieved to see that he had returned for me.

1. Was there a time when your parents or guardians did not show up to pick you up? What did you do in that situation?

_____
_____
_____

There is a safety knowing that our moms, dads, aunts, uncles, or even friends, are going to be there to pick us up or make sure that we are okay. We can rely on that, and when it does not happen, we can get worried or scared.

Well, there is someone who we can rely on that said He would and is going to return. His name is Jesus.

Read Revelation 22:12.

2. When does Jesus say He is coming back? What do you think ***"soon"*** means?

_____
_____
_____

3. The word ***"recompense"*** means to repay or restore. What is Jesus restoring?

_____
_____
_____

Jesus promises and tells us that He will be returning soon to restore the world and ***"repay each one for what he has done."*** This means that those who confessed, believed in Jesus, and lived a life for Him shall receive the reward of eternal life, while those who chose to do the opposite and live a life for themselves will be punished.

4. Are you excited for Jesus' return? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

5. What is scary about Jesus returning?

_____
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_____

Going back to the beginning, when I mentioned being scared that my dad was not there to pick me up, I think about that in the same context as Jesus returning. When I was younger, I was a little scared of Jesus returning because, ultimately, I did not want to die yet. As I got older and life began to become harder, darker, and scarier, I realized that I wanted my Savior to come back because I knew I would be fully safe when He returned.

6. Jesus is the only One who will never leave or forsake us. How does that make you feel about Him returning?

_____
_____
_____

There are three more verses in which Jesus promises He will return.

Read:

- John 14:2-3
- Acts 1:11
- Revelation 22:7

Knowing that He is returning and knowing that it is going to be soon that He will come and repay everyone, I want to leave you with this question that I want you to pray and ask yourself.

7. Are you ready for Jesus to return? If not, how can you be ready?

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_____

NOTES

LESSON ELEVEN

He Will Give You Rest

PASTOR GARY WRIGHT

1. What are the promises of God that we have already talked about over the last few weeks?

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Tonight we are going to talk about another promise from God that says, ***"I [He] will give you rest."***

2. Tell me of a time when you were extremely tired.

_____
_____
_____

For me, it is always after summer camp. It is because of two weeks of staying up late, getting up early, and only getting four or five hours of sleep per night. When I get home from camp, I am so tired I cannot stay awake. If I sit down on the couch to relax, I am sound asleep, sometimes right in the middle of a conversation with my wife. It usually takes me three or four nights of good sleep to start feeling rested.

Read Matthew 11:28, ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."***

3. What does Jesus mean when He says, ***"Come to me"***?

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_____
_____

4. What do we need to do to come to Jesus?

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_____
_____

Read Luke 18:9-14.

5. Why was the tax collector justified?

_____
_____
_____

6. Again, what do we need to do to come to Jesus?

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_____
_____

7. What does the word ***"labor"*** mean?

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8. What does ***"heavy laden"*** mean?

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_____

In Jesus' day, the religious leaders taught that you had to follow God's Law perfectly to get to Heaven. When God gave the Law, He knew we would not be able to keep it. The Law was never intended to save us; it was intended to show us that we are sinners in need of a Savior (Romans 3:20). When Jesus talks about those who labor, He is talking about those trying to work their way to Heaven by keeping the Law. The religious leaders not only taught to keep the Law perfectly, but they added their own standards and traditions to pretty much every human activity. The Law was impossible to keep, and by adding to it, they made it even more difficult.

The religious leaders placed impossible work-based loads on the people of Israel. This is what Jesus is talking about when He talks about those who are heavy laden. Jesus also talks about this in Matthew 23:4.

9. What does Jesus mean when he says, ***"I will give you rest"***?

_____
_____
_____

10. What are some ways we still struggle with trying to work our way to Heaven?

_____
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_____

11. Are there still false teachers today that teach works-based salvation?

_____
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_____

When Jesus says that He will give us rest, He is not promising us a vacation because we are so tired. Jesus' promise is that He will give us spiritual rest when we realize we are sinners in need of a Savior and humbly come to Him in repentance and in faith by believing that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay for our sins, and rose from the dead (Romans 10:9). Only through faith in Jesus do we get to Heaven and get closer to God.

12. Do you know Jesus as Savior?

_____
_____
_____

Once we know Jesus as Savior, He wants us to submit our lives to Him. Read Matthew 11:29-30, ***"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."***

A yoke is a wooden cross beam fastened over the necks of two animals and attached to a plow or a wagon. In biblical times, the yoke was usually placed over two bulls or two oxen to plow fields. A dominant animal and a submissive animal would always be yoked together. When two dominant animals were paired together, they would constantly work against one another. When a dominant animal and a submissive animal are paired together, the dominant animal leads, and the submissive animal follows.

13. What is Jesus asking us to do when He says, ***"Take my yoke upon you"***?

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_____
_____

14. How does being submissive to Jesus bring rest to our souls?

_____
_____
_____

15. How do we learn from Jesus?

_____
_____
_____

16. We cannot work our way to salvation. How does salvation produce good works in us?

_____
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Read Ephesians 2:8-10, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."***

17. What are some steps that we can take to become more submissive to Jesus?

_____

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_____

John MacArthur said, “Submission to Jesus Christ brings the greatest liberation a person can experience, actually the only liberation he can experience, because only through Christ is he free to become what God created him to be.”

NOTES

LESSON Twelve

He Will Never Leave You

ZACH HONNEN

1. What is your greatest fear?

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_____
_____

Whether you share with others or keep it to yourself is not really important, but for me, my greatest fear growing up, and if I am being honest even today, is being alone. I remember several times in my life when I stopped and thought about what would happen if I lost my family. Throughout the years, I have seen friends come and go. Thankfully, my family is still with me, but I still fear being alone. Some have called my generation, and probably including your generation, the most connected yet lonely generation in history, and I think it is accurate. So today, let us deal with the topic of loneliness.

2. Have you ever felt alone, and if so, when was a time you felt alone?

_____
_____
_____

3. Do you worry about people leaving you?

_____
_____
_____

Hebrews 13:5 says, ***"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"***

To keep ourselves from the love of money is definitely an important topic, but for today's study, I want to keep our focus on the last half of the passage, ***"I will never leave you nor forsake you."***

4. Have you ever heard this last phrase before? If so, where?

_____

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_____

I grew up in the church, and from a young age, I have always been told that God was always with me. I would complain about feeling alone, and I would get the quick "You are not alone," and as a kid, it would frustrate me. Now, having lived a little bit of life, I have found so much truth and comfort in it. Whether or not life is going good, bad, or ugly, God has not left me. I can imagine you may be asking yourself, "How do I know that God will not leave me?" The answer is simply because He said so. Just because someone says something does not make it trustworthy or credible. You have to look at the person's track record to understand if they are trustworthy. So, what is God's track record?

God's Promise to Abraham

In his old age, Abraham was promised to have descendants, a child from whom a nation would be formed (Genesis 17:1-8). God promised the continuation of Abraham's name, and God fulfilled that despite Abraham and Sarah's age and even their unbelief (Genesis 21:1-7).

Therefore, we see that God is able to do the impossible and keep His promise to Abraham. Let us look at another aspect of God's track record: The fact that He will not abandon His people.

The Life of Joseph

If you read from Genesis chapter 37 to Genesis chapter 50, you will see an incredible story of misfortune, suffering, triumph, more suffering, and ultimately salvation from a famine through God's plan. Joseph went through many different trials: being sold into slavery by his brothers, succeeding in his master's house until the master's wife falsely accuses him and he gets thrown in prison, and being

forgotten in prison by a fellow inmate who was freed. However, Joseph was brought out of prison into power to save his people. The one thing through it all is that God never left him, and from what we can tell, Joseph never thought that God left him.

So, we see God's character; His track record is to never leave His people during suffering, but to lead His people through suffering to salvation. This leads us to God's promise to us.

God's Promise to Us

As we have already seen in our text, God has promised, ***"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*** However, we also see another promise in John 3:16, which says, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*** So, God has promised us eternal life and an eternal relationship with Him. Like with Abraham, He is able to keep His promises even when we do not believe or have faith. Like with Joseph, He will not leave us no matter what we go through in our life.

5. Do you believe that God will do what He says He will do?

_____
_____
_____

6. Have you put your faith in Jesus? If so, are you doing everything you can to walk with the Lord?

_____
_____
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7. When you feel alone, do you turn to God, or do you turn to things of this world?

_____
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God's track record is perfect. If He says He will do it, He will do it. So, for you and for me, we need to live in the reality that God is always with us. He will never leave us and we can rest in the fact that even when we feel alone, we are not alone. God is a God of love and mercy. He will never leave us, even when we fail, even when we struggle and do not know what is next in life; God is with us.

8. What are some ways in your life that you can practice recognizing God is with you?

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_____
_____

9. Who are some people in your life who need to be reminded that God will never leave them?

_____
_____
_____

10. Who are some people in your life who do not know God and desperately need to know He loves them and wants a relationship with them?

_____
_____
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Take time to pray as a group and ask God to help you recognize that He will never leave us. Even when people leave us, friends leave us, or family ultimately leave us, He never will.

NOTES

LESSON THIRTEEN

He Will Provide a Way of Escape

PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

One of my favorite movie series of all time is the *"Lord of the Rings."* Specifically, the *"Two Towers"* is my favorite of this trilogy. It does not matter what anyone says to me or what argument is made; no one can ever convince me that the *"Lord of the Rings"* is not the best trilogy of all time. The fight scenes, the dialogue, and the story arc of the characters are just so much fun to watch. During the *"Two Towers,"* a major issue arises for the protagonists of the movie (For time's sake, I cannot go into all the details; sorry, fellow *"Lord of the Rings"* nerds.) The forces of evil are beginning to pursue them, and they know they need to do something to protect themselves and their people from the coming conflict. They end up taking their army and their people to this place in the world called Helm's Deep. It was a huge fortified fortress where they were going to make their stand against the evil forces. What takes place is one of the coolest fight sequences in any movie ever. It is about 45 minutes long! However, during this scene, the good guys begin to lose. The walls of the fortress are breached, and it looks like there is no hope. At the last second, when it seems as if the battle is lost, one of the main characters, Gandalf, comes riding from the East with thousands of troops in reinforcement to save the day. It is one of my favorite scenes in cinematic history.

1. What is your favorite movie? Are there any specific scenes from a movie that you vividly remember?

_____

_____

_____

I share that story with you not just to talk about my favorite movie, but to give you an illustration of a similar battle that all of us face. It is the battle of temptation. Temptation tries to pull us toward sin and the things that God does not want us to do. It is a lifelong battle and one that can seem so hopeless. What do we do when we are being tempted, and we feel there is no way to escape from it? We are going to look at another promise of God: He will always provide a way for us to escape the temptation we face.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-11.

2. Who is Paul referring to in this passage of Scripture?

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_____
_____

3. What are some ways the people of Israel sinned in the Old Testament that you can remember?

_____
_____
_____

Before we talk about how God provides the way of escape for us in our temptation, we first need a bit of context. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul uses the Israelites as an example. There are numerous things they did wrong in the Old Testament, some of those being worshiping a golden calf, sexual immorality, disobeying God's direct commands, and going after other gods. The point Paul is trying to show us is that it is important to look back and see that, as humans, we are vulnerable.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:12.

4. Do you struggle with the temptation of certain sins?

_____
_____
_____

5. Is it wrong for us to struggle with temptations? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

One of the things that Paul wanted to make clear to the Corinthian believers was that we are weak and vulnerable to temptation. As

humans, we have a sinful nature, and every single one of us struggles with temptation to sin. The first step to overcoming temptation is understanding you have a weakness and that you need help. Far too often, students will try to pretend to everyone in the youth group that they are okay and that they do not struggle with temptation. However, the whole time, they are losing the battle by refusing to ask for help. I want to make sure none of us do that.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.

6. What does it mean when it says, ***"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man"***? Why is that important?

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_____
_____

7. If God provides a way of escape, what do we need to do? How can we do that?

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_____
_____

8. Has there been a time when God provided a way of escape from your temptation? Can you share that?

_____
_____
_____

This verse is very encouraging. Paul tells us that God will always provide a way of escape from whatever temptation comes our way, with no exceptions. The reason we can believe this is because God is faithful to us; however, we need to take the escape He provides. The Bible never tells us the temptation will just go away. We need to rely on God, His truth, and His strength to get through temptation.

Now, I am sure you are asking, “What are some ways that God provides escape when we face temptation?” I believe many of those ways are provided for us before we face the temptation. We need to be proactive about fighting off temptation, not reactive. Let us look at one last thing that can help us here.

Read Romans 8:5-6 and Galatians 5:16-17.

9. What does it mean to set your mind on the Spirit? What does it mean to walk by the Spirit?

_____
_____
_____

10. What are some ways that you personally can get better at setting your life on the Spirit?

_____
_____
_____

11. What are some ways that, as a group, you guys can help each other fight temptation and walk by the Spirit?

_____
_____
_____

Reading the Word and praying daily are two very important tools that help us set our lives on the things of the Spirit. The daily act of aligning our minds with who God is and on His Word is essential if we ever want to overcome sin. We also need a community of believers around us. We need other followers of Christ who can help us in our walk. They can be there for us to call us out, correct us, encourage us, or whatever it may be.

I want you to take the last few moments to discuss how, as a group, you are going to be accountable to each other and make sure that

your group is a safe space to share the struggles you are going through.

NOTES

LESSON FOURTEEN

Rescued

PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

I must admit, I am a little bit obsessed with flashlights. For multiple years in a row, I asked for flashlights for my birthday, and each year, I got them. Our house is filled with those flashlights. There is one in the kitchen, the bedroom, the basement, in each of my camping bins, and one in each of our cars. I am a bit obsessed, but I do not want to be left in the dark if the power goes out!

1. Do you have a flashlight ready around your house? If so, where do you keep it?

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_____
_____

2. When was the last time you used a flashlight? What was the purpose of using it?

_____
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There was a day, many years ago, where phones did not have built in flashlights. Instead of pulling your phone out and turning on your flashlight in a pinch, you would be left in the dark if you did not have a physical flashlight with you.

3. When was the last time you were in the pitch dark? What was it like?

_____
_____
_____

Colossians 1:13-14 gives us another promise of God. Read it as a group.

These verses come right after Paul lists the things he is praying for the church in Colossae.

4. Read verses 9-12, then list the things that Paul is praying for the Colossians.

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That is a beautiful prayer! If you have been struggling with how to pray for someone, pray those verses over that person.

Verse 13 tells us that God has ***"delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son."*** There are two key words in this verse we are going to focus on: ***"delivered"*** and ***"transferred."*** Both of these words have the idea of a rescue.

When I was about six years old, my family went on a camping trip with my church's youth group because my parents were chaperones. It was a four-day trip to the middle of nowhere in Kentucky. When we arrived, the campground was a bit muddy, but we were still able to get settled. That first night, it began to rain. The next day, it rained some more. On the third day, it rained even more, but then that night, a tornado came through the area! It was one of the scariest nights of my life. (I really wished I had one of my handy-dandy flashlights with me at that time!) We all hunkered down in our minivan because there was no shelter around other than our van. The next morning, the trip leaders decided that we were going to leave. The only problem was that, because of all the rain, the dirt and grass campsites had turned completely to mud. All of our vehicles to tow our campers were completely stuck. We were stranded, with nowhere to go; all the while, it continued to rain and get worse. We were completely stuck. We were miles from the town in the middle of Kentucky. Finally, hours later, some local farmers showed up with their tractors. One by one, they began rescuing each vehicle and camper out of the campground. That is a picture of our life before Jesus. We were completely stuck in darkness and sin and in need of rescue. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves.

5. When have you needed to be physically rescued? What emotions were you feeling while waiting to be rescued?

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_____
_____

Needing to be rescued can be a scary place. Whether it is a vehicle being towed and needing a tow truck, being locked out of the house and needing a locksmith, or being in danger and needing the police, there are different fears with each situation. We have many people whose sole job is to rescue people. Thankfully, we also have Jesus, who came to earth to rescue sinners just like us!

6. What are some of the ways that people try and save themselves to go to Heaven?

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Colossians tells us that without Jesus, we are trapped in the domain of darkness where Satan and sin are our masters. However, when you turn from your sin, accept what Jesus has done for you on the cross, and confess Him and the Lord of your life, you are ***"transferred to the kingdom of his beloved Son [Jesus]"*** (Colossians 1:13). Just one verse earlier, Colossians 1:12 says that Jesus ***"has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."*** Because of what Jesus has done, we are ***"qualified"*** to share in the light. We are no longer living in darkness.

7. What happens if you try and run while in complete darkness? What are the dangers of running while in the dark?

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_____

8. What difference does it make when you turn a light on? Can you run easier?

_____
_____
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Read Psalm 119:105.

9. What is God's Word described as? How do we find God's words?

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_____
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10. How does God's Word act as a light for us?

_____
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When we try to go through life without a light, it is like fumbling through our house in the dark. We bump into things, take wrong turns, and we might even knock some things over. To help us see clearly, God has shown us how to live by giving us the Bible. Now, we have to read it, study it, and memorize it so that it can guide us!

NOTES

LESSON FIFTEEN

ROMANS 101

PASTOR FERDINAND SANDERS

One of the things that I really loved about college was the fact that you could pick an area of study (your major) and really dive in and focus on that one topic. Sure, you would have some courses that everyone had to take (prerequisites), but each year that you committed to that specific program or major, you would grow deeper in understanding that certain topic. For most colleges and programs, these courses or levels of study are broken down into categories that are associated with the amount of time spent studying that subject. For example, 100-level courses would typically be taken during your freshman year, 200-level in your sophomore year, 300-level in your junior year, and 400-level courses in your senior year. I know that none of you at this point are technically "college students" (maybe some of you are dual enrolled), but today, you are all enrolling in Romans 101: Intro to Romans.

1. Hypothetical: If you had to pick today what you would want to study in college, what would you pick?

_____

_____

_____

The book of Romans, written by the Apostle Paul to the Christian community in Rome, is a profound presentation of the Gospel in which Paul explains how God's righteousness is revealed through faith in Jesus Christ. The book of Romans would make a great college major, as Paul's letter is packed full of both foundational truths and an extremely profound spiritual depth. It would allow the Christian "student" to begin at the 100-level courses and eventually make their way up to the higher level courses. Since this is just a 101-level course, we will just be getting a brief introduction today.

Read Romans 1:1-7.

That is a run-on sentence! Though that may have been difficult to get through in one breath, there is a lot that we can pull out of Paul's introduction. Paul introduces himself as a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, who is called and set apart to preach the Gospel of

Christ. From the very beginning, Paul establishes both his credibility and his authority based solely on the resurrection of Christ. Paul establishes himself as both called and set apart as a servant ***"to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations."***

2. What do you think it means to be ***"set apart"*** for God's mission today?

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_____
_____

3. After reading this passage, how would you describe or define your own calling and purpose in life as a follower of Christ?

_____
_____
_____

The purpose of a 100-level course is to serve as an introduction to the subject, going over key terms and definitions. In order for there to be depth of knowledge or understanding in the future, there must be a foundation established to then build upon. Right from the beginning of Paul's letter to the Romans, we see the foundation of the Christian walk being built upon the confidence we should live in because of the resurrection of Christ.

Read Romans 1:8-15.

Another key element of my college experience, that I am extremely grateful for, was the relationships. I truly believe that I would not be who I am today without my peers, friends, and roommates, and especially without the love and encouragement from my professors, bosses, and mentors over the years. In some college courses, you will have lectures where you will sit quietly and take notes for what feels like an eternity, and then you will leave. On the other hand, some of my favorite learning experiences came as a result of

discussing a topic with the other students in my class, facilitated by the professor's wisdom and experience on the topic. I feel like both of these sentiments are found in what Paul is writing.

Romans 1:11-12 says, ***"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you - that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine."***

4. What are some of the sentiments that Paul writes about towards the Christians in Rome?

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_____
_____

5. How do we, as individuals, benefit from living and participating in a Christian community?

_____
_____
_____

Read Romans 1:16-17.

6. Keeping in this theme of academia or pursuing a college degree, what would you say to someone who pursued a specific major but had never got a job related to that?

_____
_____
_____

7. What would you say is the purpose of getting a college degree?

_____
_____
_____

You may not know this, but it costs quite a bit of money to go to and graduate from a four-year institution. Money aside, it also requires a lot of hard work, time, and dedication to study and graduate. I hope your discussion from the previous questions were all very similar, that it would be incredibly foolish to not put that amount of investment to good use in an applicable or related way.

I like how Paul puts it in verse 16, ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."***

To me, it sort of asks the question, "What sort of purpose or effectiveness would we have for the sake of the Gospel if it failed to impact or change our lives?" To me, this seems like a bit of wasted potential to not allow what Paul writes as ***"the power of God for salvation"*** to cause a significant and noticeable difference in our life.

8. If you were ***"ashamed of the gospel,"*** what sort of message would that communicate to others? What would that say about you?

_____

_____

_____

In verse 17, Paul writes, ***"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"***

This is a very profound verse, and is one of the essential truths or key terms from our Romans 101 course today. The Gospel (good news and resurrection of Christ) is the very foundation of our faith. Our response, faith, and belief in that is what makes us righteous in the eyes of God.

Guzik wrote, "This faith (trust) in Jesus Christ becomes the basis of life for those who are justified (declared righteous); truly, the just

shall live by faith. They are not only saved by faith, but they live by faith."

9. What does it mean for you to live by faith daily?

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_____
_____

10. Are there areas in your life where you can more fully rely on your faith? What steps would help you to live out your faith more boldly and consistently?

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_____
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NOTES

LESSON SIXTEEN

THE NEED OF THE WORLD

PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

One of the things I hate the most in life is being wrong about something. Which, if I am being honest, hardly ever happens (I hope you hear the sarcasm in that statement while you are reading this). However, there have been a few times in my life when I was so adamant that I was right about something and then was proven to be wrong. Most of the time, this comes with the sports teams I root for. I love football, and I am very passionate about Michigan football. Outside of last year in 2023-2024, when they won the national championship, they have, for the most part, let me down. There is one instance that stands out to me. It was 2015, and Michigan was about to play against Michigan State. The week leading up to that Saturday, I was talking so much junk to my friends who liked Michigan State about how Michigan was going to beat them. Well, the game was played, and Michigan lost. I was proven a fool for all the smack talk I did. I had to go to school that Monday and face all the ridicule that was deserved to me.

1. Has there ever been a time when you thought for sure you were right and got proven wrong?

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_____
_____

2. Are you someone who is right all the time? Be honest; this is a safe space.

_____
_____
_____

During this lesson we are going to be studying a passage of Scripture that addresses something similar to the story I mentioned above. It is the idea that creation, in following our sinful desires, have proven ourselves to be fools by thinking that we are right in not following God. Let us look at Romans chapter 1 and see how Paul lays out this truth and what the great need of the world today is.

Read Romans 1:18-20**.**

3. What is ***"ungodliness"*** and ***"unrighteousness"***?

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_____
_____

4. How is the world suppressing the truth about God?

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5. What are some of the things in creation that prove to us the existence of God?

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_____

Paul starts this section of Scripture by talking about the condition of every person in the world. We have rejected the truth about His existence, and have instead followed sinful ways. In verses 19-20, the argument of general revelation is brought up, which essentially means every person in the world can know God exists simply by looking at creation. Paul takes the terrible state humans are into an even deeper level in the next few verses.

Read Romans 1:21-23.

6. What makes someone a fool, according to these verses?

_____
_____
_____

7. What does it mean to exchange the glory of God for other things? How do we do this in our culture?

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_____
_____

8. What does all of this do to our hearts?

_____

_____

_____

It is a scary reality that all of us are either at this place in our lives or we were there at some point. Paul goes on in the next few sections to talk about how God has given us up to these sinful desires. Verse 24 says, ***"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves."*** Again, in verse 26, he says, ***"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions."*** Essentially, what God said was if we want to exchange the truth of God for a lie, then so be it. Now, if the story were to stop there, that would be tragic. We would be hopeless and have no point in life. Thankfully, God does not leave us here. He displays His great love for us by sending Jesus to the earth to die for us.

Read Romans 5:8.

9. Why is this verse encouraging in light of what we just read about humans above?

_____

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God shows His love for us in that ***"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** I want to make it personal. While we were exchanging the truth about God for a lie, Christ died for us. While we chose sin instead of following God, Christ died for us. While we were in desperate need of being saved, Christ died for us.

10. How does reading about the sinfulness of the human heart make you feel?

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11. Are you still among the people who have exchanged the truth about God for a lie, or do you want to follow Jesus today?

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My prayer is that no matter where you are in life or what wrongs you have done, that you would recognize you are in desperate need of saving. Please realize you cannot do it yourself, and that Jesus is offering this salvation to you freely. If you want to do that today, talk to your leaders right after this group.

NOTES

OUR VISION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"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."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "We don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

The goal of weekend gatherings at The River Church is to glorify Christ in all we do! Whether it be through singing, giving, serving, or any of the variety of ways He has gifted us and called us together, Jesus is at the center of it all. We celebrate that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher, it brings life-change!

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***"all things in common."*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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