

Sonship by Story:

A Collection of Bible Stories and
Lessons to Encourage Living in Step
with the Truths of the Gospel

(Cf. Galatians 2:14)

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Goals

- **Goal of Sonship**
 - For students to experience spiritual renewal through engaging with key Sonship themes that offer profound understanding of the implications of the gospel, the necessity of repentance, and what it means to be transformed by God's grace.
- **Goals of this Curriculum**
 - To present truths found in Sonship in a format that is more accessible to primary oral learners to help them to understand, live in, and eagerly reproduce in their own communities the great themes of biblical grace.
 - This curriculum will provide a number of Bible stories that may be used to emphasize one or more key Sonship themes. Each story is accompanied by a set of questions and potential answers to facilitate discussions with oral learners after they have been taught a Bible story. In every lesson, the Bible story is the center of the lesson, the memorable fulcrum around which each lesson will pivot.

Core Gospel Concepts Foundational to Sonship

I. Created in God's Image

All men are created in the image of God and continue to bear that image despite its corruption by sin. That means that all men and women from every nation, from every economic stratum, and from every station in life have dignity and value.

II. Sin

You are more needy than you think. Sin is much more than surface behavior. Sin is rooted in the heart and consists of our attitudes, desires, and motivations as well as our actions.

When we live as spiritual orphans, we can turn towards two paths: moralism and/or idolatry. In moralism, we live to justify ourselves through “good” behavior or performance, which is always inadequate. The moralist seeks to be his own savior.

Idolatry is seeking to satisfy ourselves through finding life and value in something other than Jesus. Those idols might be “good” things on the surface, but they are evil when they replace Jesus as our ultimate satisfaction. Both moralism and idolatry find their roots in the self. The radical self-orientation of our fallen nature is what we refer to as “the flesh.” Additionally, this self-centered root of sin always has community effects, as seen in broken relationships, division, abuse, poverty, etc.

The flesh will always be with us. It cannot be tamed nor improved. It must die. Throughout this life, the flesh will wage war with our spirit. Though the flesh is powerful beyond our efforts to control, we are not obligated to obey the demands of the flesh. Believing the gospel makes available to us the power of the Spirit to refuse the flesh and to walk in love.

Therefore, for the gospel to be transformational on both an individual and a community level, the deeper nature of sin must be exposed.

III. Justification

The work Jesus does for us on the cross is both the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of his righteousness. All of our sins are taken away, and the full expression of the Father's just anger is satisfied as it is poured out on Jesus in his death. Jesus pays our debt in full.

In addition to forgiveness, we are given righteousness, not which we earn on our own, but that which Jesus earned through his perfect life and then gives to us. Both forgiveness

and righteousness are received by faith alone and not through any work we can do. Now that we possess true righteousness, we can enjoy the full expression of the delight of our Father, just as he would express delight in Jesus.

IV. Our Identity in Christ

Our identity as sons and daughters is solely based on the work of Jesus and our union with him, not on anything we do or accomplish, or fail to do or accomplish. Our assurance is secured through us being united with Jesus in his death and resurrection, and subsequently being adopted as sons and daughters of God. Therefore, we can have freedom from guilt and condemnation, and we can have sure hope of his love, his care, and the fulfillment of all his promises given to his beloved children.

Though we are new creations, we are still sinners, living in the corruption of the Fall. We are, as Martin Luther observed, “Just, and yet sinners.” Progress in the Christian life demonstrates an increasing identification with the “new me” - righteous, empowered by the Spirit, and growing more into the likeness of Jesus - and less with the “old me” - helpless sinner incapable of doing any good.

V. The Nature of Faith

Faith is accepting, receiving, and resting in the riches of the gospel. Faith is passive in that it “receives and rests” on the work of Jesus alone for salvation and for the fulfillment of all the promises the gospel gives to us. Though it is passive in the sense that it is a receiving faith, it is not inactive. Faith actively pursues these gifts and blessings, persistently running to and grasping onto Jesus for his blessing.

Though faith is in part active, faith is not a work. It is, in fact, a gracious gift of the Spirit. It is also not the quality of our faith that gives us hope. Our faith is weak and never sufficient in and of itself. Rather our hope is in the object of our faith, Jesus, who never fails and forever holds us.

VI. Repentance

Repentance is the normative lifestyle of a believer, not just the beginning of the Christian life. It is not simply a change in outward behavior, nor is it merely sorrow over sin. First, it begins with brokenness over sin that is produced by the Holy Spirit, where we face more clearly the depth of sin in our heart and our inability to defeat it. In our brokenness, we turn from sin to Jesus. It is a relational turning from our idols and moralism, from our self-sufficiency and self-preoccupation, to being dependent on Jesus alone. In the cross, because of the work Christ has done for us through his life and death, we have the freedom to face our true sin problem and to return to Jesus. As repentance is both a

turning from self and a turning to Jesus, joy is a primary fruit as we experience restored intimacy with him.

Repentance must also have a horizontal, communal impact. As we trust in the work of Jesus for us and in the power of the Spirit, we move more honestly and transparently towards others. We freely acknowledge and take responsibility for our sin, and rest in and experience the Father's love and grace.

VII. Sanctification

Sanctification is growth or progress in living not according to the flesh but by being more transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into Christ-likeness. In this life we will never be perfected, but we will make progress in becoming more like Jesus.

We participate in our sanctification through faith (that is, continually believing the gospel) and repentance, which lead us to being transformed by the Spirit. By trusting more in the Spirit and less in ourselves, we are empowered more and more to resist the flesh, thus rendering it increasingly powerless. The primary evidence of growing holiness in one's life is love.

VIII. Obedience

Progress in the Christian life is required, commanded, promised, guaranteed, and a necessary and inevitable result of saving faith, of grace at work in us. This progress may be slight and inconsistent, but if there is no tangible progress, then the presence of faith must be questioned. This progress is not simply moral reformation, but deep spiritual transformation from being self-focused to being other, outward focused.

Our call to obedience does not conflict with the freedom we have through the gospel. Our freedom is not to be used for the gratification of our flesh, but it is a freedom to express our faith through loving others. We are free to love, not free from obedience.

The nature of true obedience is not merely the fulfillment of duty, though duty has its place. True obedience is the joyous expression of love to the Father and to others in response to the great love we have been shown. We are called to obey even when the emotions are absent, but the mere fulfillment of that outward duty cannot be construed as complete obedience.

IX. Love

All true obedience is relational. In other words, holiness has external results. As Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40, the whole law is fulfilled in the two commandments, love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. There is no true fulfillment of the

law outside of the context of relationships. Therefore, true holiness cannot merely be defined by our outward performance or adherence to a set of rules. Rather, it is faith expressed through love.

Therefore, faith will always lead us to love and a deeper involvement in community with others. When faith is working, we are always driven outside of ourselves and into the lives of others. Our righteousness in Jesus sets us free to fail, and therefore to take risks in moving toward and loving others. Faith never leaves us as we once were. It always moves us outward. If love is not evident, then faith is absent.

The gospel must go into one's heart before it can flow out of them. Love for others flows from a heart of faith the more we experience God's love for us and rest in our identity in Christ. We cannot love until we know we are loved. Love is something that the Spirit produces in and through us.

X. The Role of the Holy Spirit

Power in the Christian life is supplied by the Holy Spirit. We live in reliance on the Spirit, and he provides for us all the resources we will ever need to live out the life God calls us to. We access the power of the Spirit as we, by faith, turn from ourselves and our self-sufficiency towards Jesus and his Spirit in dependence. Through our faith we are empowered to believe and to love as we are loved, bearing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

XI. Intimacy with the Father

Because we are fully righteous through the work of Jesus, we now possess and can enjoy the full delight of the Father. Because we have his delight, we can enjoy intimacy with the Father as a beloved son or daughter. We can draw near to him without fear or shame because he has drawn near to us through the cross of Christ. This intimacy is pursued on our part through prayer, reading and hearing the preaching of Scripture, the sacraments, worship, and the community of other believers. These disciplines, or means of grace, become more than mere duty. They are pathways to know more deeply the great love of the Father.

XII. Forgiveness

Forgiveness from all of our sins, achieved through Jesus' death on the cross, now becomes the basis of our ability to forgive others. Because we have been forgiven a huge debt of sin, we are called now to forgive others who are indebted to us. Failure to forgive points to our own unbelief in that we do not accept God's forgiveness for ourselves and we insist on living on the basis of justice instead of mercy.

Forgiveness is not equal to reconciliation. Forgiveness is the foundation from which reconciliation can take place.

XIII. The Use of the Law

The law still plays an essential role for the Christian, though it must be used properly. The law consists of all of God's commands and requirements of us as given in the Scriptures. It can also be a system of achieving God's favor through keeping the "rules" that govern our lives, many of which we create ourselves.

The law does not have the power to change us, nor was it given to make us good people. It allows us to know the character of God the Father. It also defines for us what love is and what love does. Finally, by showing us the inadequacy of our efforts, it drives us to Jesus for mercy and help.

We are no longer "legally" obligated to keep the law because Jesus kept it for us through his life and death. We are now obligated by love, doing what pleases the Father through responding to his love for us, and joyfully expressing that love through the way we now love and serve others. Jesus now lives out his love through us.

Legalism is more than merely working for our salvation through good works. It is also our attempt to gain a sense of value and identity because of our performance. This is the improper use of the law.

XIV. The Kingdom

When the gospel is properly understood and embraced, the natural result will be a focus on the larger Kingdom of God. The gospel connects us to Jesus and to his broader mission, which is to bring redemption to all of creation. Therefore, the gospel moves us to lay down our lives for those who do not know the grace of Jesus, and to enter into the brokenness of the world in order to push back the effects of the Fall (mercy, reconciliation, education, etc.).

SUGGESTIONED FORMAT for TEACHING STORIES and LESSONS

- Follow the outline for each lesson. This includes the following:
 - **Introduction question:**
 - A suggested question for a very brief discussion in pairs just to start learners thinking about one of the main issues to be addressed in the lesson.
 - **Teacher's transition statement:**
 - This is optional but stating it out may help to connect the introduction to the story you are telling.
 - **Learn the story together.**
 - This involves telling the story by memory eight or more times depending on the length or difficulty of the story. It includes the trainer first telling it himself two or three times, then leading the group through the story using questions or fill-in-the blanks, then giving each person in the group opportunities to tell the story either in pairs or going around in small groups. Finally two or three people will volunteer to try to tell the whole story.
 - **Listening tasks:**
 - Between some of the different repetitions of the story, it is helpful to give the group a listening task. This is something particular for them to focus on while listening. It helps them remain engaged through multiple repetitions. The listening task should particularly focus on different characters in the stories and their words and actions. Each lesson has some suggested listening tasks.
 - **Basic Outline:**
 - This is to help facilitators lead the discussion without simply reading out every question. A facilitator may write up this brief outline on one sheet of paper to have nearby so that she covers the main points.
 - **Discussion Questions:**
 - Use some of these to guide the conversation about the story.

STORIES & LESSONS:

1. The Parable of the Two Lost Sons, Part One

Luke 15:1-2, 11-24

Key Theme: Adoption

[Core Gospel Concepts: Identity in Christ, Sin, Repentance, Intimacy with the Father]

THE STORY:

One day, tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So Jesus told them several parables like this one:

“There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between his two sons. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had and set off for a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth in wild living.

“After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death? I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.”’

“So he got up and went to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.”

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Galatians 4:4-5:** *“When the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law so that we might receive the full rights of sons.”*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **What is life like for abandoned orphans? Why is it so difficult not to have a father?**
 - Possible responses: *Lonely; no help; no one to depend on; no one who cares; no sense of belonging; no provision; deep sense of abandonment; uncertain future; need to provide for oneself; tendency to beg, borrow, steal instead of trusting in a father to provide; no place to call home; no shelter; no protection; easily gets into trouble; independent; does not need to listen to authority; has no parent or authority to tell him or her what to do or how to live; no good clothes; looked down on; people don't want to touch or associate.*

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- This story has two parts, and deals with two sons who each act like orphans, but in very different ways. Today, we will look at the first son, and think in turn about how we live like orphans sometimes, even as Christians.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory:
 - Note all the words and actions of the younger son.
 - Note all the words and actions of the father.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **AUDIENCE:** Who was Jesus telling the parable to? Why?
- **THE YOUNGER SON:** What was he like? How was he living like an orphan? What do we learn about ourselves from the younger son?
- **THE FATHER:** What was he like? What do we learn about God from the father?
- **REPENTANCE:** What does this story teach us about repenting from orphan living?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are ways we as believers may act like the younger son?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What recent actions or thoughts of yours have been like the lost younger son or like a spiritual orphan?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

- **Why was Jesus telling these parables? Who was with Jesus while he was teaching? What did he observe about these people?**
 - *Tax collectors and sinners had drawn near to Jesus, and he ate with them.*

- *This upset the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They were judging Jesus for mixing with sinners. Jesus was challenging their way of thinking.*
- **Who were the main characters in the parable?**

THE YOUNGER SON

- **What was the younger son like at different points in the story? What did he do or say that makes you say that? How did the younger son relate to his father? What was his attitude toward his father?**
 - **What was he like at the beginning of the story?**
 - *Proud, demanding, disrespectful, unthankful, self-centered, rule-breaking, foolish.*
 - *Did not have or want a real relationship with his father; he only wanted his father's things, wished him "dead" in his life, and wanted complete independence.*
 - *I.e. he wanted his father's things, not his father himself.*
 - **What was he like in the middle of the story, immediately after all his money was gone? What was the result of his rebellion against his father?**
 - *Was left starving, desperate, friendless, hopeless.*
 - **What was he like later when he "came to his senses"? What does it mean that "he came to his senses"?**
 - *Saw his desperate situation, realized it was all his fault, and saw that he could not help himself. His only hope was his father.*
- **How are people today like the younger son – especially in the time before he came to his senses? How are even Christians like him sometimes?**
 - *Various examples today of rebellion against God and "wild living," especially as our lives parallel the son's attitude toward himself, his father, and his life.*
 - *Sometimes Christians forget God and are interested in themselves more than God and others. Religion becomes more about us than about God. We desire to be important, to have a good reputation, to be educated or wealthy, to depend on ourselves, not God.*
 - *Therefore we worry, and turn to dishonesty, false gods, quick fixes, pain relief, divorce, etc. We run from our problems instead of running to Jesus.*
- **What did the younger son finally do right?**
 - *"Came to his senses." Saw where sin had led him, what the results of his choice were.*
 - *Admitted his fault. Saw that he deserved no help from his father or anyone else.*
 - *Returned to the father; knowing he was the only one able to help him.*
 - *Asked for mercy. Understood that his father was a merciful man.*
- **The son did repent, but how was his repentance incomplete?**
 - *Imagined that he could only come back as hired help. He never imagined coming back as a son. He did not dare ask for full restoration.*

- *Still did not really understand his father or the fullness of his father's love and mercy.*
- **Think back to our introduction question about abandoned orphans. How was the younger son living and acting like an orphan at various points in the story?** (Note: You may choose to have your students first discuss in pairs before listening to their answers in the full group.)
 - *At first:*
 - *Acted as if his father did not care about him. Demanded his "rights."*
 - *Wanted to depend on himself alone, to run his own life.*
 - *Concerned only about himself. Easily got into trouble.*
 - *When destitute:*
 - *No one would care for or help him, had no one to depend on, sent out to the pigs, away from people, abandoned, uncertain of the future, fending for himself, begging.*
 - *No place to call home, no shelter, no protection.*
 - *Was looked down on. People didn't want to touch or associate with him.*

THE FATHER

- **How do fathers in your society act when their sons rebel against them? Can you think of any examples? How is God different from the fathers of this world?**
- **Tell us all the actions and words of the father in this story as they relate to the younger son.** (Review details of the story)
 - *Did not force his son to stay with him. Gave him his share of the inheritance.*
 - *Watched and waited for his son, ran to him, hugged, kissed, put on the best robe, gave him a ring, sandals, slaughtered the fattened calf for them to celebrate.*
 - *Called for a party without demanding explanation or restitution.*
 - *Rejoiced because his son was dead, now alive, was lost, but now found.*
- **What do you think the robe, ring, and sandals stand for?**
 - *Robe: the "best" robe – distinct, special, likely belonging to the father himself. Also covers his son's uncleanness: a picture of Jesus' blood and righteousness covering our sin!*
 - *Ring: showed he possessed the father's authority, similar to having the family credit card, showing he was a son, not a servant.*
 - *Sandals: the son is a free man, not a slave. Only slaves went barefoot in this culture.*
- **So what do we learn about the father from all this?**
 - *Merciful, loving, not worried about his reputation in the community, willing to forgive wrongs and losses. Wanted relationship with his son.*
 - *Thrilled for his son to return.*
- **What was the father willing to give up for his son?**
 - *His dignity, reputation, and pride.*

- *His property, because he cared more about his son than his possessions.*
- **What did the father most want from his son?**
 - *Intimacy, close fellowship.*
 - *To know him, to be known by him.*
- **Who do you think the father represents?**
 - *God, our Father.*
- **So what does this part of the story teach us about God?**
 - *He is forgiving; he has mercy for those who turn back to him, not anger.*
 - *He longs for intimacy with us, to know us and be known by us.*
 - *He is loving. He wants us to be sons and daughters, not slaves!*
- **How do we as believers often view God, especially when we sin?**
 - *As angry, ready to punish us harshly; as distant, offended, not wanting our fellowship. Sometimes we even view him as vindictive, prepared to get revenge against us because of our sin against him. As one who requires us to earn our way back to him.*
- **How does God actually want us to view him?**
 - *As our loving father. Wanting us to know him.*
 - *Ready to forgive when we repent and turn back to him.*
 - *Willing to sacrifice himself and his dignity to gain us back.*
 - *Longing to be restored to and in fellowship with us, his children.*
- **When the father does not demand that his son apologize or explain himself, what is he actually communicating to him?**
 - *He is saying, "I will not allow you to be a servant, to earn your way back home. I am making you my son – completely by grace. I want a son, not a slave."*
 - *"I want to be close to you, to be intimate."*
 - *He wants us at the feast! Wants to cover us with the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness.*

REPENTANCE:

- **What do we learn about repentance from this story?**
 - *We need to "come to our senses!"*
 - *See our sin, confess that it is ours and not anyone else's.*
 - *Realize that we deserve punishment.*
 - *Believe in the mercy of God in Christ.*
 - *Turn back to him, believing in the Savior who died for us. Trust him to forgive and cleanse us from our sin and give us his righteousness.*
 - *Ask him to help us to change our words, thoughts, attitudes, affections, and behavior.*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some ways we may act like the lost younger son (i.e. like a spiritual orphan)?**
 - *Feel that God is withholding something good so we need to steal it for ourselves.*
 - *Rejecting God's rule over our lives. Ignoring his law because we don't trust that He is leading us well.*
 - *Giving in to lust. Being jealous of someone else. Complaining about our lives.*
- **Read Galatians 4:4-7 - "*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'* So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."**
 - **When we trust in Jesus, we are no longer slaves or orphans but sons and daughters of God, a kind and loving father. How should this truth affect our daily lives?**
 - **How should believing this truth help you to repent of your sin and follow Him?**
 - **How should the love of the Father affect the way you look at other people? How would this help you not to judge people harshly?**
- **Read John 14:18 - "*I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.*"**
 - **Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to every believer. How does this promise encourage you? How does it help you live as a Christian today?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What recent actions or thoughts of yours have been like the lost younger son or a spiritual orphan?**
 - **How have you despised or rejected your Father at times?**
 - **How have you run too much after the things of the world even in some small way?**
 - **What do you need to repent of today?**

2. The Parable of the Two Lost Sons, Part Two

Luke 15:1-2, 11-32

Key Themes: Self-Righteousness & Orphan Living

**[Core Gospel Concepts: Identity in Christ, Intimacy with the Father,
Repentance, Justification, Use of the Law]**

THE STORY:

One day, tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So Jesus told them several parables like this one:

"There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between his two sons. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had and set off for a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth in wild living.

"After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men."' "

"So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

"But the older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'"

"'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Galatians 4:4-5:** "When the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law so that we might receive the full rights of sons."

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- Can you think of a time in your life when you have been good and faithful, while you saw someone else who has been unfaithful treated better than you? How did that make you feel? Why did you feel this way?

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Usually when you hear this story, the focus is on the younger brother and his need to repent, and possibly about the great love of the father when he does. But we don't think much about the "good guy," the elder brother.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER:(Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory:
 - Note all the words and actions of the elder son.
 - Note all the words and actions of the father.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **AUDIENCE:** Who was Jesus telling the parable to? Why?
- **THE OLDER SON:** What was he like? What was good about him? What was not good? Relationship with Father? What was the motivation for his obedience? How was he living like an orphan? What do we learn about ourselves from the older son?
- **THE FATHER's PARTY:** What was he like? How did he relate to each son in the story? What did he sacrifice for each? What do we learn about God from the father? What does he want from us? Who goes into the party?
- **A TRUE ELDER BROTHER:** Who should have searched for the younger brother? How is Jesus the true elder brother?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What "good" deeds do we need to repent of? (because we're doing them for the wrong reason) What are some signs in our lives that show that we are living like the older son?

- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What is one way that you are acting like an older brother?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

AUDIENCE

- **Who was Jesus' main audience when telling this story?**
 - *The Pharisees and the teachers of the law.*
- **Who would those people be in today's world?**
 - *Those who look down on others, perhaps church people, people approved by society or religion, people of dominant races or classes.*

ELDER BROTHER

- **What seems good about the elder brother?**
 - *He is obedient, good, never refused to obey his father, stayed at home, faithful, did not waste inheritance, disciplined, did not meet prostitutes, did not get drunk, and caused no problems.*
- **What was not good about him?**
 - *He was self righteous, judgmental, hated his younger brother, jealous, angry because of the mercy shown to his brother, offended, and had no love for brother or father.*
 - *His service was like a slave or servant rather than the joyful service of a son, and wanted an exclusive party with his friends.*
 - *Described his brother to his father as "this son of yours" instead of "my brother."*
- **Describe his relationship with his father.**
 - *Obedient on the outside, but was depending on his work or good behavior in order to earn from his father respect, position, and possessions rather than rejoicing in simply being his son and enjoying all the fruits of that relationship.*
 - *Did not share his father's heart of love for the younger son; in fact he did not understand his father at all.*
 - *Still wanted to control his own life, but instead of doing this by running away, he chose to stay at home and obey (i.e. tried to control his life or "get life" by staying and obeying).*
 - *Was inside the house, but wandering far from home in his heart. Was lost inside the house.*
 - *Did not claim a relationship with his brother or father: "This son of yours!"*
- **How did he use his obedience? Was it joyful service out of love for his father?**

- *No, not joyful service but he used obedience as a tool to make himself feel worthy or righteous, to “deserve” his father's favor*
- *Used obedience as a tool to defend himself, judge others, attack his brother, disrespect his father, argue, shame his father, and to stay outside.*
- *Ultimately he used it as a weapon to get what he thought he deserved.*
- **So who is more lost, the younger son or the elder?**
 - *The elder son is more lost because of his “goodness” blinds him to his lostness, to his need for his father’s love. He does not “come to his senses” the way the younger son does.*
 - *He is not starving like the younger son, but is full and satisfied - satisfied with himself. So the younger son, though just as far from the father, is more likely to come to the end of himself and see his desperate need.*

THE FATHER’S PARTY

- **How is the way the Father treats the elder son the same as how he treated the younger son?**
 - *In both cases, the Father goes outside, approaches the son, and invites him into the party.*
 - *In both cases, the Father forives the son’s sin against himself in order to bring him back into his full relationship as a son.*
- **The younger son goes inside to the party, but the older son does not! What does this mean?**
 - *The elder brother is lost, not despite his goodness, but because of his goodness.*
 - *Because he “obeyed” (i.e. obeyed in order to get control, to merit life), he can’t really understand his father’s love, therefore he won’t come in.*
 - *Our “goodness” can separate us from God worse than our “badness” IF it hides our sin, or hides how we try to save and rule ourselves, if it makes us think, “I deserve this.”*

SIGNS of BEING an ELDER BROTHER:

- **Who did the elder son represent?**
 - *Religious people: the Pharisees and teachers of the law.*
 - *Those who were “inside the house, but wandering far from home.”*
 - *Those who are very busy for God, obeying his commands at least superficially, but not knowing and loving him.*
 - *Those who condemned Jesus for welcoming sinners and eating with them.*
- **So is it wrong to try to be good?**
 - *No! We are not saying it is wrong to be good, to do good, or to obey God. Of course not! But we should not only be good for the wrong reasons.*
 - **What is the proper reason for true obedience?**

- *The foundation for our obedience should be love and gratitude for God's mercy to us. Obedience should not be just an attempt to earn God's or other people's favor.*
 - *The motivation and power to obey can only come from the Good News of what Christ has done for us - living sinlessly, dying for us, and rising again to victory.*
 - *We strive to obey God and live a life worthy of the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit because of what Christ has already done for us.*
- **What is the proper goal or motivation for true obedience?**
 - *Ask yourself: what do you want most?*
 - *Do you mostly want God's THINGS? – i.e. wealth, respect, reputation, position, success, authority, comfort, security, pleasures?*
 - *Or . . . Do you mostly want God HIMSELF? God the Father – to know and be known, to have a relationship with the one true God?*
 - *Which of these two is your deepest motivation?*
 - *If a relationship with God your Father is your motivation, goodness and obedience will also result from that motivation - i.e. from thankfulness, love, and desire to please your heavenly Father.*

A TRUE ELDER BROTHER:

- **Who *should* have gone looking for the younger brother?**
 - *The elder brother!*
- **Who is our *true* elder brother, the one who comes looking for us in order to bring us home to the Father?**
 - *Jesus! The true elder brother who brings us back even though it cost him his life. He went to the cross to bring us to the Father's feast!*
- **Why does the story end unfinished? Why is the elder brother still outside, and we're left wondering whether he came in or not?**
 - *Jesus wants us to listen to him, whether we are elder or younger brother types. He is calling to us, "Come home!" Whether you have run away from home, trying to follow your own path, or have hidden inside the house behind your own obedience, you have been away from home.*
 - *Home is the place you were created for, the person you were created to be. There is a true elder brother. He is inviting you to come home.*
- **So, to review, what did each of the two brothers need to repent of?**
 - *The younger brother - his bad behavior, his running away far from the father to rule his own life*

- *The older brother - for misusing his goodness, for obeying with self-centered motives - to get reputation, for despising real relationship with his father and not trusting him.*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some wrong motivations we believers sometimes have for trying to obey God?**
 - *to look good in front of others, to improve or maintain our reputations*
 - *to feel proud, confident, and righteous before God*
 - *to obtain higher positions, opportunities, power, or wealth*
- **What good things do we sometimes need to repent of? In other words, what are some of the good things we do that we sometimes do for sinful reasons?**
 - *attendance at church, prayer meetings - or tithing - or serving in the church (but looking down on others who do less); being kind to others (but expecting recognition or appreciation), sexual purity (but looking down on those who have failed), sacrificing self for God's work (and feeling proud)*
- **What are some signs that may reveal that we are living as elder brothers?**
 - *Anger - at God, at self, at others.*
 - *Jealous – “I deserve, they don’t.” For example: “I have prayed so much for _____ and those people get what I want even though they are not as faithful as me!”*
 - *Judgmental of others.*
 - *Hates the law, but claims to love it. In other words, he obeys the law, but hates it when it doesn’t serve him well.*
 - *Says, “I have slaved,” To him, rules feel like “orders” rather than God's loving guidance. Obedience feels like “slavery” instead of grateful service.*
 - *Exclusive, shows favoritism*
 - *The elder brother wants to meet with his small group of friends. The father welcomes the whole community to celebrate together.*
 - *The elder brother doesn't want to “eat with sinners.”*
 - *Unforgiving.*
 - *Not interested in sharing the Good News! (except as another form of merit).*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What “goodness” do you need to repent of?**
 - **In other words, what good things do you do? Why do you do them? How are these things at least sometimes done *for you* instead out of love for your Father?**

- **Remembering the elder brother (the Pharisees) and his attributes, what is one way that you are acting like the older brother? Are you jealous? In what ways do you tend to think you deserve to be treated better by God or others? How is your thinking wrong?**
 - **What would it look like in your life for you to come home to the Father, to join the party?**

3. David and Mephibosheth

2 Samuel 4:4; 9:1-13 (Background: 1 Samuel 20:12-17)

Key Themes: Adoption

[Core Gospel Concepts: Identity in Christ, Intimacy with the Father]

THE STORY:

During the time of King Saul, the Israelites went to battle with the Philistines with whom they had been at war for many years. During the fierce battle, King Saul and his son Jonathan were both killed, and the soldiers of Israel all fled in defeat. When the news of King Saul and Jonathan came to their family, Jonathan's five-year-old son was taken up by his nurse, and they ran away in fear. As she fled, the boy fell and became lame, crippled in both feet. His name was Mephibosheth.

Years later, when David was king over Israel and the Lord had established his covenant with him, David said, "Is there anyone left in Saul's house that I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" [He asked this because David and Jonathan had been best friends, and they had promised to show kindness to one another's family as long as either lived.] Ziba, a servant from Saul's house, was called to David and was asked the same question.

Ziba answered, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet."

David asked, "Where is he?" When Ziba told David where he was, David sent for him. When Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, came and fell on his face before David to honor him, David said, "Mephibosheth!"

And he answered, "Behold, I am your servant."

Then David said, "Don't be afraid, I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you shall always eat at my table."

Mephibosheth was amazed and said, "Who am I, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"

Then David said to Ziba, "Everything that belonged to Saul I have given to Mephibosheth. And you, your sons, and servants shall till the land for him and give him the produce, that your master's grandson may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth, your master's grandson, shall always eat at my table." Ziba agreed to everything David had said. So he, his fifteen sons, and twenty servants became Mephibosheth's servants.

So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem because he always ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons. And he was crippled in both of his feet.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **2 Samuel 9:7** - *“Then David said, ‘Don’t be afraid, I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul, and you shall always eat at my table.’”*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **What is the most kind thing someone has ever done for you? Did you deserve that kindness? Why did they choose to love you that way?**

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today’s story is about a man who deserved nothing, but was given the greatest gift he could ever imagine.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - Who was the only living descendant of Saul? What had happened to him?
 - What did Mephibosheth call himself?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **MEPHIBOSHETH:** What was he like? What were his problems? How was he living like an orphan? Why was he unworthy to eat at the king’s table?
- **KING DAVID:** What was he like toward Mephibosheth? How did he treat him? Why could he have refused to help him? What do we learn from him in this story about God from the father? What does he want from us?
- **YOU and ME:** How did Mephibosheth’s life change? How does this story remind you of how God treats us when we repent and believe?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** How are we like Mephibosheth? I.e. How do we live like spiritual orphans? What does God want for us instead of living like spiritual orphans?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What current actions, attitudes, or beliefs show that you’re living like a spiritual orphan? How do you refuse to feast at your Father’s table?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

MEPHIBOSHETH:

- **What was Mephibosheth’s physical problem? How did this affect the rest of his life?**
 - *Mephibosheth was lame from an accident that happened when he was a child.*
 - *Made him an outcast, constantly dependent upon others, not able to make decisions on his own, helpless, hopeless.*
- **What was Mephibosheth’s other problem? What happened to his family? How do you think this made him feel? How was Mephibosheth’s situation like that of other orphans?**

- *He was the descendant of Saul, who had been rejected as king by God.*
- *He was an orphan. His grandfather and father were killed, and he was forced to live in hiding in case another king wanted to take his life.*
- *He likely lived every day of his life in fear of what could happen to him by someone more powerful than him. He was completely unable to help himself out of his situation.*
- *Mephibosheth had everything in his life stripped away from him in the matter of a few hours: his position in the royal family, his health, childhood, independence, loved one, friends, even his dignity. He was only five years old when this all happened. This was a true tragedy.*

KING DAVID:

- **Why does David choose to extend kindness to a member of Saul's house? How had Saul treated David during his life? What does this teach us about David's heart?**
 - *Because of the covenant that he had made with his close friend, Jonathan. David and Jonathan had promised each other that as long as they live, they would show kindness to each other's families. After all those years, David did not hate Saul, even though Saul hated David and had sought to kill him numerous times.*
 - *David had truly forgiven Saul and had truly loved Jonathan and was willing to keep his promise even though no one was there to hold him accountable to it.*
 - *His kindness was not based on the merit of Mephibosheth.*
- **What are two different ways that Mephibosheth is described in this story?**
 - *Several times in the story we are reminded that he was crippled or lame in his feet. This seems to be the distinguishing characteristic of Mephibosheth.*
 - *But David primarily sees him as a son of King Saul and Jonathan. His previous identity as son of his dear friend Jonathan and a member of the royal family is more important to David than the fact that he is lame.*
- **How do you think Mephibosheth felt when he was brought before the king?**
 - *He was probably scared, perhaps he thought that he had finally been found out and that he would be punished by David for all the evil that Saul had done to David. Mephibosheth falls down on his face before David in respect.*
- **How does David choose to treat Mephibosheth? What sorts of things does David give Mephibosheth?**
 - *"Don't be afraid." Immediately reassures him that this is a meeting of peace, not revenge.*
 - *Identifies and treats Mephibosheth as a son of the king.*
 - *Restores to him the land that had been Saul's.*
 - *Gives Ziba and his household as servants to care for the land and bring him the produce.*
 - *Offers him a seat at David's table all the days of his life (which would imply that Mephibosheth would live in Jerusalem with the king in his house).*

- **Who normally lives in the king's house and eats at the king's table? What does this tell us about David?**
 - *The family! Only the king's wife, children, and closest advisors and friends would eat at his table. Mephibosheth is being invited to a place at the table where only the king's family is welcome. Mephibosheth is being treated as if he is one of David's own sons.*
 - *David, the king of Israel, delights to extend kindness to this person who doesn't deserve it. There is nothing Mephibosheth can contribute to the work of David's kingdom; David expects nothing in return from Mephibosheth for the kindness that he is showing him.*

YOU and ME:

- **How does this remind you of how God treats us?**
 - *This story is for everyone who repents and puts their faith in Jesus! We are like Mephibosheth: hopeless, helpless, afraid, hiding, undeserving. But the King, in his abundant and eternal kindness, has invited us to eat at his table all the days of our lives as one of his own children.*
 - *Mephibosheth moved from being an orphan to being a son of the king, simply because the king declared it to be true. God does the same for us when we trust in Christ.*
 - *He never again needed to live in fear of being outcast but in the freedom of knowing he was part of the king's family. Mephibosheth was no longer known primarily by his physical disability; instead he was identified as a child of the king.*
 - *This is the heart of the gospel! We are unable to save ourselves out of our terrible situation. The only solution is for the King to extend undeserved kindness to us and make us a member of his family. It's not because of anything we have done.*
- **Does Mephibosheth's place at David's table come at a cost? Who pays the cost? What is this a future picture of?**
 - *David pays for Ziba's care. Also Ziba and his servants commit to serving Mephibosheth all of their days.*
 - *Points forward to Christ: the greater King, the greater Promise Keeper, the greater Servant, who paid with his own life so that we could be reconciled to God and given a seat at his table forever.*
- **Mephibosheth's life has been completely changed. He changed from living like an orphan to living as a beloved child. What is life like for abandoned orphans? Why is it so difficult to not have a father?**
 - *Lonely; no help; no one to depend on; no one who cares; no sense of belonging; no provision; deep sense of abandonment; uncertain future; need to provide for oneself; tendency to beg, borrow, steal instead of trusting in a father to provide; no place to call home; no shelter; no protection; easily gets into trouble; independent; does not need to listen to authority; has no parent or authority to*

tell him or her what to do or how to live; no good clothes; looked down on; people don't want to touch or associate.

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some ways that we might be living daily as if we are spiritual orphans?**
 - *May feel worthless because of being poor, less educated, less talented, less beautiful, less important than others.*
 - *May be anxious or fearful because we feel alone, helpless, or as if we don't belong.*
 - *May worry about our future, not trusting that our Father will care for us.*
 - *May feel that no one is providing for us so we need to steal it for ourselves.*
 - *May reject God's rule over our lives or ignore his law because we don't trust that He is leading us well.*
 - *May complain and grumble about our lives or be jealous of others.*
- **Jesus kindly invites us to dine at the Father's table! To be with Him, to be nourished by Him. What are some ways that we (even as Christians) sometimes fail to truly enjoy the feast He provides us at His table?**
 - *Shame, guilt, anxiety, fear, discontent.*
- **Ephesians 2:8,9: “It is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast.”** God's kindness to us is pure grace, totally undeserved. Sometimes instead of feeling too unworthy to be loved by God, we **believe that we deserve God's favor** and good treatment. **What are some of the reasons our hearts may feel this way? How does that rob us of the full riches of the Gospel?**
 - *Because we feel we have been faithful, generous, obedient. Or because we are talented, wealthy, educated, well known, important - at least more than other people!*
 - *Makes us less grateful to God and less dependent on the Gospel of Jesus, less able to rejoice in His great love for us!*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **In what way do you sometimes feel the same as an orphan would feel?** How do you view yourself more by things that are true on your surface than by what the King has declared to be true about you?
- **What is one way that you sometimes fail to feast at the Father's table?** Do you truly believe that the King delights to see you personally come into his presence? How can you more fully experience the freedom and joy that Jesus offers you at His table?
- **What is one way that you are tempted to think that God loves you because you deserve His love?** How could that rob you of the full riches of the true gospel? How can you repent today of this pride?

4. Mary and Martha

Luke 10:38-42

Key Theme: Resting in Our Father's Presence

[Core Gospel Concepts: Intimacy with the Father, Sin, Identity in Christ]

THE STORY:

One day Jesus and his disciples were traveling, and they came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Luke 10:42:** *"Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her."*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **Why should we pray? What are your motivations for praying or taking time to be with God?**

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today's story tells us about two women who welcomed Jesus into their home, but they did so in very different ways. Let's look together at how they each came to Jesus.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - What choice did Mary make when Jesus arrived in her home?
 - What choice did Martha make when Jesus arrived? How did she respond to Mary's choice?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **MARTHA:** What was she like? What was good? What was not good? How did she treat Jesus and her sister? What was most important to her?
- **MARY:** What was her attitude toward Jesus? What was most important to her?
- **JESUS:** How did he respond to Martha's complaint? What was most important to him?

- **YOU and ME:** When we allow our “good” work for God to prevent us from being with our Father, how does it affect the way we treat other people? Spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible study, and church attendance are good. But how can even these things become a hindrance to us sitting at Jesus' feet like Mary?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some ways we resemble Martha at times in our service to the Lord? Or in our spiritual disciplines?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What needs to change in my life after studying this story - after learning how Jesus just wants me to enjoy his presence and learn from him? I.e. What is one way that you are letting a Martha-like attitude prevent you from loving Jesus and others more fully?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

MARTHA

- **What did Martha do when Jesus came to her village? What did she do when Jesus came into her house?**
 - *She welcomed him into her home, and she began to make preparations for his visit.*
- **Why was Martha upset? What did she do about it? What did this reveal about her heart? What was Martha most concerned about? What do you think really motivated her or caused her to be that way? Why was Martha's work so important to her?**
 - *Martha opened her home to Jesus, but she failed to open her heart to him.*
 - *Serving Jesus is good, but Martha was so busy trying to make him think well of her that she failed to slow down and to know him personally and listen to him.*
 - *Martha was very distracted by all the work she thought she needed to do. Perhaps she was too concerned about looking good in front of her visitors.*
- **How did Martha treat Mary in this story? Why?**
 - *She was angry, blaming, and judgmental.*
 - *Mary was not joining in Martha's priorities. She was making her look bad and making her work harder.*

MARY

- **What did Mary do when Jesus came into the house? Where was she? What was her attitude?**
 - *Mary sat at Jesus' feet, listening to his teaching.*
 - *Her attitude was one of humility and eagerness to be with Jesus, to be near him, to listen to him, to sit with him.*
- **What was Mary most concerned about? Why do you think she was that way?**

- *Mary wanted to know Jesus, sit in his presence, listen to his words.*
- *She was most concerned with having a relationship with Jesus.*

JESUS

- **What was Jesus' response to Martha's complaint?**
 - *"You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*
- **What mattered most to Jesus when he went into someone's house or entered into their life?**
 - *Relationship with him or her.*
 - *Touching his heart and loving him.*

YOU and ME:

- **When we allow our "good" work for God to prevent us from being with our Father, how does it affect the way we treat other people?**
 - *Makes us proud, angry, jealous of other people who are not working as hard as we are.*
 - *Prevents us seeing and loving other people the way that God sees and loves them.*
- **In what way is Martha like the elder brother in the story of the Two Lost Sons?**
 - *Martha felt that she deserved Jesus' favor because of her work for him.*
 - *She wanted Jesus' approval more than she wanted to be with him.*
 - *She believed that hard work would make her right with God.*
 - *She was self-righteous, judgmental toward her sibling, and self-centered.*
- **Spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible study, and church attendance are good. But how can even these things become a hindrance to us sitting at Jesus' feet like Mary?**
 - *If we mainly focus on these things as ways to justify ourselves or to be worthy before God and others, then we are acting like Martha. Doing good things but deep down more focused on ourselves.*
 - *Such spiritual disciplines are to be tools to help us sit in Jesus' presence, to be with him, to learn from him, to humble ourselves before him, to learn to love*
- **If someone really understands and believes what Jesus has done for them – that he died on the cross and rose again for them - how can that help them long for fellowship with the Father?**
 - *If we think that we must keep earning God's favor by our hard work for him, we will remain anxious when it becomes difficult or we are failing.*
 - *If we trust fully in what Jesus did for us, we can relax sometimes and take time to sit with him, not feeling guilty about all the work we need to "produce" in order to feel good about ourselves.*

- *Understanding the cross will help us see that God wants to be our Father; wants us to value our relationship with him, and wants us to sit and listen to him.*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **How do we resemble Martha at times?**
 - *want to look good in front of others, to improve or maintain our reputations*
 - *want to feel proud, confident, and righteous before God*
 - *are so concerned about doing our duty that we don't take time to sit and listen to our Father who loves us.*
- **What are some common things in our lives that distract us from really sitting in the Father's presence?**
- **If knowing Jesus and being with him in his presence became the most important thing in our lives, how might we live differently? How would our attitudes be different? Or our actions? How can slow down to "sit" with and listen to Jesus help us to love others?**
- **If people in your church began considering knowing Jesus more important than all other activities or concerns, how do you think your church would be different than it is now?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **Can you think of a recent situation where you felt like Martha in this story? Perhaps a situation in your own life when you have failed to love others because of your busy work for the Lord?**
- **What works do you do "for the Lord"? How does this work, even though it is good, sometimes distract you from what is really needed - to be with your Father? What are you "worried and upset" about today? How can you repent of these distractions?**

5. The Woman and the Serpent

Genesis 3

Key Theme: The Nature of Sin, Unbelief

[Core Gospel Concepts: Sin, Created in God's Image, Intimacy with the Father]

Context: God had created mankind in His own image, male and female, and had placed them in the garden of Eden to help him care for his creation. They lived there in perfect fellowship with God.

THE STORY:

The Tempter

The serpent was the cleverest of all the animals God had made. One day, the woman was in the garden, and the serpent came up to her. The serpent said, “Did God really tell you that you may not eat from any tree in the garden?”

The woman said, “No, God said we may eat from every tree in the garden, except one of those in the middle– the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. We may not even touch it or we will die.”

The serpent said, “No! That is not true! God knows that when you eat of that tree, you will become wise like He is, knowing good and evil.”

Then the woman looked at the tree. She saw it was beautiful, and it would be good to eat, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they saw that they were naked. So they sewed leaves together to cover their bodies.

Hiding

Just at that time, they heard God walking in the garden. So they ran into the forest to hide. God called to the man, “Where are you?”

Adam said, “I heard you and was afraid, so I hid because I am naked.”

God said, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I told you not to eat from?”

Adam said, “This woman you gave to me – she gave me the fruit and I ate it!”

Then God said to the woman, “What have you done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate the fruit.”

Curses, Mercy, and Separation

God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed! You will crawl on your belly all your days eating the dust of the ground. And I will

put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he (the seed of the woman) will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Then God also cursed the woman, saying, “You will have terrible pain in child-bearing. Your desire will be against your husband but he will rule over you.”

Then God said to the man, “Because you listened to your wife, and have eaten of the tree I told you not to eat from, the land is cursed because of you! Through painful work by the sweat of your brow you will get your food, but the land will produce thorns and thistles. Then you will die and return to the dust from which you were taken.”

At that time, the man gave a new name to the woman. He called her Eve because she was the mother of all living people. And God made clothes for them from animal skins and clothed them. Then God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the Lord drove them out of the garden, and at the entrance of the garden he set angels and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Romans 3:10:** “As it is written. ‘There is no one righteous, not even one.’”

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- What do you think is the main motivation behind every sin?

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today’s story is taught in more detail in the Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) series. Here we are going to focus on seeing what it teaches about SIN.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - Name each sin done in this story.
 - Make a list of each word or occurrence that led to a sin.
 - List each consequence for sin in this story.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **THE SERPENT:** What were his strategies for tempting the woman and the man?
- **SIN:** What do we learn about sin? What it looks like? Where it comes from, it's root? What do we learn about how sin progresses?
- **ROMANS 1:18, 21-31:** The nature of sin? What does it mean to be given up to sin?
- **HOPE:** What hope does this story give to sinners?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some ways that we “sew fig leaves” in our lives in order to hide our sin or shame? I.e. What are ways we “suppress the truth” about God or about ourselves? How does this block our closeness to God?

- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What actions, attitudes, or beliefs need to change in your life after learning about sin and how deceitful our hearts are? What is one way that you are “sewing fig leaves” in order to hide your sin?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

THE SERPENT:

- **How did the serpent influence the thoughts of the woman (and the man who was with her)? In what way did he tempt her?**
 - *Made God’s good law seem too strict. “Did God REALLY say . . . ?” Tempted them to doubt God’s word or His goodness and trustworthiness. To think that perhaps God was withholding something good from them?*
 - *Tempted them to put themselves in charge of deciding what is best.*

SIN:

- **What is sin? How was the man and woman’s response to temptation sinful? What was the surface sin? What was the deeper sin underneath it?**
 - *Sin is breaking or failing to obey the law of God. The woman responded by paying attention to the lies that the serpent said about God and considering the doubts that he put into her mind. She failed to trust what God had said. She then responded by taking the forbidden fruit and eating it.*
 - *The surface sin was eating the fruit from the tree that God told them not to eat from. The deeper or hidden sin was unbelief - doubting that what God said was true and doubting that God had their best in mind when he gave that command. This ended with them deciding to rule their own lives in this situation rather than submitting to God’s rule.*
- **What happened after they ate the fruit? What does this teach us about the nature of sin?**
 - *Their relationship with God was broken.*
 - *They saw their nakedness and felt shame and began trying to hide their sin and shame by sewing fig leaves and by hiding in the forest.*
 - *Sin is rooted in deception and leads to hiding and adding sin upon sin in order to make ourselves seem righteous and approvable.*
- **What evidence was there that the first sin led to more sins?**
 - *The shame they felt, the attempts to hide their sin and make themselves appear righteous, this first instance of depending on themselves for their needs instead of God, fear of being seen and known inside and out blaming others for their sin - each other and God*

ROMANS 1:18,21-31:

- **READ Romans 1:18, 21-31 -**

- *¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. . . . ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. ²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. ²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.*
- **What does this passage teach us about the nature of sin? How is sin related to the truth in this passage?**
 - *Sin always involves **suppressing the truth** about God and about ourselves.*
 - *Sin involves **exchanging the truth** about God **for a lie**.*
- **Three times in this passage it says that “God gave them up to” more sin. What does this teach us about sin and how it works in our lives?**
 - *The more we listen to temptation and give into sin, the harder our hearts become, and the more easily we follow sin the next time. Unchecked by true repentance it grows deeper and stronger in us.*

HOPE:

- **What hope is there for sinners? Every person is a descendant of Adam and Eve, the mother of all living people, and are born outside of the Garden of Eden, outside of fellowship with God. We are all born with the sin nature, unable to save ourselves from the effects of sin. Where is there hope in this story?**
 - ***Genesis 3:15** is the first promise of a Savior who would come. It is pointing to Jesus Christ, the Seed of the Woman who would crush the head of the serpent. In other words he would destroy Satan and all his works and give us victory over sin. From this point on people could come to God by confessing their sin openly and putting their trust in the promised Savior.*
 - ***1 Corinthians 15:22** - “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”*

- **Romans 10:9** - *When we sin, it is still true that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*
- Even when God “gives us over” to our sin, he is allowing our sin to reap its natural consequences in our lives so that we might “come to our senses” and repent, trust in Christ, and be changed.

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- What are some ways that we “sew fig leaves” in our lives in order to hide our sin or shame? What are some ways that we “suppress the truth” and let our intimacy with our heavenly father be compromised?
- What are some practical examples where you can see destruction in people’s lives when they “exchange the truth about God for a lie?”
- How do you see practically in people’s lives today that God “gives us over to” sin when we rebel against Him?
- When we realize we have suppressed the truth or allowed sin to run away with us, what are we encouraged by this lesson to do?
 - *admit our sin to God, turn back to him, and put our hope in the Savior that he has promised to send, Jesus Christ.*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- What is one way that you have recently tried to suppress the truth or HIDE from God or “SEW FIG LEAVES”? In other words, in what situation have you tried to cover your sin and shame through your own efforts? How can this story help you come out from hiding?
- How has Satan deceived you sometimes? What lies about God or yourself are you even now tempted to believe?
- How are you tempted to try to take God’s place in some area of your life? How can you repent of this?

6. The Foolish Rich Man / The Foolish Rich Church)

Luke 12:15-21,31,34 / Revelation 3:15-20

Key Themes: Pride, Self-Dependence

[Core Gospel Concepts: Sin, Repentance, Intimacy with the Father]

THE STORY:

One day Jesus was teaching crowds of people, and someone said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But Jesus said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Then he told them a parable, saying,

“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And then I’ll say to my soul, “Soul, you have plenty of good things laid up to last for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul (life) will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God . . . Instead, you should first seek God’s kingdom, and these other things will be given to you as well . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Revelation 3:20** - *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **What are some of the gifts God has given you?** (things, abilities, relationships, opportunities, etc.)

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today’s story centers around Jesus’ parable of the rich fool. After learning this story we will also compare it to one congregation in the early church and see what we can learn.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER:(Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory, consider these questions:

- Why did Jesus tell this parable? What had someone said to him?
- What did the rich man do as his business got bigger?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **REASON for PARABLE:** Why did Jesus tell this story?
- **RICH MAN:** Riches, response, real goal, result?
- **RICH CHURCH / CITY: Read Revelation 3:15-20:** For both Laodicea church and city, what is its riches, its response, its real goal, and its result?
- **REAL PROBLEM:** What do we really need to understand about ourselves?
- **REAL SOLUTION:** What does Jesus offer for us to buy?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some of the riches that we have in our lives? How can these riches hinder our relationship with God?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What particular type of riches is hindering your relationship with God these days? How can you use those riches to love others better?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

REASON for PARABLE:

- **What prompted Jesus to tell this parable? How do you think the man who asked for Jesus' help with the inheritance was feeling? What did Jesus think was wrong with his request? What warning did he give?**
 - *take care, guard against life being about accumulating possessions*
 - *gave him example who HAD all those things the man wanted from his brother - and how bad it turned out.*
 - *Though the man asking the question did not have the riches he wanted, he was still being controlled by riches!*

RICH MAN:

- **What were the RICHES of the man in Jesus' parable? How was he blessed?**
 - *Grain, storage, money, organized, financially secure future, reputation*
- **What was his RESPONSE to these riches? I.e. What did he say to himself? How did it affect his attitude? What did this show about what was most important to him? Who was he depending on?**
 - *He said, "Soul, you have plenty of good things that you've stored up . . . eat drink, be merry." He told himself how good he was, how much he had, how he had no need.*
 - *proud, self-dependent, greedy, hoarding for himself, selfish, apathetic*
 - *not humble or thankful to God*
- **What was the REAL GOAL underlying that response?**
 - *himself, not others or God*

- What was the RESULT, the actual fruit in his life of the attitude he had about his blessing?
 - death - physically and spiritually, a wasted life

Transition: The rich man in this parable is similar to both the city and the church in Laodicea.

RICH CITY / CHURCH:

Rich City (Note to teacher: just summarize this information for the group. Note that this part does not come from Scripture but from a Bible dictionary.)

Many years later, after Jesus had gone up to heaven, God spoke to the church in Laodicea, as recorded in the book of Revelation. According to other historical documents, Laodicea was a city in the Roman province of Asia that started a few hundred years before Christ was born. By the time of the early church, it had become a wealthy center for business. It was in an area that was famous for producing beautiful, black wool and for having very good doctors who made special medicines.

But the city did have one obvious problem. They had no good water supply nearby. Therefore, they had to pipe water to their city from springs far away, so by the time the water arrived in Laodicea it was lukewarm and very hard to drink. This was different from its neighboring towns, one of which had hot water with healing powers, another of which had cold refreshing water.

But despite its poor water, the people of Laodicea thought they needed nothing from anyone else. They were proud of their own ability to take care of themselves. For example, when the city was destroyed by a terrible earthquake in AD 60, the people actually rejected the Romans' offer to help them rebuild. They could do it themselves! They thought they were rich and needed no help! The church at Laodicea had the same attitude. Listen to what God says through the angel to that church in Revelation 3.

Rich Church (Note: read aloud Revelation 3:15-20, repeat once before dialogue)

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can

cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

- **For the people of the city and church of Laodicea, what were their riches, their gifts, their advantages?**
 - *City: business, farms, money, gold, professional people, black wool, medical skills*
 - *Church: had all the same wealth physically plus felt rich spiritually*
- **For each of them, what was their response to their riches, gifts, advantages? What fruit did it produce in their attitudes?**
 - *proud, self-satisfied, made an idol of wealth, success, felt important and worthy*
- **What was the final result of these attitudes?**
 - *Their fruit in their lives was bad, tasteless (like the lukewarm water in the city)*
 - *Forgot God as source of all blessing. Credited themselves instead.*
 - *Lukewarm spiritually, spiritual pretenders, deceived themselves.*
 - *Prideful, blind to see their own need, so not praying to God for what they most needed*
- **What true needs in their lives did they fail to see? God told them that they were what? What did they truly need?**
 - *wretched, pitiful, poor*
 - *blind - could not see selves truly, did not see their sin, wrong motives*
 - *naked - exposed and shameful, no covering. Riches could not cover shame.*

REAL PROBLEM / REAL SOLUTION:

- **Considering the parable of the rich man as well as Jesus' words for the church at Laodicea, what do you think is one of the most foundational sins of people's hearts?**
 - *pride, depending on self, rejecting God*
- **What did he counsel them to "buy" from Him?**
 - *gold - true, refined by fire (remember, Laodicea was famous for its rich business)*
 - *so that would be rich, not wretched, pitiful, and poor*
 - *salve (remember, Laodicea was famous for its doctors and medicines)*
 - *so that they could see, not be blind, but able to truly see the truth about their own sin and need for forgiveness, and about the gift of life that Jesus offers*
 - *white clothes (remember, Laodicea was famous for black wool)*
 - *so that they could cover their nakedness and shame*

- **What was the gold refined by fire that they really needed?**
 - *growing relationship w/Christ – true riches*
- **What was the salve that they needed and Christ offered?**
 - *His Word and Spirit to enable them to see their own sin in light of God's holiness and to see the beauty of the Gospel of salvation that Jesus offers.*
- **What were the white clothes Jesus offered for purchase?**
 - *Jesus shed his blood to cover their sin and shame.*
- **How could they and you buy these important things?**
 - *Hear Him knocking at the door of your heart. Open the door so he can come in and eat with you and you with Him.*
 - *Realize that **He has already purchased all of this** for you.*
- **Jesus says, “So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” Is he mainly speaking to the lost who do not believe in Him? Who is he speaking to?**
 - *He's talking to believers, to the church, to us when we become prideful and self satisfied, unwilling to see our sin and follow Him closely through ongoing repentance and trust in the Gospel.*
- **Why are we so afraid to accept that we are “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked?” How does Jesus treat such people? Does he wait for them to come to Him? What does he really desire from those who realize they are “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked?”**
 - *He does not wait for us to clean ourselves up, to earn our own wealth, to clothe ourselves. He is knocking at the door!*
 - *He wants to help believers become hot for the Gospel, to grow in holiness, to grow in passion for knowing God more fully (to abide with Him, eat with Him be nourished by Him) and for making Him known to others.*
- **Consider again the rich man in Jesus' parable. How should he have thought about and used his blessings?**
 - *He should have recognized that every gift was from God Himself and that only God sustained him day by day. This should have felt him with thankfulness and praise.*
 - *He should have depended on God to know how best to use his blessings for God's kingdom - to love others and show them the beauty of God so that they also could feast with Him.*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **The rich man was rich with good crops and all the possessions he could ever want. Most of us are not that rich money wise, but we all do have some ways in which we are rich. What are some ways that people, particularly believers, are rich?**
 - or think of it another way:
- **What are some ways that we would like to be rich? In other words, of what things or advantages or positions do we sometimes think, “If only I had _____, then my life would be OK!”**
 - **When we think this way how can this hurt our relationship with God? Or with other people?**
- **How should we respond to God’s blessings in our lives, to the riches He provides for us?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What is one particular blessing/possession/advantage (maybe you have it, maybe you do not) that you sometimes feel you cannot live without? Something that has become a source of hope to you? How has this damaged your relationship with God? What would it be like for you to repent of this attitude?**
- **In reality, in what way are you lukewarm? Or wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked? When you realize this truth, how can it lead to change in your life?**
- **Jesus said, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” Are you experiencing God’s discipline in any way? What might God be asking you to repent of? Will you open the door to him and let him in to love you?**

7. The Call & Faith of Abram

Genesis 12:1-8; Genesis 15

KEY THEMES:Justification by Faith, Living by Faith

[Core Gospel Concepts: Justification, Identity in Christ, Nature of Faith, Obedience]

THE STORY:

After the time of Noah and the Tower of Babel, there was a man named Abram. He was 75 years old. His wife, Sarah, was also old. And they had no children. One day, God appeared to Abram and said, “Abram, you must leave your country. You must leave your family. And you must leave your father and go to a place that I will show to you. And I will make of you a great nation. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. And I will bless all the nations of the world through you.”

So Abram took his wife, Sarah, and his nephew, Lot, and he traveled for many months until God led him to Canaan, the Promised Land. Around that time there was a famine in the land. So Abram took his family to Egypt. There, even though Abram sinned by not trusting the Lord and lying to the king, God, in his mercy, protected him and his family, both from famine and from the Egyptians and even blessed Abram with great wealth during that time.

When Abram and his family returned to Canaan from Egypt, they had many animals. Both Abram and Lot were very rich by this time, and the land was not strong enough to support them both, so arguments broke out among their herdsmen. Abram said to Lot, “Let us not quarrel. We are one family. Look over the land. If you choose to go to the right, I will go to the left. If you choose the left, I will go right.” Lot looked at the whole land and saw that the valley of the Jordan River was very beautiful. It was full of tall grass good for animals and water. So he moved his herds to the valley and settled near the city of Sodom while Abram remained in Canaan, and God promised to give him and his offspring that whole land.

Then God appeared to Abram and said, “Do not be afraid. I am your shield and your reward.” But Abram said, “What good is it if you bless me when I have no son to inherit?” And God took Abram out and showed him the sky. He said, “If you can count the stars, then you will be able to count your

descendants.” And Abram believed God and God counted it to him as righteousness.

Then God told Abram to offer a special sacrifice in which God appeared to him as a flame of fire between the two halves of carcasses of several animals and spoke to him of the future.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Romans 3:21-22a** - *”But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- How would you explain to someone the relationship between faith and obedience and how we are saved?
- When God looks you in the eyes, what is the expression on his face? What if you do good? What if you do bad? What can you do to change the expression on his face when you look at him?

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today’s story helps us understand the relationship between faith, obedience, and righteousness in the eyes of God.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER:(Listening Task):

- As you’re committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - What promises did God make to Abram?
 - Why was Abram righteous in God's eyes?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **ABRAM:** In what ways does he show his faith in God?
 - **Hebrews 11:1** How is Abram's faith like what is described in this verse?
 - What are obstacles to his faith? When was his faith weak? I.e., How does he sin?
- **LOT:** In what ways do we see his sin? How does he not trust God?
- **GOD:** What is God’s role in faith and our salvation?
 - **Ephesians 2:8,9** Where does salvation come from? Where does faith come from?
- **THE SACRIFICE:** Why is sacrifice important to our justification, i.e. to being declared righteous?
 - **Romans 3:21-25** What does sacrifice and faith have to do with Jesus?
- **THE GREAT EXCHANGE - JUSTIFICATION by FAITH**
 - **2 Corinthians 5:21** The Great Exchange example - our sin / Christ's righteousness.

- **WHY IT MATTERS:** How does justification secure our future? How does it help us now?
 - **Faith & Obedience: Our Sanctification:**
 - How can remembering our justification daily help us to progressively change, to grow more obedient to God like Jesus?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:**
 - Name some different sins. Share how each one can be linked to not fully trusting God.
 - How do we try to make ourselves right in the eyes of God or others? I.e. What are ways that we attempt to justify ourselves by our good works?
 - How can trusting in our justification by grace through faith become the foundation on which we grow in obedience?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:**
 - What is one of the actions in your life that seems to be rooted in NOT believing that you are truly forgiven and made right before God? What have you learned in this story that can help you grow in true obedience through faith in the Gospel?
 -
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

HEBREWS 11:1:

- **According to this verse, what is faith? Let's look at how this is displayed in the life of Abram.**
 - *Assurance of things hoped for, belief in things not seen*

THREE CHARACTERS - ABRAM, LOT, GOD

- **ABRAM:**
 - **What did God first call Abram to do? What promises did God make to Abram?**
 - **Is faith easy? What were the obstacles to him doing this? What were his struggles?**
 - *Old age of self and wife, childless, leaving behind family and all that is known, going to unknown land, facing powerful enemy king, waiting for years, watching Lot have blessing of rich land*
 - **How did Abram solve the conflict between him and Lot? How did this display his faith?**
 - *He let go of some good things (beautiful grassy valley), he was centered on other people, and He trusted God to bless him. Did not cling to his rights.*

- **How did Abram respond when God showed him the stars to remind him of his promise? How did God in turn respond to him?**
 - *Abram believed God. God counted him as righteous in his sight.*
- **What do we learn from Abram about how faith relates to obedience?**
 - *Faith comes before obedience.*
 - *Faith produces obedience.*
 - **Galatians 5:6** - *“Faith expressing itself through love.”*
 - *Our faith is displayed or worked out in our love (our obedience).*
- **Did Abram have perfect faith? Was Abram a sinner? How do we see this?**
 - *NO, he had doubts, showed through his question of “What good is all this if I have no one to inherit?”*
 - *He stopped trusting God for a time. He feared the Egyptians and lied to the Egyptian king.*
- **LOT:**
 - **How is Lot different from Abram? How did Lot look at the world and make decisions?**
 - *Lot was focused only on himself and his earthly interests.*
 - *Abraham first considered his relationship with God when making decisions while*
 - **What does Lot’s approach tell us about man in general?**
 - *Mankind is naturally focused on himself, making decisions based on what is in his own interest, not considering God in the process.*
- **GOD:**
 - **God was the primary actor in this story and in this relationship. How do we see God acting on Abram’s part?**
 - *Appears to him over and over; called him; repeatedly affirmed His promises; declared Abram righteous; purposed to bless all the nations through him; led him, protected, provided; encouraged him over and over.*
 - **How did God treat Abram when his faith was failing in Egypt and when he was struggling with doubts after Lot moved away? Does God require perfect faith in order to respond to us or be kind and merciful to us?**
 - *God shows patience and mercy, and responds even to weak faith when our faith is in Him.*
 - *The greatest issue is not the measure of our faith, but the object of our faith, i.e. in WHOM are we TRUSTING?*
 - **What is God’s role in faith?**

- *Faith must be rooted in God's character and promises. God was the initiator. He chose and commanded Abram. He blessed him and guided him. He was faithful to keep his promises.*
- **Read Ephesians 2:8- 10: What does this tell us about where faith comes from? How does it relate to works**
 - *It is the gift of God.*
 - *We are not saved by works, but saved to work for God!*
- **What was Abram's response to all of God's initiative?**
 - *He received. By faith. Passive righteousness. Like earth receiving the water.*
 - **HE BELIEVED** – *trusted God's promises and character and acted on the basis of his faith, trusting Him for his future. He did not earn his righteousness, but received it.*
 -
- **What was God's response to Abram's faith – especially after showing him the stars and renewing his promises?**
 - **He COUNTED HIM as RIGHTEOUS**
 - **What does this mean, that God credited or counted him as righteous?**

What does the story show us about what this means?

 - *He accepted him as His own. He received him into relationship despite his sin. He forgave his sin. The righteousness God gave him was a gift. He did not earn his status of righteousness through his good works.*
- **SACRIFICE:**
 - **What did God require Abram to offer in order to continue meeting with him? What does this show us?**
 - *He had to offer a sacrifice. The bloody sacrifice tells us that Abram is a sinner who needs a lamb who would die in his place, a lamb whose blood is shed in his place in order to meet a holy God.*
 - **How does this point to Christ? How was he like the sacrifice?**
 - *Christ is the final, perfect sacrifice that eternally provides a substitute for our sin. When we trust in Him and his death on the cross, our sins are forgiven and we are declared righteous by God.*
 - **What does this teach us about justification?**
 - *Justification is being made right before God, not by our own goodness, but by God's grace, by Him declaring us righteous based on a righteous sacrifice made in our place. We receive it by faith.*
 - **Romans 3:21-25a - a sacrifice of atonement for justification**

- *But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a **sacrifice of atonement**, through faith in his blood.*

- **GREAT EXCHANGE:**

- **READ 2 Corinthians 5:21** – How does this affirm what we’ve been talking about?
- **ILLUSTRATION – 2 Book Covers** – *one book labeled with my name contains all the deeds, thoughts, words of my life (obviously deeply tainted by sin), the other contains all Jesus’ thoughts, words, actions (completely holy and good) – when I trust in Jesus, God essentially takes the cover off of Jesus’ book labeled with his name and puts it on my book, i.e. Jesus is taking credit for my sin and pays the penalty on the Cross. He also takes the book cover with my name and puts it on the book about Jesus, i.e. crediting me with all of Jesus’ righteousness. - the Great Exchange of my Sin for His righteousness!*
-

- **WHY IT MATTERS:**

- **If someone is 1) forgiven of all his sins and 2) given credit for all of Jesus’ perfect righteousness, how would this affect them when they stand before God on the day of judgment?**
 - *He’s completely accepted by God, and can look forward to eternal life of joy and peace with Him.*
- **If someone is 1) forgiven of all his sins and 2) given credit for all of Jesus’ perfect righteousness, how should it affect a believer’s life now – especially when he struggles with sin? What specific changes might it lead to in a person’s life? How can it help him to grow in his walk with the Lord?**
 - *He will be more at peace. Will be less worried about what other people think of him or about the problems or challenges he has in his life. It will help him to lie or gossip or boast or be too critical less and less over time. He will become more and more like Christ!*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **Every sin is somehow connected to not trusting God.** I.e. We do not fully believe . . . that the forgiveness and righteousness which we have in Christ is enough for us . . . or that God loves us fully.

- Name some different sins. Share how each one can be linked to not fully trusting God.
- People throughout history have tried to justify themselves, to make themselves righteous before God. Every religion does this. But even believers who are eternally justified before God sometimes slip into living as if they need to justify themselves. What are some ways that people do this?
 - *Obedying all the laws of their religion.*
 - *Trying to do all the right things, to never make a mistake or do anything bad.*
 - *Doing great and generous things that other people can recognize.*
 - *Comparing themselves to others in hopes of looking better.*
 - *Pretending that their sin is not so bad.*
 - *Trusting in education or riches or power.*
- How can trusting that we are truly justified by grace through faith become the foundation on which we grow in obedience to Christ?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- What is one of the obstacles today that makes it challenging to trust God or to really believe he has forgiven you and made you completely righteous in his eyes? How can this story encourage you?
- What is one of the actions in your life that seems to be rooted in NOT believing that you are truly forgiven and made right before God? For example, which of your deeds or words are motivated by a sense that you can only satisfy God through your own obedience or righteous behavior? What have you learned in this story that can help you grow in true obedience through faith in the Gospel?

TEACHER'S REVIEW: Main points about JUSTIFICATION from this story: (Teacher, study through this as part of your preparation for teaching.)

- **Faith: Justification is by faith alone.**
 - Faith is rooted in understanding what God is really like. He is trustworthy, holy, truthful, faithful, powerful, and gracious.
 - Faith is more than just intellectual belief. It is a trusting relationship that results in taking risks, i.e. being willing to step out to obey when we don't see the outcome. (Heb 11:1ff)
 - It is leaning one's whole weight upon God.
 - Faith has obstacles – look at Abram's obstacles to faith:
 - His own sin, doubt, his age, Sarai's age, their lack of child, the long wait
 - Faith is expressed in obedience.
 - God honors people of faith, even through times of weakness.
- **God's revelation: Abram's justification was rooted in God's revelation** of himself so that he could know him.

- God was the actor in justifying Abram: He chose him; he reached out to Abram; he called him, justified him; led him; protected him; and was faithful to him. Abram received all that God did for him by faith. God was active. Abram was passive. He simply received.
- **God's goodness / grace. Justification is totally based on God's unmerited grace toward sinners.**
 - Abram was a sinner. Not consistent in his faith, yet God honored, responded to his faith.
 - Abram had not earned anything by his deeds.
- **Counted or credited as righteous: Justification is not being righteous on our own, but having Christ's righteousness credited to our account because of his shedding his blood for us.**
 - God met with Abram, appeared to him in a special way, and related to him.
 - God provided a way for Abram to come into his holy presence.
 - Sacrifice was needed for Abram to relate to God.
 - It was grace, BUT it was not free. Sacrifice was required to atone for Abe's sin.
 - The sacrifice pointed to Christ and his sacrifice.
- **Our justification is the foundation for our ongoing sanctification.**
 - **Colossians 2:6,7** - *⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*
 - I.e. You received Jesus through repentance and faith. Continue to live daily in the same way, through repentance and faith, full of thankfulness which leads to obedience.
- **In SUMMARY:**
 - Man comes to God, is justified, only through the bloody substitute that God provides.
 - God responds to faith in that substitute, Jesus Christ, by justifying the sinner.
 - Justification is a one-time, eternal act by God. It cannot be undone!
 - But our faith that leads to justification is a journey with ups and downs, not a one-time act. This persevering faith in our justification is vital for ongoing growth in the Lord.
 - Faith perseveres even when things don't make sense. It is often risky.
 - True faith is known by the works or deeds it produces. i.e. True faith produces obedience. I.e., Obedience flows from faith.
 - True obedience is living in light of our justification, i.e. living as if we have indeed been justified or counted righteous before God.

OTHER HELPFUL VERSES. What do they each say about JUSTIFICATION and how it helps us live our lives daily?

- Romans 4:1-3 – *Abram justified by faith, not by works*
- Hebrews 11: 1-12 – *By faith . . . obedience*
- Romans 5:8 – *Christ died for us and justifies us "while we are still sinners."*
- 1 John 4:10 – *God love us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for us*
- Romans 1:16,17 – *Salvation for all who believe - A righteousness that is by faith*
- Romans 4:3 – *Abe believed God and credited to him as righteous.*
- Romans 3:21-25 – *had to meet the requirement of the law – sins could only be forgiven by shedding of blood – a righteousness by faith, justified by grace*
- Romans 5:1 – *because we are justified by faith, we have peace through Jesus.*
- Galatians 2:14 - *living in step with the truth of the Gospel.*
- Galatians 2:20b - *"The life I live in the body, I live by faith in (who?) the Son of God, who (did what?) loved me and gave himself for me." i.e. Since I'm a believer, a child of God, I live my life daily in obedience to God by trusting in the truth of the Gospel, that the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.*

8. Nicodemus & the Bronze Serpent

John 3:1-21 (also Numbers 21:4-9)

KEY THEMES: Justification by Faith, Received Righteousness

[Core Gospel Concepts: Justification, Sin - Unbelief, Nature of Faith]

THE STORY:

One day Jesus was in Jerusalem around the time of the Passover and had been teaching all day. When it was evening, he went out to the place where he was staying. When it was dark, a man came to see him. His name was Nicodemus, and he was one of the rulers of the Jews. Nicodemus said, “Teacher, we know that you have come from God for no one could do the things you are doing unless God were with him.”

Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

Now Nicodemus was confused. He said, “How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter his mother’s belly a second time and come out again?”

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly I say to you, The one who is born of flesh is flesh, but the one who is born of the Spirit is spirit. You must be born again.”

Nicodemus was still confused. He said, “How can this be?”

So Jesus reminded him of an incident in the history of Israel when Moses was leading the people through the wilderness. At that time Israel had disobeyed God, and God had sent many snakes into the camp which were biting many people. Many were in great pain and were sick and even dying. Then Israel cried out to God, “Help us!” Then God told Moses what to do. He said, “Make a snake out of metal and put it on a tall pole. Then set the pole up in the middle of the camp. If any one is bitten by a snake, he only has to look at the snake-on-the-pole, and he will not die.” And this is what happened.

Then Jesus said to Nicodemus, “In just the same way that Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so also the Son of Man must be lifted up so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **John 3:16,17** - “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Whoever believes in him is not

condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **What do you think it means to be born again?**

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today's story helps us to see how our salvation and the way we live are all about Jesus.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - How does Jesus bring the Old Testament into his own day?
 - What comparison does Jesus make in this story?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **NICODEMUS** Who was he? What was his faith like?
- **BORN AGAIN:** What does it mean? Why did Jesus use this example as a picture for being restored in relationship with God?
- **JOHN 3:16:** Where does being born again lead?
- **JUSTIFICATION by FAITH:** How does it relate to John 3:16?
- **BRONZE SERPENT:** What do we learn about saving faith? About the object of our faith?
- **NICODEMUS CHANGED:** What was different?
- **2 CORINTHIANS 5:21** The Great Exchange example - our sin / Christ's righteousness.
- **SANCTIFICATION:** How can remembering our justification by faith daily help us to change, to grow more like Jesus?
- **RECEIVING / RESTING:** How Justification is the Foundation of Sanctification or True Life Change :
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some ways that we today, like the Pharisees, try to justify themselves?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** In what issue in your life do you need to put your eyes of faith on of Jesus - just like the Israelites looked to the bronze serpent?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

NICODEMUS:

- **Who was Nicodemus? Why was it risky for him to come see Jesus?**
 - *He was a ruler of the Jews, a teacher. Risked being condemned by fellow Jews who opposed Jesus.*

- Nicodemus said, “Teacher, we know that you have come from God for no one could do the things you are doing unless God were with him.” What did Nicodemus believe about Jesus at this point? How can we see that his faith was still weak?
 - *Nicodemus had a growing faith. He came asking questions. He knew Jesus was from God.*
 - *His faith was weak and confused. He showed fear by coming at night.*
 - **What does this teach us about the quality of faith that Jesus requires in order to respond to us?**
 - *Jesus never rejects those who earnestly come to him, though their faith is weak or confused.*

BORN AGAIN:

- **How does Jesus respond to Nicodemus’ comment / question? What was he most concerned about? Why did Jesus use the words “born again” to describe entering God’s kingdom?**
 - *Jesus is concerned about Nicodemus more than about defending himself or arguing theology. Wants Nicodemus to be in his kingdom, to be born again*
 - *When we are BORN the first time, we ourselves do nothing to cause our own birth. It just happens to us. We are birthed through the acts of our father and mother. Being BORN AGAIN, i.e. born the second time or reborn spiritually, shows that we do or contribute nothing to our spiritual birth! By grace alone do we receive this spiritual birth. We receive it by faith alone, i.e. by putting our trust in what God has done in us.*
 - *Being BORN also means to come to life. Prior to our second birth we are spiritually dead in our sin. In our rebirth, God makes us alive! When he does, we become aware of our sin that separates us from Him and throw ourselves on his mercy in Christ, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification!*
- **We tend to think that we will be saved or enter God’s kingdom if we can turn our life around. What do we learn from Jesus’ words, “You must be born again?” How is being “born” different than “turning your life around”?**
 - *To turn your life around implies that you will fix yourself. For someone to be born is something beyond his own power. We cannot make it happen. Only God can give us life. We have to leave behind the old life. We are dead in our sins. We must be made alive again spiritually through a new birth.*

JOHN 3:16:

- **In John 3:16 Jesus uses a different way to describe what he means by being born again to enter the kingdom of God. What does he say there about gaining eternal life or entering the kingdom of God?**
 - *When we are born again, we BELIEVE in the one and only Son that God, in his love, has sent into the world, and we receive eternal life.*
 - **Being born again leads to saving faith.**

JUSTIFICATION by FAITH:

- **Justification:** Being justified before God means being counted as righteous in his eyes. Remember Abram. He “believed God and it (his faith) was credited to him as righteousness.” (Gen 15:6)
 - **How is being born again like being justified or counted as righteous?**
 - *Just like being “born again” is something only God can do for us, being “credited” with righteousness before God is also something only God can do for us.*
 - *Faith in Christ that justifies means simply receiving His grace. His righteousness or salvation is given to us and received by faith alone, not by our works.*
 - **Saving faith leads to being counted righteous and receiving eternal life**

BRONZE SERPENT - Saving Faith - an example:

- **Jesus uses an example to explain what it means to believe - the example of the Israelites in the wilderness. Why was their complaining unfair to God? What had God already done that Israel so quickly forgot? How does their complaining reveal their unbelief?**
 - *He had already miraculously saved them from Egypt through the plagues and led them through the Red Sea and had provided food and water over and over again.*
 - *By complaining they were showing that they did not trust in His promises to provide and care for them and his promises to lead them back to the Promised Land.*
- **The Israelites’ faith was tested when they had to wait for water or for food or to reach the promised land. In what ways is our faith tested? When are we tempted to complain against God?**
 - *So many ways. When life is not working out the way we want – when we don’t get blessings we want, when we go through pain and sickness, when we’re treated unfairly, when we have to wait for God’s answer to our prayers.*
- **When we give in to unbelief and start complaining, what are we forgetting? What are we refusing to believe?**
 - *We forget all that God has already done for us – especially the salvation and hope and new identity he has given us through Jesus, and all the promises that go along with that salvation.*
- **How does this story of the Israelites in the wilderness help Nicodemus and us understand what it means to be born again? What did saving faith look like for the Israelites? What should it look like for us? How would Jesus be like the bronze serpent?**
 - *The Israelites recognized and confessed their sin before God and pleaded for mercy. Then they looked to the salvation God provided, the bronze serpent.*
 - *Jesus also would be lifted up on a pole - on the cross - to pay for our sins.*

- *Like the Israelites we confess our sin and rebellion and plead with God for help and mercy and look with eyes of faith upon the Savior that God has provided - Jesus.*
- **What was the function or purpose of the many serpents that God sent on the Israelites? Was there any grace in His sending the serpents?**
 - *The snakes were a punishment they deserved for their sin, but also . . .*
 - *The snakes were a huge grace to make the people desperate for a saving God and to lead them to repentance and faith.*
- **Let's return to Nicodemus for a minute. How would you describe Jesus' response to Nicodemus in general? What was Jesus' attitude?**
 - *kind, patient, attitude of teaching, not hung up on winning an argument or convincing a hard heart, but intent on digging into Nicodemus' heart needs – the need to be born again by faith.*

NICODEMUS CHANGED by JESUS BEING LIFTED UP:

- **Was Nicodemus changed after meeting with Jesus? What evidence do we see that he had saving faith in Jesus?** Consider these two other instances that the New Testament records Nicodemus' words and actions:
 - **Read John 7:45-52** where Nicodemus stands up for Jesus before other Pharisees.
 - **Read John 19:38-42** where Nicodemus helps Joseph of Arimathea prepare Jesus' body for burial.
 - **What might these two instances of Nicodemus' words and actions teach us about his faith and the evidence of slow steady growth?**
 - **Considering what Jesus said about Moses being lifted up in the wilderness, what was especially significant about the timing of Nicodemus participating in Jesus' burial?**
 - *Nicodemus is slowly getting a bit bolder. Daring to question his peers, the Pharisees he spent time with.*
 - *This evidence is of an even stronger faith in Jesus – to help Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus after his death. He was not too afraid to be associated with Jesus' followers.*
 - *Nicodemus has now seen with his own eyes that Jesus, the Son of Man, was lifted up, and he was believing in him for eternal life just as Jesus promised. Surely Nicodemus remembered those words of Jesus at this time!*
 - *He responded to Jesus' kindness and patience with him. Surely he had been born again and was beginning to taste the new life of salvation!*
 - **What is significant about John 19:38-42, the strongest evidence that Nicodemus had been changed?**
 - **What can we learn from this about where true change in our lives come**

from?

- *Change comes when we turn the eyes of faith on Jesus and what he did for us in his death and resurrection.*
- *Faith in Jesus leads to salvation, eternal life.*
- *And it then also leads to a slow change in the way we live for God day by day, just as it did for Nicodemus!*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21:

- **How is this verse like John 3:16,17?**
- **ILLUSTRATION – 2 Book Covers** – *one book labeled with my name contains all the deeds, thoughts, words of my life (obviously deeply tainted by sin), the other contains all Jesus' thoughts, words, actions (completely holy and good) – when I trust in Jesus, God essentially takes the cover off of Jesus' book labeled with his name and puts it on my book, i.e. Jesus is taking credit for my sin and pays the penalty on the Cross. He also takes the book cover with my name and puts it on the book about Jesus, i.e. crediting me with all of Jesus' righteousness. - the Great Exchange of my Sin for His righteousness!*

SANCTIFICATION: How can remembering our justification by faith daily help us to change, to grow more like Jesus?

- **If someone is 1) forgiven of all his sins and 2) given credit for all of Jesus' perfect righteousness, how would this affect them when they stand before God on the day of judgment?**
 - *He's completely accepted by God, and can look forward to eternal life of joy and peace with Him.*
- **If someone is 1) forgiven of all his sins and 2) given credit for all of Jesus' perfect righteousness, how should it affect a believer's life now – especially when he struggles with sin? What specific changes might it lead to in a person's life?**
 - *He will be more at peace. Will be less worried about what other people think of him or about the problems or challenges he has in his life. It will help him to lie or gossip or boast or be too critical less and less over time. He will become more and more like Christ!*

RECEIVING / RESTING - How Justification is the Foundation of Sanctification or true life change :

- **The Pharisees often focused on gaining righteousness through obeying the law. But this was fruitless.**
- **“Received righteousness” - Jesus said, “You must be BORN again.” It does not say, “You must fix yourself.”**
 - **i.e. The only true righteousness before God is “received” righteousness. It is received from him. Made right - all by God's work.**

- o *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.* (Ephesians 2:8,9)
- **Received by faith - We receive this righteousness only by believing, by focusing our spiritual eyes on the Savior that God provides just like the Israelites focused their physical eyes on the bronze serpent.**
 - o **Learning to REST in the righteousness that Jesus provides is the foundation for living more obediently for doing righteous deeds that honor God.**
- **Heart change leads to LIFE CHANGE to a fuller obedience, a deeper confidence to live for Him!**

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- Many of the Pharisees like Nicodemus tried so hard to be good and to obey all of the law in order to justify themselves before God. **What are some ways people try to justify themselves today? What about we as believers?** How do we try to make ourselves right in the eyes of God or others?
- **What kind of things continue to condemn us in our lives? How can this story help us when we feel condemned?**
- Like the rebellious Israelites looking at the bronze serpent, we need to look by faith at Jesus alone on the cross to be born again and to remain strongly connected with him. He is the one who makes us right before God and helps us to live for His glory. **What are some ways that we tend to take our eyes off of Jesus?**
- **What might be some of the serpents God uses in our lives to stretch our faith? How can the pain someone is going through lead to a deeper faith and a richer understanding of the new life we have in Christ?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **Christian, in what issue in your life are you taking your eyes of faith off of Jesus? What do you need to repent of so that you can trust again in the awesome grace of God that justifies you and sustains you? How does God promise to receive you when you repent and trust Him?**
- **Have you been born again? Has God changed your heart so that you see your sin and your need for a Savior? If not, can you share with a believer and understand what it means to give your life to Jesus?**
- **What sin or failure seems to be condemning you over and over? How can this story encourage you?**

9. The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Luke 18:9-14

Key Themes: Justification, Self-Righteousness / Humility

[Core Gospel Concepts: Sin, Repentance, Use of the Law, Justification]

THE STORY:

One day Jesus told a parable to some people who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else. This is what Jesus said:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself, saying, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his chest and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'"

And Jesus said, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Hebrews 10:19-22:** *"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience..."*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **Are there any people in your life who you tend to look down upon? If so, what kind of person or people do you look down on? Why?**

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- In today's story Jesus has something to say to us when we are feeling proud or looking down on others. Let's look at the story he teaches and discuss what we learn about the story's characters.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory:
 - Note all the words and actions of the Pharisee.
 - Note all the words and actions of the tax collector.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **AUDIENCE:** Who was Jesus telling the parable to? Why?
- **BOTH MEN - The SAME?:** How were the Tax Collector and Pharisee alike?
- **BOTH MEN - DIFFERENT?:** How were they different in their behavior?
- **GOD's LAW - USING IT RIGHTLY or WRONGLY:** How well did the law serve each man?
- **SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES:** What laws do we make for ourselves about disciplines like prayer, Bible study, fellowship, tithing, etc.? What should be our true goal in such disciplines?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** How do we today sometimes resemble the Pharisee in how we think, act, or speak? How do we try to look good in front of others.
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** How am I like the Pharisee these days in my approach to God? How can I repent?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):)

AUDIENCE:

- **Who was Jesus telling this parable to?**
 - *Those who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else.*
- **Who might those people be these days? In whom might we see the Pharisee or the tax collector today, in our churches and world?**
 - *Highly committed people in the church - pastors, leaders, those who tithe, those who attend every event, some who pray or sing loudly and passionately.*
 - *People who do good things, but begin to be proud of themselves for these things. They do good things more for their own reputation than out of humble gratitude to God or out of love for others.*

HOW THEY WERE THE SAME? - Pharisee and Tax Collector

- **What did these men have in common? What did each of these men go to the temple to do?**

HOW THEY WERE DIFFERENT? - Pharisee and Tax Collector

- **Let's look at some of their differences. Where and how did each one position himself to pray?**
 - *The Pharisee stood proudly, spoke loudly, had no shame, only felt confidence in himself.*
 - *The tax collector stood far off to the side, almost hiding. He was full of shame and sorrow. Beat his chest with his head down.*
- **Why did each of these men go to the temple to pray?**

- *Pharisee: to exalt himself, to show off in front of others, to boast in front of the Lord, to recount for all every act of commitment.*
- *Tax collector: to plead for God's mercy, he was broken by his own sin. Knew he deserved punishment and condemnation, was burdened by it.*
- **What was each man depending on?**
 - *Pharisee: himself, his own good deeds, his own rule keeping, his own righteousness.*
 - *Tax collector: God alone, God's mercy on sinners.*
- **How was it possible for the Pharisee to feel so confident in himself?**
 - *He looked only at his surface activities, not at his heart attitudes.*
 - *Compared himself to others in these surface activities. Felt that God owed him since he performed better than other people.*
- **What was the difference in how each man approached God?**
 - *Pharisee: not in need, just came to acknowledge his own righteousness. He said he was thankful, but really was just proud. Felt like God owed him a good position and that he deserved for God and man to listen to him. He could not see the sin of his heart because of his pride in how well he performed in his religious activities.*
 - *Tax collector: desperately needy, ruined by his sin, knew it and admitted it, hopeless in himself, grateful for a God that would just listen to him, even though he didn't deserve it.*
- **What was the final result for each man?**
 - *The tax collector went home justified before God.*
 - *But the Pharisee remained lost in his sin.*
- **What did it mean for the tax collector to be "justified" before God?**
 - *He was accepted by or approved of by God. He was made right in God's eyes.*

GOD'S LAW - Using Rightly or Using Wrongly?

- **So, did all the good things that the Pharisee do end up being good for him or harmful for him? Why?**
 - *They were ultimately harmful because Satan used them to deceive him into thinking he was righteous and in need of no help. He did not see his need for a Savior.*
 - *In the end he did not really trust God and was not justified. Therefore he was in danger of God's judgment.*
- **How well did God's law serve or help each man?**
 - **How did it serve the tax collector? How did it help him?**

- *It showed him that God was holy, that he was a terrible sinner, and it led him to cry out to God for mercy.*
- **How did it serve the Pharisee? How did it help him?**
 - *Not very well. The law is good, but the Pharisees set up external obedience to the law as the key to pleasing God and standing before him. They even added more rules and regulations that they could obey in order to increase their display of commitment before others. Thus, they cheated themselves regarding the reality of their inner heart sins.*
 - *Their misuse of the law led them to depend on themselves and not on God. In the end it led to destruction for those who never repented.*

USING the MEANS of GRACE:

- **What do you think this parable can teach us in regard to using the various disciplines of our faith, such as having our personal quiet times?**
 - *Simple external activity, for example obeying a law to pray and read every day, might just lead to pride rather than truly meeting with our Father.*
 - *God wants us to come to him in need, admitting our own unworthiness and inability to save ourselves or fix our own lives or the problems of the world. We are to believe that he is a God who loves us and receives us always. We are to come in gratitude for all he has done for us in Christ.*
- **How could having daily times of prayer and Bible reading ever turn into a bad or dangerous thing? Is this possible? Does that mean we should stop doing it?**
 - *These practices can become dangerous when doing them makes us proud and makes us look down on others, as if these practices earned our salvation before God.*
 - *We should not stop doing these things. Instead we should continue in them but repent regularly of the wrong attitudes we've had and trust Jesus alone for our righteousness. We should ask the Spirit to grow in us a humble, thankful, and repentant heart.*
- **What really makes true fellowship with God possible?**
 - *The gospel of grace through Christ. We need to respond to the gospel in faith, to know that God loves you and wants you to be with him. This must always be at the heart of our devotional time, church activities, and areas of service.*
- **What should be the ultimate goal of prayer and Bible study? What should you avoid? Why?**
 - *The final goal is to meet with your merciful Father.*
 - *Should be aware of your own tendency to build a sense of your self-righteousness or to be overwhelmed with guilt when you fail. Better to rejoice in having a Father who loves you and a Savior who died for you.*

- **Read Hebrews 10:19-23. How can confidence in God’s grace and forgiveness for your sins help you in your devotional life? How can knowing that you are adopted as God’s child who is always welcome into his direct presence encourage your devotional life?**

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **How do we resemble the Pharisee at times in the way we think and act? How do we subtly try to look good in front of other believers?**
- **When you realize that you are more concerned about your own reputation than loving others, what should you do?**
 - *Confess your sin, repent, trust again in Jesus, knowing that he saves you and is ready through the Holy Spirit to continue helping to change your heart and your actions.*
- **What are some specific ways that such a Pharisee attitude can hurt the way we approach our daily devotions or other spiritual disciplines?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **How do you sometimes think or behave like the Pharisee? How does the attitude of the Pharisee affect your spiritual disciplines such as participating in church, doing daily devotions, or avoiding particular sins?**
- **Are you ever tempted to do or say something among fellow Christians that, deep down, is mainly an effort to impress people and look good? What are specific ways that you sometimes brag about your spirituality in “humble” ways? What would repentance look like for you now?**

10. Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler

Matthew 19:16-26

(cf. Luke 18:18-27, Mark 10:17-27)

Key Theme: Use of the Law

[Core Gospel Concepts: Nature of Faith, Use of the Law, Justification, Self Righteousness]

THE STORY:

Now a man, a ruler, came up to Jesus and asked, "Good Teacher, what good deed must I do to get eternal life?"

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only one who is good – God. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments. You know them."

"Which ones?" the man asked.

Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself."

"All these I have kept from my youth," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Jesus looked at him and loved him, and he answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Matthew 19:26:** *"With man this [i.e. being saved] is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- Can you think of a person in your church or community who is a great model of someone leading a good life? Why do you think well of them? What about them makes them a great role model?

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today we are introduced to a man who seems like a wonderful example of someone who was living the right kind of life. Let's see how Jesus interacts with him and what he teaches him.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - What did the young man think about his obedience to God's law?
 - How does Jesus respond to the young man? How does Jesus feel toward him? What detail indicates Jesus' heart posture toward the young man?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **RICH YOUNG RULER:** What was he like? What was good? What did he desire? How did he think he could get it?
- **JESUS:** How did he respond? What was most important to him? How did he feel about the man?
- **RICHES / SELL ALL:** What is Jesus' attitude toward our riches? What did the man trust in or depend on to get life?
- **THE DISCIPLES' DISMAY:** How did the disciples respond? Why? What hope did Jesus give them?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** In the lives of people today, even Christians, what are examples of "riches" that sometimes become a spiritually dangerous for us? How?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION: SELL ALL!** What is one way in which you are rich but this richness makes you proud and self-sufficient? What do you need to sell (i.e. to stop depending on more than Jesus?)
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

RICH YOUNG RULER:

- **What was this man like? What was good about him? His behavior, reputation, etc.? What was his reputation based on?**
 - *Rich, young, leader, or ruler. Had obeyed all the law, at least so he thought.*
 - *Very good man in the eyes of the community, judging by disciples' reaction at the end. Well thought of.*
 - *Reputation based on obedience, respectability, leadership, riches*
- **What was the young man seeking for? How did he think he would be able to get it? Why was he confident? Had he truly kept all of these laws perfectly since his childhood?**
 - *Seeking eternal life, the highest place in the kingdom.*
 - *Thought he could get it from doing good deeds, the more completely the better.*
 - *He was deceiving himself. He had not kept all these laws since a boy. We all have broken God's laws. No one is righteous enough on his own. (Matthew 5:20-22, 27, 28, 43-44)*

- *He did not truly love his neighbor as he loved himself because he was not willing to give his possessions to the poor.*
- **What was wrong with the young man's understanding of eternal life and how to enter it?**
 - *It was all based on his own performance, his own riches or gifts, that the more he did, the better his chances!*
 - *Did not understand his own sin, his own inability to truly keep the law in his heart.*
 - *Depended on himself instead of God.*

JESUS:

- **What were some of the ways that Jesus answered him? Why did he answer this way? How did Jesus feel toward the young man?**
 - *Keep the commandments!*
 - *Jesus knew that eternal life was not earned through perfect obedience to the law, but he knew man's heart and thoughts and wanted to show him how his understanding was wrong, how he was depending on the wrong thing to save him: law-keeping.*
 - *It is as if Jesus said, "OK, if this is your method for pleasing God or earning eternal life, then this is how you have to do it – simply obey!"*
 - *He loved him. He wanted to point him to the true way to life!*

RICHES / SELL ALL:

- **If Jesus loved the young man, why did he tell him to sell all his possessions? How had riches become a problem for the young man?**
 - *Jesus' words to go and sell all would have felt difficult and unloving. But Jesus told him to sell all in order to help the young man, to challenge his way of thinking, to help him find the true way to life.*
 - *Wealth was too important to him. It was more important to him than gaining eternal life or having a relationship with God. He depended on riches to give him comfort, provision, and a good reputation.*
 - *Relationship with God through Jesus is the real treasure! Far superior than worldly wealth or reputation.*
- **Does God hate worldly riches? Does God require every person to sell all his riches and be poor before they can follow God? So why do you think Jesus told the young man to "sell all"? What do you think Jesus knew about the man's heart that caused him to answer this way?**
 - *His riches were hurting him! They hid from him his great need for a savior.*
 - *He knew the man was putting all of his hope in his riches and good deeds: how they met his needs, how they gave him a good reputation, how they made him feel righteous and worthy.*

- *He was trusting riches far more than trusting God.*
- **Jesus saying, "Sell all your possessions" was another way of saying to the man, "To be saved, you need to repent, to get rid of all the things you are trusting in besides me." If the young man seemed really good in keeping the law, what did the young man need to repent of?**
 - *He needed to repent of depending on all of his good deeds and the blessings he possessed to be in right standing with God.*
 - *A funny way to say it would be, "You need to repent of all your good deeds and blessings."*
 - *He also needed to repent of thinking he actually kept the law when in his heart he did not. (For example, he did not love the poor enough to sacrifice his wealth.)*
 - *Jesus wants a relationship with lost sinners who come to him. He's not interested in us trying to make ourselves look perfect through good behavior. True obedience is built on relationship based on repentance and trust in the Savior.*

THE DISCIPLES:

- **When the young man left, Jesus told them that it is impossibly difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Why did they despair?**
 - *"Who then can be saved?" They believed the same as the rich man (the same as the world believes) - that someone who is respectable, obedient, and rich surely deserves salvation. (This is the world's view.) If he was not good enough, then what hope did they have?*
- **What hope did Jesus give the discouraged disciples? What hope did he give us?**
 - *"With God, all things are possible." God's mercy is huge beyond our imagination. Can even save a "rich" man when he stops trusting his "riches" and trust in the Savior.*
 - *Only Jesus himself would be able to keep the law perfectly. Only God could make salvation possible. Only if God becomes man and keeps the law for man, and man puts all his trust in the real law-keeper can man be saved or get eternal life!*
 - *God is saying to each of us, your "riches" are blocking your relationship with me. You need to "sell all," trusting that the riches you'll get from me are so much better. Then, come and follow me. Be with me. Abide in me. Be strengthened by me. Rest in me.*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What examples of "riches" can you think of in peoples' lives today? How can such riches become dangerous for us? How do we put our trust in them too much?**
 - *Money, cattle, property, education, reputation, good behavior, position in the church or community, health, abilities or talents, good grades, popularity, social skills, being accepted by others, opportunities, obedience, discipline, experiences.*

- *We can depend on these things to stay right with God, to remain blessed, to keep our reputation. This blocks our relationship with him because we're not trusting him alone.*
- *Jesus wants us to depend on him continually, never to depend on our blessings, gifts, or talents in place of him. We must be grateful for them, yes - to use them for his glory and for the good of others. But not to turn them into means to save ourselves.*
- **The young man (and even the disciples) lived by certain “life rules” that he thought were true. For example:**
 - “If I obey all the laws, I will be blessed and have eternal life.”
 - “If I am wealthy and blessed with a good reputation, this means God is happy with me. I am righteous in his eyes. He will be more pleased if I obey more laws!”
 - **What life rules do we try to keep today in order to be “right” or to “get life”?**
 - *Go to church, get a good job, have a respectable family, make a decent income, live in a particularly well known neighborhood, be publicly recognized, etc.*
- **Jesus says to each of us, “Sell all!” What does he mean? What might it look like for them to “sell” something they are depending on too much?**
 - *Repent of trusting in anything other than Jesus for eternal or abundant life.*
 - *Do whatever you need to do in order to make that thing less important to you.*
- **What are some of the things God wants people to “sell”? How can you know that you need to “sell” one of your riches?**
 - *possessions, abilities, a good family, education, solid health, a reputation or position in your church or community, opportunities*
 - *Ask yourself these questions: What are you clinging to? What are you refusing to give to God? What do you fear losing?*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What riches or blessings do you have in your life, especially on the surface? What is one of these that you have allowed to satisfy you or to cause you not to look to Jesus every day for forgiveness and help? What could it mean to “sell” this thing in your life?**
- **Jesus looked at the young man and loved him by telling him to repent. How does Jesus really feel about you when he sees you depending too much on something other than himself? How can this help you to repent?**

11. Jesus and the Pharisees: Sabbath Controversies

Mark 2:28-3:6

Key Themes: Use of the law; self-righteousness

[Core Gospel Concepts: Use of the Law]

THE STORY:

One Sabbath day, Jesus and his disciples were going through some grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pluck heads of grain to eat. But the Pharisees saw this, and they said to Jesus, “Look, why are your disciples doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

Jesus answered them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, David entered the house of God, and ate the sacred loaves of bread, which is lawful only for the priests to eat. And he gave some to his companions too.”

And Jesus said to the Pharisees, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and there was a man there who had a withered hand. Since it was the Sabbath, some Pharisees were there, looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him very carefully to see if he would heal this man, then they could accuse him of working on the Sabbath.

Jesus said to the man with the withered hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” And the man did. Then Jesus asked the Pharisees, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath? To do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent and would not answer.

And Jesus looked around at them in anger, grieved at their hardness of heart. And Jesus said to the man with the withered hand, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man did, and his hand was completely restored.

Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the supporters of Herod how they might kill Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Mark 2:27,28** *Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **Laws. Rules. Commandments. Ordinances. Regulations.** What kind of emotional response do these words elicit in you? So is the law good or bad?

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today we want to talk about the purpose (or purposes) of God’s law. To do this, we will see Jesus focusing on a particular law – the law about the Sabbath.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - List all that the Pharisees did and said. What might they have been thinking?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **TWO SITUATIONS - MAIN ISSUES:** Pharisees' response? What is the surface issue? What is the deeper issue?
- **SABBATH - BIG PURPOSE - SCRIPTURES:** Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:15; Exodus 31:13b,16; Hebrews 4:3a, 9-11a; Romans 8:20-21
 - What do these Scriptures teach about the Sabbath and Sabbath rest?
- **MEETING # 1 JESUS AND PHARISEES:** How were the Pharisees **misusing the law** here? What did they not understand about the Sabbath law? What was the goal of the Sabbath?
- **MEETING # 2 JESUS AND PHARISEES** How were the Pharisees **misusing the law** here? How do we see here that the Sabbath was made for man? What is true Sabbath rest?
- **PURPOSE OF THE SABBATH - CONCLUSION:** What is true Sabbath rest?
- **PURPOSE OF THE LAW:** How should God's law work in our lives? 1 Timothy 1:8; Romans 3:20b. How does the Gospel help us to more effectively keep the two greatest commandments?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some examples of laws or rules that we sometimes create, like the Pharisees did, in order to build ourselves up or judge ourselves and others?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What is one way that I misuse God's law? What is one of God's laws that I am often breaking? How can remembering the Gospel help me as I look in the mirror of this law? How can it lead to a fuller law keeping?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

TWO SITUATIONS - MAIN ISSUES:

- **What were the two situations in our story? What did the Pharisees do and say?**
 - *Jesus and disciples walking through field, plucking kernels of grain*
 - *Jesus healing a man's withered hand.*
 - *Pharisees: "Why are your disciples doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"*
Became silent and angry, planned how to kill Jesus.
- **What are the main issues in this story?**
 - *The surface issue – What can and cannot be done on the Sabbath day?*
 - *The deeper issue – What does true, godly, law keeping look like?*
- **What do you know about Pharisees? Are they good?**
 - *Known as the "Law guys"*
 - *Very serious about keeping God's law. (This seems good at first, but . . .)*
- **Do you know of any OT law that seems to support the Pharisees concerns?**
 - Exodus 20:8-10 - 4th commandment – "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your

God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates..”

- *For Pharisees - “Work” includes – plucking grain, healing a withered hand.*

SABBATH - BIG PURPOSE - SCRIPTURE PASSAGES:

- **What do you think was the big purpose of the Sabbath when God gave them this law?**
 - *God knew that man needed REST!*
 - Genesis 2:3 - So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.
- **Read these passages about Sabbath to learn about the kind of rest God gives:**
 - **Exodus 20:11** (The reason for the Sabbath law given after 4th commandment) *“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”*
 - **Why did God rest according to this verse? Then why would we need such rest?**
 - *He had completed all his work of creating in six days.*
 - *Since he is the one who completes his purposes, we don't need to rely solely on ourselves to have every possible work completed before we can rest. He made rest possible for us.*
 - *A physical rest, but not just to rejuvenate your body, but also to know that you've done enough for now, that you can trust God to take care of you even if some of your work feels incomplete.*
 - **Deuteronomy 5:15** – (The reason for the Sabbath law given after 4th commandment) . . . *“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”*
 - **Exodus 31:13b, 16** - (The reason for the Sabbath law.) *“Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. . . .¹⁶ Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever.”*
 - **What kind of rest did God give? What reason did God give for Sabbath rest?**
 - *A physical but especially a spiritual rest*
 - *Resting in God's saving work (saved from slavery in Egypt). He's the mighty deliverer.*
 - *Trusting that God is the one who does the work to make us holy (to sanctify us). We don't clean ourselves up!*

- *Confirming relationship with God (covenant - “keep” my Sabbaths as sign)*
- **Hebrews 4:3a, 9-11a** – *“Now we who have believed enter that rest . . . There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work just as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest . . .”*
 - **What kind of rest does God want to give us through the Sabbath according to these verses?**
 - *Spiritual rest - to rest from works – earning our identity*
 - *The Pharisees were making every effort to do each tiny thing, but this urges us to “make every effort to enter that rest.” Our striving is not to earn our place with God by doing every possible work, but to strive to more fully trust in what He has done for us through Jesus.*
 - *“IT IS FINISHED!” – on the CROSS!*
 - *Forgiveness of sin*
 - *Gift righteousness of Christ!*
- **Romans 8:20-21** – *“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”*
 - **What kind of rest does God want to give us through the Sabbath according to these verses?**
 - *A groaning creation that will finally come to rest as it is redeemed and restored (liberated from its bondage to decay and made free)!*
 - *Liberation from bondage, decay, and sin IS God's rest!*

MEETING # 1 JESUS AND PHARISEES: (RETELL Mark 2:23-28)

- **Note: In the first part of the story, the disciples were not truly breaking God’s law according to the OT scriptures.** *OT law allowed for the poor, fatherless, widows, and sojourners to pluck grain in any field they chose if they were hungry. It also gave some specifics regarding what kind of grain harvesting was considered to be “work. People in Israel were not allowed to pull out a sickle or other tools for harvest, because then it became work or business rather than just survival.*
- **If it was not really God’s law, where did the rule about plucking come from?**
 - *The Pharisee’s commandment was extra-biblical tradition, i.e. rules made up by men.*
- **What do you think motivated Pharisees to make rules which were even more strict?**
 - *Went to extreme degree to insure no law is broken.*
 - *Were focused on external compliance, less concerned about heart issues.*
 - *Opportunity to display exceptional commitment. To show who is really serious about following God*

- **How were the Pharisees using God's law sinfully in this case?**
 - *They saw obedience to the law as the way to be qualified or made acceptable before God and man. They used the law to earn their own righteousness.*
- **How did Jesus answer the Pharisees?**
 - *“Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, David entered the house of God and ate the sacred loaves of bread, which is lawful only for the priests to eat. And he gave some to his companions too.”*
- **So the first thing he said was, “Have you never read what David did?” Why do you think he began his answer this way? Why would this have caught the Pharisees attention?**
 - *They were the “law” guys, the ones who supposedly really knew and were serious about their OT Scripture. He used those Scriptures to challenge them.*
- **How can Jesus’ approach be helpful to you or me when facing hard questions about faith or its practice?**
 - *We need to learn more and more of Scripture and what it means in its context. Need to be humble in our interpretation and not just think we are always right!*
- **What did Jesus say that David had done? Was this breaking any law of God? What was the reason that David did this?**
 - *Had eaten the consecrated bread and given his companions. This was against God’s law. He did it because they were hungry and in great need.*
- **What do you know about the situation David was in?** (by the way, the Pharisees would have known the story from 1 Samuel 21:1-6)
 - *They had been running from Saul. David was anointed by Samuel to be king, but Saul was trying to kill him, resisting God’s will. Rather than attacking Saul back, David chose to flee and to try to take care of his followers.*
- **So what do you think Jesus was trying to teach the Pharisees about the Sabbath law by reminding them of this story?**
 - *That there are exceptions when people are in great need or doing important work for God where it may be ok to violate the law. The laws have a deeper purpose.*
- **What else did Jesus say to the Pharisees in this section? What did this mean?**
 - *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”*
 - *The Sabbath law was created for man’s good, to help him thrive in life and in his relationship with God. It was not made just to have an extra rule for us to obey in order to feel good about ourselves!*
 - *The Son of Man (Jesus) actually has authority higher than the OT Sabbath law.*

Summary Conclusions of Meeting #1

- **Three clear statements about the Sabbath and, more generally, about God’s law:**
 - *The Sabbath was made for man.*
 - *Man was not made for the Sabbath.*
 - *The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.*

MEETING # 2 JESUS AND PHARISEES (RETELL Mark 3:1-6)

- **Describe the scene of the second meeting of Jesus and the Pharisees in this story.**
 - *Another Sabbath, at a synagogue. Jesus was faced with a man with the withered hand and was being observed by the Pharisees, who were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, especially to see if he would do a healing.*
- **What does this show about the Pharisees' attitude toward Jesus? And toward the Sabbath law? And toward the man with the withered hand?**
 - *They were not interested in Jesus' teaching or his healing power. They only wanted to find a way to bring him down. Like in part 1 of the story, they were legalistic, seeing law keeping as the way to earn acceptance before God and other people.*
 - *They did not care about the man with the withered hand.*
- **What did Jesus do, knowing what the Pharisees were thinking? What did he ask the Pharisees?**
 - *Had the man stand in front of everyone, then asked a question to the Pharisees.*
 - *"Which is lawful on the Sabbath? To do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?"*
- **Why did he say "lawful" rather than just "better"? What was he teaching?**
 - *Not only would it be better to do good and to save life, but it is actually lawful, i.e. it is not breaking God's law but actually keeping His law in a deeper, more meaningful way.*
- **So what was Jesus teaching them about the Sabbath? What about the law in general?**
 - *Doing good and saving life are clearly obeying the intent of the Sabbath law to help people thrive and rest in God and the salvation he provides.*
 - *The law is good. Its purpose is to lead toward good and to the saving of lives.*
- **When the Pharisees remained silent, what did this show about them?**
 - *They knew that Jesus had them beat, but they hated him and did not want to admit it. They showed that their hearts were hard to him and to his good intentions and to his heart to save. They had no love for others. All they cared about was keeping their own rules and being very religious.*
- **What did Jesus do in response to their silence? What does this show us about Jesus?**
 - *He looked at them, angry at their hatred, grieved at their hardness of heart.*
 - *That he hates sin, but that he also grieves for people's lostness. He loved the Pharisees. Their refusal to soften their hearts to him gave him great sorrow.*
- **What does Jesus then do? What does this teach us about Jesus' goals and purposes?**
 - *Tells the man to stretch out his hand and completely heals him.*
 - *He came to seek and save the lost and broken and to redeem this broken world, including broken bodies.*
- **Then what did the Pharisees do? What does this show us about them?**
 - *They began looking for a way to kill him. They hated Jesus. They wanted to destroy and to do evil, the very opposite of what the Sabbath was about. And they wanted to kill, to break the very clear sixth commandment. They were full of hypocrisy.*

- **What would probably have happened if Jesus had done something different, if he had decided to follow the Pharisees' little man-made rules and regulations which they had added to the Sabbath law?**
 - *Continued suffering. The man would have remained broken.*

PURPOSE of the SABBATH - CONCLUSION:

- **What was the real purpose of the Sabbath law? How was Jesus the fulfillment of the Sabbath?**
 - *Rest for God's people. Rest from work. Spiritual rest.*
 - *Jesus is our rest. We can rest from all our hopeless striving to keep the law and to earn our relationship with God by our own obedience and goodness.*
 - *The ultimate purpose of Sabbath is RELATIONSHIP with God. It was created for MAN's GOOD. His sanctification. His healing. His freedom. His enjoyment and benefit.*
 - *In the two parts of this story,*
 - *It was fine for David and his companions to eat the forbidden holy bread because it was giving them benefit – strength as they fulfilled their Godward purpose.*
 - *It was perfectly fine for the disciples to pluck grain and strengthen themselves to fulfill their purposes. And God had never prohibited this anyway!*
 - *The withered hand was a picture of a broken, frustrated creation.*
 - *It was completely restored. Made whole!! This is what God is doing and will finish when Jesus comes again!*
- **Were the Pharisees pointing people to true rest as God intended. Were they themselves experiencing the kind of rest that God intended for them?**
 - *Ironically, adding Sabbath requirements as Pharisees did, trying to “raise the bar” on the Sabbath is ultimately going against its purpose. It is creating more of this toxic striving, and less of rest that God designed for us.*
- **Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” How did Jesus further demonstrate this truth?**
 - *He showed that His purpose was not to follow misguided regulations, but to save and redeem. Jesus is Lord. He was Lord over creation. And he is Lord over broken creation that needs fixing, including healing the man with the withered hand.*

PURPOSE OF THE LAW:

- **God's law was a tool for the good of man that the Pharisees often misused. How did they misuse it?**
 - *They took a GOOD TOOL. But used it to try to do the WRONG JOB!.*
 - *Were using it to gain their own righteousness, their own identity, their own worthiness, their own standing before God and within the religion. And . .*
 - *Were using it to beat other people down. To judge them. To compare and elevate selves.*

- *Were misusing the tool, God's gift. Misusing the Sabbath, misusing the law in general.*
- **Do you think we could take the three statements Jesus said and replace the word "Sabbath" with "Law"? Like this:**
 - *The Law was made for man.*
 - *Man was not made for the Law.*
 - *The Son of Man is Lord even of the Law.*
- **Why do you think that makes sense? What does this show us about the main or foundational purpose of God's law? What is the correct way to use God's law?**
 - **1 Timothy 1:8** – *"The law is good if used properly."*
 - **Romans 3:20 b** – *"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law. Rather through the law we become conscious of sin."*
 - *Just like the Sabbath was made for man's good, the law also was made for man's good. Man's primary purpose in life is not to focus only on keeping the letter of the law. It is to know the saving, merciful God and thus bring glory to him. When we do that, our desire to keep the law grows!*
 - *The law acts as a MIRROR on our hearts. It shows us our sin, and it proves to us that we cannot keep God's law on our own. Therefore we can never save ourselves by obedience. When we see our sin against the mirror of the law, we know that we need help. We need a Savior who can fix our sin problem. The law thus drives us to Jesus!*
 - *After we have come to Jesus, the law acts as a MAP or GUIDE that helps us know Him and his character, and to honor him in what we do, think, believe, and say. Obedience to the law leads to further blessing.*
- **So if you put these two things together, (the law as a mirror driving us to Christ and the law as our guide for kingdom living), what would you say the overarching purpose of God's law is?**
 - Relationship. *For us to be in relationship with God and to love him in that relationship and love others as we relate to them as fellow children of God. The law is good. The law was indeed made for man!*
- **What if you want to drive to Nakuru and you see a big road sign pointing the way. It is a good thing, right? What if instead of following its directions and heading on to Nakuru we just rejoice over the sign and park under it to focus only on the sign itself? How is the law like a road sign?**
 - *The sign would become useless for us because we would be misusing it. We would never reach our true goal. Only by using it rightly can we reach our destination.*
 - *The LAW is a SIGNBOARD. The place we are going is JESUS! A deeper relationship with God. A fuller experience of His kingdom in relationship with Him and his people.*
- **Why can we say truthfully that Jesus is Lord of the law?**
 - **Matthew 5:17:** *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."*
 - *Jesus fulfills the law by obeying it perfectly and then by dying on the cross to pay our penalty for our breaking the law, and to grant us his perfect law-keeping righteousness. He kept the law for us, therefore is Lord over it. And he is the*

creator who made everything perfect and whole and who will restore all of Creation to wholeness!

- **What are the two greatest commandments according to Jesus and the OT law?**
 - *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.*
 - *Love your neighbor as yourself.*
- **The Pharisees were so concerned about keeping all the details of the law. How well were they keeping these two laws? Explain.**
 - *The Pharisees misuse of the Sabbath law led them to break the two most important laws:*
 - *Loving God (they hated Jesus).*
 - *Loving neighbors (they cared nothing about the man with withered hand or the hungry disciples).*
- **If in these two situations the Pharisees had been using the law correctly, how might their responses have been different?**
 - *First they would have realized that they themselves broke the law by striving for their own righteousness, by refusing to REST in God's grace toward them. They would have seen the hardness of their hearts and repented of trying to save themselves by obedient acts.*
 - *Then they would have been more humble and not judgmental toward the disciples or Jesus.*
 - *They would have loved the man with the withered hand and rejoiced in his healing.*

The Use of the Law Summarized:

- The Sabbath was made for mankind's benefit, to help him know God through Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, to help man to get his REST in Him.
- God's law overall was given to help man, to lead him to a deeper relationship with God.
- The first thing the law does for us is reveal to us our sin, how are completely unable to keep the law on our own. It shows us that we need a savior! We find that savior as we turn to Jesus through repentance and faith.
- As we trust in the Savior, the law now acts to guide us in how best to live in God's kingdom in thought, word, and deed.
- We need to repent of misusing the law when:
 - We refuse to rest but instead try to save ourselves through striving to keep the law.
 - We beat other people with the law through our judgment and pride, ultimately pushing them away from the Savior.
- We need to trust the Holy Spirit to help us keep the law more deeply from the heart and to help us use the law more humbly and effectively in order to help others know Him.

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **The Pharisees made up rules about the Sabbath to add to God's command. What are some examples of laws or rules that we sometimes create in order to build ourselves up or judge ourselves and others?**
 - *A person must be on time to be righteous.*
 - *I must make top grades to be a worthy person?*
 - *Someone must dress a certain way to be well thought of in the church?*
 - *I must pray or sing a certain way to be important in the church?*
- **What are some other specific ways that Christians today misuse God's good law?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What is a rule that you have created for your life or for your friends or family that you wrongly use to make yourself acceptable?**
- **What is one way that you misuse God's law? What is one of God's laws that you often break? How can remembering the Gospel help you to look at his law as a mirror on your heart? How can it lead to a fuller law keeping?**
- **What is one way you can grow in using the Sabbath law in your life today so that it leads you to a deeper relationship with God?**

12. God Calls the Prophet Isaiah

Isaiah 6:1-13

(Background: 2 Chronicles 26:1-23)

Key Theme: God's Holiness & Man's Sinfulness;
Right Use of the Law

[Core Gospel Concepts: Use of the Law, Sin, Justification]

THE STORY:

Uzziah had been one of the godly kings of Judah during the time of the divided kingdom. As long as he humbly sought the Lord and listened to the Lord's priests, God gave Uzziah success against his enemies. But later, when he was strong, he became proud and burned incense in the temple, ignoring the priests' cries for him to stop and leave. So the Lord afflicted him with leprosy, and he died alone, never able to enter the temple again.

Isaiah was one of the great prophets God sent to Judah to warn them of judgment for their sins, and to give them hope of future blessing when they repent. This is the story of how God called Isaiah during the sad time after Uzziah died a leper. Isaiah describes what happened:

"I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted. His robe was so long that it filled the whole temple. Above him were angels, each with six wings. Two wings covered their faces, two covered their feet, and the other two were used for flying. They were calling out to each other: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'

"At the sound of their voices the whole place shook and the temple was filled with smoke. And I cried out, 'Woe is me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.'

"Then one of the angels flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'

"And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"

Then God gave Isaiah the difficult task of preaching to his hard-hearted people even though most would not listen and would be destroyed, and only a remnant of faithful people would remain.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Psalm 51:1-3:** *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.”*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **Give some examples of God’s laws. Consider in your heart how well you keep them. Here are some examples to consider:**
 - *You shall not worship any other gods. (Exodus 20) You shall not make or worship idols. (Ex. 20)*
 - *Do not murder. (Exodus 20) Whoever is angry with his brother or insults his brother will be liable for judgment. (Matthew 5:22)*
 - *Don’t commit adultery. (Exodus 20) Don’t even look at a woman with lustful intent. (Matthew 5:28)*
 - *If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matthew 5:39)*
 - *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:44)*
 - *When you give to the needy, don’t let left hand know what right is doing. (Matthew 6:3)*
 - *Forgive those who sin against you (Matthew 6:12-15)*
 - *Don’t lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. (Matthew 6:19)*
 - *Do not be anxious about your life (Matthew 6:25; Philippians 4:6)*
 - *Rejoice always (Philippians 4:4)*
 - *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)*
 - *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)*
 - *Give thanks in all circumstances. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)*
- **Can you remember a time when you felt overwhelmed by God’s holiness or by his perfect law? Which of his laws sometimes feels impossible for you to completely obey?**

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today’s story tells of a man who suddenly saw God in all his holiness and glory. He compared God’s holy standards to his own sin and weakness, i.e. to all the ways he had broken God’s laws. He felt far more helpless than you and I have ever felt. Let’s see what God did for him and what the results were.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - How is the Lord described in this story when he appears to Isaiah?
 - How does Isaiah respond when he sees the Lord’s glory and holiness?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **VISION OF GOD:** How was his holiness and greatness displayed?
- **OLD ISAIAH:** What did he learn about himself when bowing before God’s holiness? Why did he talk of lips?
- **BURNING COAL:** Where did hope come from in the midst of Isaiah’s despair?
- **NEW ISAIAH:** How was he changed? What changed him?

- **GOD'S LAW AT WORK:** How do we see God's law (God's holiness) working rightly in Isaiah's life in this story?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What do you think are some of the kinds of sins that people would feel condemned about if they faced God in his holiness like Isaiah did?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** If you imagine yourself in Isaiah's position before God, what particular sins or law breaking in your life do you think you would remember? How can this help you understand more your deep need for the Savior?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

VISION OF GOD:

- **What do we learn from this story about God? What words or phrases would you use to describe him?**
 - *He is powerful, awesome, holy beyond description, unapproachable by sinful man, supreme over all, he is the only King.*
- **What are some of the ways this story shows us God's holiness and greatness?**
 - *He is on the only throne in the temple, high, exalted, his robe filled the temple.*
 - *Angels worshipping – even sinless angels covered themselves due to his greatness.*
 - *Angels' words: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty; the earth is full of his glory."*
 - *Sounds so powerful that his voice shook the temple and filled it with smoke.*
 - *Sinful Isaiah was overwhelmed just to see God.*

OLD ISAIAH:

- **What does this story teach us about Isaiah, or about ourselves? Why does Isaiah mention his and his countrymen's lips? How might Isaiah have broken God's law with his lips?**
 - *Deeply sinful.*
 - *He came from a sinful race of people, i.e. all are sinful, no one is good enough.*
 - *Sin is deeply related to his lips, his words. Words are the fruit of one's heart.*
 - *He feels helpless and unworthy to be in God's holy presence.*
- **How did Isaiah respond when confronted head on with God's holiness or his holy law?**
 - *Despair, "woe is me." I deserve God's punishment, my people and I deserve nothing. We are deeply tainted by sin.*
 - *Overwhelmed because he had looked upon the Lord in his holiness.*
 - *Lost hope in himself and his own righteousness. He knew he was deeply sinful and had broken God's holy law.*

- **What did Isaiah deserve from God? What did he get instead? What does this tell us about God?**
 - *Isaiah deserved death, but was given mercy.*
 - *God loves to show mercy and to use broken, contrite sinners, those who admit they cannot measure up to his standards, for the purposes of his glory. God came near to him.*

BURNING COAL:

- **What did God use to change Isaiah?**
 - *He touched him with the burning coal in order to take away his guilt and atone for his sin.*
- **Where did the coal come from?**
 - *From the altar, the place of sacrifice, where sin is atoned for by an innocent lamb substituted for the sinner.*
 - *This is pointing ahead to the “hot love” of Jesus, sacrificing his life on the altar of the cross to be a substitute for sinners like you and me.*

NEW ISAIAH:

- **What proof was there of a changed life?**
 - *Isaiah was no longer afraid of God’s presence. He rejoiced to be in God’s presence!*
 - *God’s mercy empowered him, made him willing and eager to go. “Here I am! Send me. I want to go!”*
- **What did God tell Isaiah to do? Was it an easy job? Was he willing? Where did he get confidence?**
 - *He was called to a very difficult task of preaching to hard-hearted people. Preaching without response from his listeners. A refining message of judgment and pruning of the people of Israel.*
 - *Until the land is utterly forsaken and the people utterly judged, until only a holy seed, a holy remnant is left in the land. A remnant faithful to the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15).*
 - *Isaiah was eager to obey because he had been cleansed by the gospel, by the “hot love” of Jesus which had touched him.*

GOD’S LAW AT WORK:

- **How did the vision of God’s holiness and remembrance of his holy law work in Isaiah’s life? So what do we learn from this story about how man is able to approach God, serve God, please God, and be changed by God?**
 - *Isaiah saw his sin clearly in contrast to God’s holiness. He realized that he deserved death for his sin and that he could not save himself.*

- *He must admit his own sin and unworthiness and throw himself on the mercy of God.*
- *He must be cleansed by the substitute sacrifice, the love of God.*
- **What kind of person does God use for his purposes and his glory?**
 - *Anyone, no matter how sinful, who sees his own sin and God's holiness, and receives God's mercy. God will forgive and cleanse such a person, change them, and empower them for the work he is calling them to.*
- **How can seeing God's holiness in His law help us to change?**
 - *A vision of God's holiness in his creation and especially in his law should drive us to the Savior. There we are cleansed, changed, and empowered.*
 - **Romans 3:20** - *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **When Isaiah was trembling before God, overwhelmed by his own sinfulness, he probably could think of some specific sins in his life that really condemned him before God. The same thing can happen to us when we look honestly at God's law - we become convicted of specific sin. What do you think are some of the kinds of sins that people would feel condemned about if they faced God in his holiness like Isaiah did?**
- **What are some specific situations that people may be in where they may easily feel overwhelmed by their own sin and weakness?**
- **How can someone become more aware of God's holiness and areas of sin in his life?**
 - *Study his Word more and more.*
 - *Ask the Holy Spirit to show you your sin and lead you to repentance. (Psalm 139:23, 24)*
 - *Look for ways that you fail to love others.*
 - *Observe your lips! What is coming out of them? Lips, or words, display the truth of our hearts. ("What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and defiles a man." Matthew 15:18)*
- **When you feel overwhelmed by your own sins and failures, what do you think God's message to you would be? What would he want to say to you? What does he want you to understand and believe?**
 - *Come into my presence, trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus.*
 - *Let me cleanse you with the "hot love" of Jesus.*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **If you imagine yourself in Isaiah's position before God, what particular sins or law breaking in your life do you think you would remember and feel guilty about? How can this help you understand more your deep need for the Savior?**
- **Is there a particular sin of your lips in your life now that reveals a heart of unbelief or rebellion? What would it be like for you to repent and trust in the Savior for this issue?**
- **What might your Savior God be calling you to do? Where might he want to send you? How can you become convinced that he is trustworthy enough to be followed even when it is very difficult?**

13. David and Bathsheba

2 Samuel 11:1-12:25, Psalm 51:1-19

Key Theme: Repentance

[Core Gospel Concepts: Repentance, Sin,]

THE STORY:

One day in the springtime when normally kings would go off to war, David was walking on the roof of his palace in Jerusalem when he saw a beautiful young woman taking a bath. Her name was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, who was in David's army off at war. David told his servants, "Go get her for me." So Bathsheba was brought to the palace and David slept with her. A little later she sent the king a message: "I'm going to have your baby."

So David told Joab, his army commander, to send Uriah home, thinking Uriah would sleep with his wife. But Uriah didn't because he felt it was wrong to be with his wife when all of his friends were at war. So David told Joab in a letter to put Uriah where the fighting was heaviest and then pull back the rest of the troops so he would be killed. Joab did as David commanded him and Uriah died.

Then David married Bathsheba right away so when she had the baby, no one except David, Bathsheba, and Joab knew what really happened. But God knew and he was displeased.

Then the prophet Nathan went to David and told him a story. He said:

"Two men lived in a town; one was rich and the other one was poor. The rich man had huge flocks but the poor man just had one little lamb. And it was so precious to him that he couldn't think of eating or selling it. It was a pet, but it was like a daughter to him and his family.

"One day the rich man had a visitor from out of town. But instead of taking one of his own sheep, he stole this poor man's pet and killed it and served it for dinner."

David was furious. "The man who did this deserves to die!" he said.

Then Nathan said to David, "You are that man. God says, 'I anointed you king of Israel and delivered you from Saul and I gave you his kingdom. If that weren't enough, I'd have given you twice as much. So why did you do this evil thing, killing Uriah and stealing his wife? Because of this, your own family will bring disaster and shame on you. And the child will die, too.'"

When he heard this, David didn't try to hide anymore. He just said, "I have sinned against the Lord." He also wrote a prayer of repentance in Psalm 51.

Even though David repented and God forgave him, and despite God calling David "a man after his own heart," Nathan's prophecy still came true.

The child did die and some of David's other children brought him a lot of grief. But soon Bathsheba had another son they named Solomon, and God loved him.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Mark 1:15** –“... the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News!”
- **Colossians 2:6,7** - “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord [i.e. through repentance and faith in Jesus], continue to live in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness”

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor)

- **When does a person need to repent?**

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - List each action David did and why he did it.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **DAVID:** What he was like at various stages?
- **TEMPTATION:** Why was David especially vulnerable to temptation?
- **REPENTANCE: 1) I . . . 2) HAVE SINNED . . . 3) AGAINST THE LORD:** What this teaches about true repentance?
- **REPENTANCE AS A LIFESTYLE PATTERN:** How could it have been different?
- **CONTINUING as WE BEGAN: Colossians 2:6,7:** How did I receive Jesus? (repentance and faith), How do I as a Christian CONTINUE to REPENT and BELIEVE?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What lies do we today, even Christians, tell ourselves to excuse or hide our own sins?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Think of one temptation you often have. How can a lifestyle of repentance help you battle against sin in this area?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

- **DAVID**
 - **Look at what he did and said at four different times in the story:**
 - at the beginning of the story
 - when he noticed Bathsheba bathing
 - after he had sinned and found out she was pregnant
 - after he was confronted by the prophet Nathan
 - **For each of these three times, consider these questions:**
 - What was the condition of his heart at the moment?

- How was he hiding?
- How did his decision affect other people?

○ **TEMPTATION**

- **How did David fall into temptation? How did his situation contribute to his fall? How might his heart condition have led to his fall?** (I.e. Everyone faces temptation at times. But how did temptation turn into sin for David?)
 - *He had distanced himself from God. He was ignoring God's Word.*
 - *He was not where he should have been (off at war with his own army.)*
 - *Maybe he had relaxed in his spiritual life. He felt he had reached the highest point, and then stopped listening to God, repenting of his sin, and seeing his constant need for God.*
 - *Selfishness, laziness. Maybe he thought he had "earned" a rest. He did not remember that all he had was given to him by God. He was idle and not focused on the things of God.*
- **How do we Christians or even we pastors set ourselves up to fall into temptation?**

○ **REPENTANCE: I . . . HAVE SINNED . . . AGAINST the LORD:**

- **What do each of these three phrases teach about repentance?**
 - **What does "I" tell us?** – *It is me who sinned. Not someone else. I cannot pass the blame. I cannot excuse.*
 - **What does "have sinned" tell us?** – *It is sin. It is not just a mistake. It is not something small. It is a great offense. It is sin which deserves punishment, even death.*
 - **What does "against the Lord" tell us?** – *Even though David sinned against Bathsheba, against Uriah, against everyone he lied to, against the whole nation, his sin was finally against the Lord Himself. It was a great offense that grieved and dishonored God himself, the God who created David, the one who blessed him and protected him, and made him king. It was serious.*
- *By confessing in these simple ways, David was dropping all his hiding, all his lies, all his excuses, and entrusting himself to the mercy of God even though all he deserved was God's wrath.*

● **REPENTANCE as a LIFESTYLE:**

- **Before David was confronted with his sin, he was not living a lifestyle of repentance.** That is, he was not allowing God to show him the sinful attitudes in his heart day by day so that he could confess them before the Lord and be changed by God's power.
- **HOW MIGHT THINGS HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT at each stage if David had been living a lifestyle of ongoing repentance? How could David have done things differently?**

- **At beginning of story – If he had been living a lifestyle of repentance, how could it have helped him to miss the temptation altogether?**
 - *He would have likely been off at war – the place where he should have been as the leader of his people. He might even have avoided the temptation. When tempted to be lazy or self-satisfied and stay at home, he would have been humbly convicted of his own desire to serve himself rather than his people. God would have helped him to go to war.*
 - **When saw Bathsheba bathing – Once he was tempted, how would it have helped him if he was living out a lifestyle of repentance? How might he have behaved differently?**
 - *When he was tempted, if he felt lust growing in his heart, he could have turned to God immediately and confessed his weakness and asked for help from the Lord to withstand.*
 - *He could have turned away.*
 - *He could have removed the temptation – found an appropriate way to have someone encourage Bathsheba to take care where she bathed.*
 - *He could have remembered God's Word, his command to live in purity and holiness.*
 - **When learned Bathsheba was pregnant – Once he had already sinned, how would a return to a lifestyle of repentance have helped him? What would he have done differently?**
 - *When he saw the pregnancy, he could have confessed to God, to Uriah, and to the nation, and thrown himself under God's mercy.*
- **CONTINUING as WE BEGAN in the GOSPEL:**
 - **Colossians 2:6,7:**
 - How did I receive Jesus? (repentance and faith)
 - So, as a growing Christian, how do I continue to REPENT and BELIEVE?

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What lies do we today, even Christians, tell ourselves to excuse or hide our own sins?**
- **What are some examples of situations in which a LIFESTYLE of REPENTANCE could help someone to:**
 - Avoid temptation?
 - Deal with temptation when it occurs?
 - Deal with sin after it occurs?
- **How can this lesson of repentance apply to your church or denomination and its pastors?**

- How can leaders promote genuine repentance and forgiveness instead of gossip and discord?
- How does your church look at people who are sinning? As “those” sinners or as “fellow” sinners? How can a change in attitude affect your church?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- What are some ways that you personally are sometimes tempted? What is a lie that you may tell yourself recently to make excuses for your own sin?
 - Think of a specific situation in your life now in which a **LIFESTYLE of REPENTANCE** could help you to:
 - Avoid temptation?
 - Deal with temptation when it occurs?
 - Deal with sin after it has occurred?
 - How can a pattern of repentance become more a part of your daily life?
-

Extra Lesson on Repentance: Psalm 51:1-19

[Psalm 51 was written by King David after the prophet Nathan confronted him concerning his sin with Bathsheba. You might consider doing this second lesson as a deeper study on repentance, saving some of the above application questions to use at the end of this lesson. Obviously this passage will be more difficult for your participants to memorize and retain – though it is a great passage to hide in one’s heart! Recite or read Psalm 51 for the group and then follow the teacher’s suggestion below.]

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.

Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Teacher’s Suggestions:

- You may go through the first four observation questions below all together or in small groups.
- First read through Psalm 51 together slowly and carefully at least two or three times.
- Then walk through the psalm together slowly, looking for answers to the question assigned to your group.
- Then come back together as a large group to discuss answers from each group. Perhaps list them on flip charts or a chalkboard, if available.

- **What does David ask God for? List everything you see in Psalm 51.**
 - *Have mercy on me.*
 - *Blot out my transgressions.*
 - *Wash away my iniquity.*
 - *Cleanse me from my sin.*
 - *Cleanse me, wash me.*
 - *Let me hear joy and gladness, let me rejoice after being crushed.*
 - *Hide your face from my sin.*
 - *Blot out my iniquity.*
 - *Create in me a pure or clean heart.*
 - *Restore to me the joy of your salvation.*
 - *Save me from bloodguilt.*
 - *Open my lips.*

- **What does David know or learn about himself? Make a list.**
 - *I know my transgressions.*
 - *My sin is always before me.*
 - *My sin is against God himself.*
 - *I've been sinful from my birth, even from conception.*

- **What does David know or observe about God? Make a list.**
 - *His love is unfailing.*
 - *His compassion is great, so David is confident to come before him pleading for mercy.*
 - *He is greatly offended by David's sin, it's evil in his sight.*
 - *He is just to punish David and to speak against him, to cast him from his presence, to take his Holy Spirit away from David.*
 - *Desires truth in inner parts. Teaches wisdom in inmost place.*
 - *If he cleanses David, he will indeed be clean, whiter than snow.*
 - *He has crushed David under the weight of sin.*
 - *He alone is able to cleanse, purify, give a new heart and steadfast spirit.*
 - *God's salvation brings joy.*
 - *Does not delight in sacrifice or take pleasure in burnt offerings (apart from faith).*
 - *Delights in a broken spirit, broken and contrite heart.*
 - *Will never despise or reject a broken and contrite heart. This is a proper offering.*
 - *Makes Zion prosper (David's kingdom).*

- **What is the result of David's cleansing and forgiveness? List every helpful change that occurs in him as he repents.**
 - *A new, clean, pure heart.*
 - *Living by the Holy Spirit, who is present with him.*
 - *Joy.*
 - *Steadfast spirit to sustain him.*
 - *Desire to teach other transgressors God's ways so that they turn back to God as well (like one beggar leading other beggars to food).*

- *Praise, songs of God's righteousness.*
- *Right sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to bring delight to God.*

Note: If you broke into small groups, first come back together to discuss the answers to the questions above, then continue together with the following questions:

- **Do you see a pattern for repentance in Psalm 51?**
 - **What is necessary for someone to repent?**
 - *Humility: brokenness over sin, realize sin, call it sin, claim it as my own, sin against God (not blaming someone else or making excuses).*
 - *Understanding the offense of sin to God.*
 - *Faith in a compassionate, merciful, loving God who never rejects a broken, contrite heart.*
 - *Longing to change.*
 - *Holy Spirit, new heart.*
 - **What are the results of repentance?**
 - *Humility, especially toward others.*
 - *New heart.*
 - *Holy Spirit to help.*
 - *Joy.*
 - *Steadfast spirit to sustain faith.*
 - *Praise.*
 - *Witness to others of God's glorious mercy.*
 - *Right sacrifices based on faith and brokenness over sin.*
 - **What is the basis for our repentance?**
 - *A merciful God who promises to forgive sin.*
 - *The truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that he died for and covers our sin.*
 - *That the agent of true change is the Holy Spirit.*
 - **How can the word of God help lead you toward repentance?**
 - *By acting as a mirror which shows us our spiritual condition, the sins in our lives, areas of unbelief, and how to repent and return to God.*
 -
 - **What should be the fruits of repentance? Do you see these fruits in your life?**
 - *Joy, praise, testimony, righteous sacrifices, ultimately a renewed commitment to loving and following the Lord.*

Application Questions : See application questions above from the story of David and Bathsheba.

14. Saul and the Amalekites

1 Samuel 15:1-35

(Background: 1 Samuel 8:1-22; 13:1-14)

Key Theme: False Repentance

[Core Gospel Concepts: Sin, Repentance, Obedience]

THE STORY:

Saul was the first king of Israel. The Israelites offended God by asking for a king, but he gave them one anyway, and Saul was anointed king by the prophet Samuel. Saul did help Israel defeat some of its enemies, but he began to trust in himself rather than in the Lord. Once, instead of waiting on Samuel, the priest of the Lord, to offer a sacrifice before battle, he became impatient and afraid and offered the sacrifice himself. God was angry with Saul.

Another time God spoke through Samuel and told Saul to attack the idol worshipping Amalekites to avenge them for attacking Israel in the past. God told Saul, "Destroy everything, even the livestock." Saul and his men did kill almost all the people and most of the animals, but instead of obeying God completely, captured the enemy's king without killing him, and spared the best of the animals. Saul was so proud about his victory that he even set up a monument to honor himself.

After the battle, Samuel went to Saul. When Saul saw him coming, he said to him, "Blessed be the Lord! I have fulfilled God's command."

So Samuel said, "What then is this sound of sheep and cattle in my ears?"

Saul replied, "Oh, my men kept the best livestock to sacrifice to the Lord your God. But we destroyed everything else."

"Stop!" ordered Samuel. "Do you think the Lord loves sacrifices more than obedience? Obedience is better than sacrifice. Your rebellion and pride are like idol worship. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king." Samuel turned to leave. Saul caught his robe and it tore. Samuel said, "The Lord has torn the kingdom from you today to give it to your neighbor."

Finally Saul said, "Ok, I have sinned. I violated God's command. But I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me and please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel then I may worship the Lord."

So Samuel went back, and Saul worshipped the Lord, but Samuel killed the king of Amalek in front of all, and he left, and never saw Saul again.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **2 Corinthians 7:10:** *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **Can you think of a time when you said to someone, “sorry,” but did not really mean it in your heart? Why do you think you apologized?**

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Our last story helped us start talking about repentance as a life pattern for Christians. Now we want to consider the difference between true and false repentance.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory:
 - Note all of the words and actions of Samuel in the story.
 - Note all of the words and actions of Saul in the story.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **REPENTANCE:** Difference in Saul and David responding to confrontation over sin?
- **EXCUSES FOR SIN / BLAMING OTHERS:** Saul? Us?
- **OBSTACLES TO TRUE REPENTANCE:** How could it have been different?
- **THE GOAL OF REPENTANCE:** Of false repentance / Saul’s? Of true repentance?
- **THE GOSPEL - THE FOUNDATION OF REPENTANCE:** What makes us free to repent?
- **VERSES ABOUT TRUE AND FALSE REPENTANCE:** Isaiah 30:15, Hosea 7:13b-14a, 2 Cor 7:10
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some ways where we, like Saul, compromise God’s commands or obey incompletely? What excuses do we make?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Think of a time recently when you said, “Sorry,” but your repentance was not completely sincere. How can this story help you toward a true repentance?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

REPENTANCE:

- **In the story of David and Bathsheba, when David was finally confronted with his sin, he confessed, “I have sinned against the Lord.” How did Saul respond differently than David when he was confronted about his sin?**
 - *There is no “I” – Saul blamed others: the soldiers and the people.*
 - *There is no “have sinned” – Saul first claims, “We obeyed,” then he says, “but the reason we did not obey in all the details was to do something better, to keep*

some for sacrifice.” Trying to make his sin sound either advantageous or obedient.

- ***There is no “against the Lord”*** – Saul never acknowledged how deeply he had offended God by rebelling against his clear command.
 - *Bottom line: His heart attitude. Saul’s attitude was one of self-defense, minimizing sin, minimizing God’s holiness, puffing up his own pride.*
 - *Total refusal to admit the rebelliousness of his heart, of his own desire to rule himself, to make his own way.*

- **What did the monument Saul built tell us about his attitude?**

- *He was full of pride and self-righteousness.*
- *Ultimately he’s more concerned about his own glory than God’s glory.*

EXCUSES FOR SIN / BLAMING OTHERS

- **What are some of the excuses Saul could have made for his sin?**

- *I mostly obeyed (Saul killed nearly all the Amalekites).*
- *I didn’t do as badly as another person, or at least I’m better than that other person. (e.g. Saul’s sin did not seem nearly as heinous as David’s against Bathsheba, but David was still forgiven.)*
- *Twisting the clear facts (obvious sounds of bleating sheep).*

- **What is God’s response to excuses?**

- *God does not delight in empty external sacrifices, but in obedience coming from faith and trust in a good, holy God and his perfect word.*

- **How do we tend to blame others for our sin? Give some examples.**

- *“If you weren’t so sensitive than . . .”*
- *“If you treated me more kindly, I would not . . .”*
- *“You deserved it.”*
- *“He started it!”*
- *“He misunderstood me.”*

- **What are examples of superficial sacrifices in our own lives? How do we sometimes try to substitute superficial sacrifice with true heart obedience? Give examples.**

- *Church attendance.*
- *Good deeds, or changing our outward behavior.*
- *Making promises or resolutions to change our behavior.*
- *Self pity, beating yourself up.*
- *People pleasing.*
- *Spiritual disciplines.*
- *Earning our way back into people’s or God’s good graces.*
- *Merely saying that you’re sorry without meaning it.*

OBSTACLES TO TRUE REPENTANCE

- **Why is it so hard for us to truly repent? What gets in our way? Why do we either fail to repent or repent in an insincere way?**
 - *Pride, shame, comparisons, reputation, pain, blame-shifting.*
 - *Lack of belief in the gospel of God's grace, the gospel that covers our sins.*
 - *Fear of man, desire to please man more than God.*
 - *Fear of punishment, loss*

THE GOAL OF REPENTANCE:

- **Why did Saul apologize? I.e. What was the goal of Saul's apology to Samuel? Was it a sincere desire to seek forgiveness from an offended God, to restore his relationship with God?**
 - *No, his goal was to calm both Samuel and God down.*
 - *To keep his standing before the people ("honor me before the elders"), to save face and maintain his status, position, and reputation.*
 - *His goals were self-focused, not God and others-focused.*
 - *He had no interest in being an example of the gospel to others through confession and repentance, no chance of leading transgressors back to God since he denied his own transgression.*
- **What was Saul relying on for his own identity, significance, and standing? Was he confident in God's mercy toward him as a sinner?**
 - *No, Saul was relying on his own actions, reputation, and position as king and general, his own sacrifices in order to paint a positive picture of himself to impress others.*
 - *No wonder he did not repent, he did not understand the wonder of God's infinite mercy! Therefore he was not able to address the sin in his own life.*
 - *He was not trusting in the promised Savior, the Christ who would come and cleanse from sin all those who put their faith and hope in him.*

THE GOSPEL - THE FOUNDATION of REPENTANCE:

- **What should make you as a Christian feel free to examine your heart? i.e. What are the blessings of salvation that make us free to be honest about our ongoing sin struggles?**
 - *God's great mercy toward sinners through Jesus.*
 - *If we have put our faith in Christ, then we have received his perfect righteousness. Our identity in Christ will never be taken from us. This gives us the freedom to be honest about the sin in our hearts and to acknowledge that sin before our Father.*

VERSES ABOUT TRUE AND FALSE REPENTANCE:

- **Read Isaiah 30:15:** "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.' Therefore you will flee! You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.' Therefore your pursuers will be swift!"

- **How is false repentance described here?**
 - *By not being quiet and trusting God, but instead “fleeing on horses,” i.e. looking to any other way to fix your own problem.*
- **Read Hosea 7:13b-14a:** “I long to redeem them but they speak lies against me. They do not cry out to me from their hearts but wail upon their beds.”
 - **What is the distinction here between “crying out” and “wailing”?**
 - *It is the difference between true and false repentance.*
 - *Wailing on your bed is just whining and complaining like a child because God is not treating you the way you want to be treated.*
 - *Crying out to the Lord from the heart indicates true repentance, giving up on trusting yourself and putting all your trust in the Lord because he is the only one who can help.*
- **Read 2 Corinthians 7:10:** “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”
 - **What is the value of true sorrow over sin?**
 - *Leads us to true repentance and the joy that comes from God’s saving grace.*
 - *True repentance leads to joy and spiritual power because in it we are throwing all of our hope on Jesus and the Holy Spirit whom he sends to be with us.*

Summary:

- False, surface level apologies focused on our own comfort don’t lead to true change.
- True repentance leads to JOY and spiritual POWER because in it we are putting all of our hope in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit whom He has sent to be with us. As we practice true repentance day by day, God grows us more into the likeness of Christ!

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **Why is it so hard for us to repent sometimes? What are some ways where we, like Saul, compromise God’s commands or obey incompletely? What excuses do we make? What should we do instead of making excuses?**
- **In what ways do we value the approval of others more than we value obedience to God’s commands?**
- **How do we know whether we need to repent? What helps us as Christians to humbly and honestly examine our own hearts?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What is a way that you, like Saul, have been lately compromising or disobeying God’s commands? What excuses or blaming do you use to justify your disobedience? How can this story help you to a true and deep repentance?**

15. Peter's Denial of Jesus

Matthew 26:31-55, 69-75, Luke 22:61

Key Themes: Repentance as a Way of Life, Recognizing Heart Sin

[Core Gospel Concepts: Repentance, Forgiveness, Sin]

THE STORY:

After Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples and Judas Iscariot had gone out, Jesus said to them, "This night, you will all fall away because of me. 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." Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. He said to his disciples, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me while I go and pray." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Jesus went away again to pray, found them sleeping, prayed again, came back, "Wake up. The hour is at hand, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Let's go." Then Judas Iscariot walked up leading a crowd from the chief priests and elders, betrayed Jesus with a kiss, and Jesus was seized. Then all the disciples left him and fled.

Jesus was taken to the High Priest and elders and scribes. Peter followed at a distance, going as far as the courtyard of the high priest. Jesus was being falsely accused and abused, though he refused to defend himself. As things were getting worse for Jesus, Peter was sitting just outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to call up a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed, and the Lord turned and looked

at him. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Matthew 26:39b:** “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **Is there some evil act or word of which you think, “I would NEVER do that?”**
Would you be willing to share that with your neighbor?
- **When do we need to repent? What is the purpose of repentance?**

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today’s story is about someone who made such a claim. “I will never fall away!” This is going to help us think more deeply about repentance and when it is needed in our lives.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory:
 - Note all of the words and actions of Jesus in the story.
 - Note all of the words and actions of Peter in the story.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **YOU WILL FALL AWAY:** Why would Jesus tell them this?
- **PETER’s RESPONSE:** What did Peter’s response reveal about his heart?
- **GARDEN of GETHSEMANE:** What did we learn about the disciples? What did Peter need to watch for and pray about?
- **PETER’s DENIAL / OUR DENIAL:** How did Peter deny Jesus? How do we deny Jesus?
- **JESUS’ MERCY DISPLAYED:** How do we see mercy in Jesus’ look? Or when he told them they would fall away?
- **REPENTANCE LIFESTYLE:** At what times in this story should Peter have repented? For what? In what situations do you need to repent? What is a life of true repentance? What is preventative repentance?
- **SIGNALS for REPENTANCE:** What signals in different parts of the story could have alerted Peter to his need for repentance?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** Why is it so hard for us to repent sometimes? What are some ways where we, like Peter, refuse to admit our own weakness?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What sin do you claim you would never do? What pride do you need to repent of?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

YOU WILL FALL AWAY:

- **As Jesus was leading the disciples out from eating the Passover together on the way to the Mt. of Olives, he told them something very disturbing. What was that? What did he mean?**
 - *You will all fall away and be scattered when I am seized and handed over to evil men.*
 - *Because of their weaknesses the disciples would all become lured into sin and would become untrue to their Master. I.e. They would desert, run away, abandon him.*
- **In two phrases Jesus gave reasons that they would fall away? What were they? What did they mean?**
 - *“because of me”*
 - *Jesus’ own ordeal would lead them to stumble.*
 - *Not just scared because of their own safety. Did not understand the purpose of what Jesus was going through.*
 - *Had resisted Christ’s humility many times already*
 - *“It is written”*
 - *It would happen because of God’s plan – referred to Zechariah 13:7, but changed to “I” will strike the shepherd. I.e. God is doing it. He is in charge, working his plan.*
- **Why was this so hard for them to hear? What do you imagine they were thinking when they heard him say that?**
 - *They thought too highly of themselves and were proud of their own commitment. “How could our master think so little of us?” It hurt their pride.*
- **Why did Jesus tell them this? Was he just trying to discourage them?**

PETER’S RESPONSE:

- **How did Peter particularly respond to Jesus’ statement? What did that indicate about his view of himself and his view of the other disciples?**
 - *“I will never fall away.”*
 - *High view of self. Did not see depth of his sinful heart*
 - *“Maybe those other guys will fall away but not me!”*
 - *Thought himself more spiritually strong than the rest. Looked down on them.*
- **What experiences in the past might have made Peter proud and confident?**
 - *“You are the Christ!” “Blessed are you Simon! . . . You are Peter, and on this rock . . .” (Matt 16)*
 - *Witnessing the transfiguration (Matt 17)*

- o *Being one of Jesus' inner circle*
- o *Casting out demons*
- **What experiences in his life could have reminded Peter of his own weakness?**
 - o *"Get behind me Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God . ." (Matt 16:23)*
 - o *Experience of trying to walk on water; not recognizing his own lack of faith. (Matt 14)*
- **Deep down, what response was Peter making to what Jesus said?**
 - o *Basically saying, "I'm not that bad!" "Jesus, how could you think that of me? You've been with me all this time, Jesus, and don't know me better than that?" I.e. He is calling Jesus a liar! Unbelief of Jesus' words.*
 - o *He compared himself to others, considered himself the most committed. Thought that Jesus should have made the same comparison and known better than question his commitment.*
- **How did Jesus respond to Peter's statement of confidence?**
 - o *"Ok, let me get specific: This very night, i.e. in a few hours, before the cock crows, you, Peter, will deny me three times!"*
 - o *Very serious: "I solemnly declare"*
- **Peter's response?**
 - o *"No way! I am determined. No matter how hard it gets! Even death can't make me deny you! My resolve is firm! You'll see!"*
 - o *Full of pride in own ability to endure.*
 - o *Still did not really believe Jesus would suffer; figured he would help Jesus conquer! Still not ready to be fully humbled.*

GARDEN of GETHSEMANE:

- **Next they went to the Garden of Gethsemane. What happened there? How does it show the Lord's patience with Peter?**
 - o *Still inviting Peter into inner circle – despite public contradiction. Merciful.*
 - o *Also, Jesus specifically spoke to Peter. He found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So you men were not able to stay awake with me for one hour?" It was not to accuse him but to show his need for repentance of a hard heart.*
- **What did Peter do? What does this show us about Peter?**
 - o *Peter was not able even to stay awake and pray. How could he think he would be strong enough to stand by Jesus when threatened with death?*
 - *Note: The disciples were clearly near enough to know some of Jesus' words. I.e. near enough to hear him and his heartfelt pleas to God for the cup to pass from him. This makes their failure even worse. They clearly knew he was in distress.*

- **What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation”? What was Peter to watch? What was the temptation?**
 - *Did not mean for them to watch out for hostile Jews. Jesus already knew they were coming and was ready to be arrested.*
 - *Jesus was helping Peter see his own weakness, give him a reason not to be so confident in himself that he would never deny Jesus.*
 - *He was to watch his own heart! He was tempted to think too highly of himself and therefore not trust fully enough in Jesus. Tempted to become untrue to Jesus.*
 - *“Watch and pray” meant to prayerfully repent and believe (depend on Jesus).*
- **What did Jesus mean by saying, “The flesh is weak”? Was he just talking about his physical body?**
 - *Maybe, but he likely also meant Peter’s spiritual tendency to depend on himself.*
 - *Peter was confident in his own flesh, his own ability.*
 - ***Where have you heard the phrase, “confidence in the flesh”?***
 - *Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who **put no confidence in the flesh**—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised . . . (Phil 3:2-4)*
- **What happened to Peter and the other disciples when Jesus was arrested?**
 - *They all fled!*

PETER’S DENIAL / OUR DENIAL:

- **While Jesus was being accused and mistreated, where was Peter? What happened to him there?**
 - *Outside in courtyard, “hiding” in public. Accused of being a follower of Jesus.*
- **Who accused Peter of knowing Jesus?**
 - *Accused by servant girls and bystanders.*
- **What significance is there in it being a servant girl?**
 - *The lowest of the low. A woman. A servant. Quite a blow to Peter’s pride.*
- **How did Peter respond? How were each of his denials more and more serious?**
 - *1st - servant girl - “You were with Jesus,” - “denied,” - “I don’t know what you mean.”*
 - *2nd – another girl - “You were with Jesus,” - “denied with oath,” - “I don’t know the man”*
 - *“the man” – very impersonal and cold*
 - *3rd – bystanders - “You’re one of them –obvious accent,” swore with curse on himself, “I don’t know the man!”*
 - *Each time the denial was more serious. Was distancing self from Jesus.*

- **Why do you think Peter denied knowing Jesus?**
 - *Afraid for his life*
 - *Confused, did not know what the purpose was for all of this. Struggling with unbelief.*
- **What are ways that we “deny” Jesus?**
 - *When we refuse to stand for what He says is right.*
 - *When we refuse to speak the truth because fear others’ opinions.*
 - *When we compromise God’s will because we base our priorities on caring for self.*
 - *When we don’t trust God to provide for self and family.*
 - *When we take credit for the good that we do or receive.*
 - *When we refuse to forgive others.*
 - *When we refuse to acknowledge our sin against others.*
 - *When we boast.*
 - *...*
- **What causes us to do it? What things do we fear that cause us to deny him?**
 - *Fear for reputation. Don’t want to look stupid or be thought poorly of.*
 - *Fear that won’t be able to take care of selves and family.*
 - *Fear of being cast out of community*
 - *Fear of being taken advantage of or looking weak or stupid*
 - *Fear of giving other people credit, of losing our position*
 - *...*

JESUS’ MERCY DISPLAYED:

- **How do you see Jesus’ mercy in the way he looked at Peter? What do you imagine was the expression on his face?**
 - **Who else did Jesus once “look at” in another story?**
 - *The rich young ruler – “looked at him and loved him” (Mark 10:21)*
 - *Loved him, pitied him.*
 - **Was leading him to deep repentance.** *Rooster’s crow was a call to repentance, ringing the bell of Peter’s conscience.*
 - *Look of sorrow. Look of love.*
- **How do you imagine Jesus is looking at you after you sin when you turn back in repentance to look at his face?**
 - *Grieved, yes, but full of love and welcome.*
 - *“Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face.” (from hymn by Cowper)*
- **What was Peter’s response after the cock crows and Jesus looked? Why?**
 - *Ran away and wept bitterly. Utterly broken.*
 - *Deep guilt and shame. His world was crumbling around him. It was his own fault.*

- **How did Jesus show mercy when he first told them they would fall away? What encouragement did he give?**
 - *“But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”*
 - **How could this statement have given hope? What was this telling them?**
 - *He would be raised again!*
 - *The resurrection would bring hope!*
 - *He wants and plans to be with them again, despite knowing they would betray, deny him!*
 - *He must have been working out something good.*
 - *He loves them even though he knows their rebellious hearts!*
 - *The scattered sheep would be re-gathered.*
 - *In Galilee – where the Lord had originally called them to himself, their homes.*
 - *Note the magnitude and reach of sin – “All of you shall become untrue to me” All protest that this will never happen. They all left him and fled.*
 - *BUT: ALL eleven of these were saved, NOT ONE of them perished. (John 17:11)*
- **How does Jesus show particular love and mercy toward Peter in this story – and later?**
 - *Prayed for him beforehand, that his faith would not fail. And anticipated him turning again (repenting) to strengthen his brothers (Luke 22:31ff)*
 - *Called him to the inner circle in Gethsemane, despite his rebuking Jesus*
 - *Looked at him*
 - *Special word to Peter at the resurrection.*
 - *Mark 16:7 – “God tell disciples and Peter that going ahead to Galilee” (i.e. “Let Peter know I love him and forgive him!”)*
 - *The private visit (“Appeared to Peter” Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5)*
 - *Public restoration (John 21:15-17) – “Do you love me?” “Feed my sheep.” Said it 3 times - covering Peter’s 3-fold denial!*
 - *Holy Spirit’s empowerment in Acts to preach boldly and endure suffering for Jesus!*

REPENTANCE LIFESTYLE:

- **When was repentance is needed in this story? At which times?**
 - *After Peter denied three times and all fled.*
 - *When they fell asleep and then ran away.*
 - *(Most people will probably give these answers only but are these really the only times?)*
- **If you think that the only place repentance is called for in this story is either when the disciples fell asleep or ran away or when Peter denied knowing Jesus, what does this tell you about how you define repentance?**

- o *This is looking at repentance as penance – just making retribution, trying to pay for what you did wrong, earning your way back to God.*
 - o *It is focusing on wrong behavior alone, on the need to change actions.*
 - *But it is not focused on deep heart causes of our sin - unbelief or self-centeredness.*
 - o *Not understanding your own heart and its potential for sin.*
- **Sometimes we promise or pledge to do some good thing or commit ourselves to an important purpose. This seems like a good thing to do. But was Peter's statement, "I'll never deny you!" a good thing?**
 - o **How much will an oath or determination help us to never deny Jesus?**
 - *Making a pledge or promise may help us for a short time, at least on the surface. However the promise cannot last without deeper heart change.*
 - o **Can anyone claim that they will never deny Jesus? Why not?**
 - *To think we are not denying him in some way or another is arrogance and lack of self-knowledge. We are denying him every way we turn.*
 - *It's not bad to be determined to try to do a good thing, but when we put too much confidence in our own ability to do right we are on the wrong track.*
- **Let's think more about repentance. What was the first opportunity that Peter and the other disciples had to repent in this story?**
 - o *When Jesus told them what would happen, that they would all fall away and be scattered.*
- **What was wrong with their response at this moment when they said that they would never fall away?**
 - o *Too much confidence in themselves. Not really seeing their hearts as they really were. Not seeing their great brokenness and need of help.*
 - o *Too much love of their own reputations.*
 - o *Clearly did not know themselves. Peter did not know his own heart. Jesus not only knew Peter's heart but revealed it to him.*
- **What could true repentance (or repentant faith) have looked like at that moment, when Jesus told them they would all fall away?**
 - o *Instead of being defensive and calling Jesus a liar and protecting their own reputation and thinking so well of themselves, they could have humbly accepted what Jesus said. For example, they could have thought or said, "Wow. Am I really that bad? Yes Jesus, you're right. I AM that weak. I do so easily fear. I do love to protect myself and my reputation. It breaks my heart to see it. Oh Jesus, what can I do? Please help me to stand up under persecution! And if I fail, please have mercy on me! If I run away, help me to come back! Please receive me back! Thank you that you always do!"*
- **Was there another instance when they could have been prompted to repent?**

- o *When they could not stay awake and gave in to discouragement. This was a chance to see their hearts' weakness.*
- **How could this reminder that our “flesh is weak” help as Christians when we think about our sanctification? Our growing in Christ?**
 - o *Agree with Jesus! Don't be confident in yourself. Despair of yourself, but trust in Jesus. Watch yourself!*
 - o *“The FLESH does not get better.” Think about that statement. We are battling the flesh. It is always weak. Constant life-long battle. New vs. old. Spirit vs. flesh. It is a war.*
 - o *Sanctification means getting more and more victory of Spirit-dependence over the flesh.*
 - o *Watch and PRAY. Depend, trust only in Jesus.*
 - o *When we just try to improve our behavior with our own strength and discipline, it is like white washing a house made of mud! It is still a mud house!*
- **What did the disciples / Peter most need to repent of? Did they mainly need to repent of breaking their promise? Or the failure to stay awake? If not, then what?**
 - o *Hearts focused on themselves. Self-dependence. Self-confidence. Self-protection. Unbelief in God's grace and protection.*
 - o *Peter had three-fold weakness.*
 - *Treated Jesus' word with disbelief. “You shall all be untrue.” Peter: “Not true!”*
 - *Showed disdain for his fellow disciples; thought self better than them.*
 - *Prideful opinion of himself – “NEVER!” Conceit, overconfidence.*
- **How do you see this tendency in yourself?**
 - o *Comparing – “At least I'm better than so-and-so.”*
 - o *I would “never” do something like that guy is doing!*
 - o **What would be a better attitude?**
 - *“Oh God only by your grace have I been spared doing sin like that! But I know it is in my heart, and that I have done many other sins, all of which would separate me from you forever without your grace. I need you, oh I need you! Help me.”*

REDEFINING REPENTANCE:

- **How would you redefine repentance after thinking through this story? What are the most important aspects of true repentance?**
 - o *Knowing your own sinfulness, your complete inability to fix yourself.*
 - o *Seeing that resolutions to do better are worthless without a repentant dependence on Jesus.*
 - o *The focus must be on JESUS, turning to Him - the resurrection, the Gospel - for help.*
 - o *It needs to happen all along the way. Over and over.*
 - o **PREVENTATIVE REPENTANCE**

- *Anticipating a struggle because you know your heart.*
- *APTAT – admit your sin or need, pray for help, trust in the completed work of Christ to save you and the Spirit to help you, act – do the right thing by faith, thank God for his faithfulness to walk with you*
- **How do faith and repentance go together?**
 - *God requires a **repentant faith**. A faith that is always repenting, recognizing our great need of Him and turning to him by entrusting our lives to him.*
 - **“Repentance is turning from as much as you know of your sin to give as much as you know of yourself to as much as you know of God.” (Packer)**

SIGNALS for REPENTANCE:

- **In the next story, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we will see that MUSIC SIGNALS people to worship an idol. For a believer in Jesus, such a signal to worship our idols could better signal us of our need to repent of our idols or any sin!) What signals in the story could have alerted Peter to his need for repentance?**
 - **At the beginning of the story, the anger and pridefulness that he felt when Jesus said he would fall away should have been a signal to him to repent!**
 - **At the end of the story, the sound of the rooster crowing should literally have been a signal of Peter’s need to repent!**
- **BACK to the BEGINNING: SO WHY DID JESUS TELL HIS DISCIPLES AHEAD OF TIME THAT THEY WOULD FALL AWAY FROM HIM?**
 - *to lead them to a deep repentance for the pride in their hearts*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **Why is it so hard for us to repent sometimes? What are some ways where we, like Peter, refuse to admit our own weakness of heart? What should we do instead of claiming, “I would never do that”?**
- **What are some sins that people do that we act as if God would never forgive?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **Is there some sin in your life that seems so bad that you cannot imagine God could ever forgive you? Or some pattern of repeated sin that you feel will always block you from God? What is it?**
 - **Thinking of today’s story: Is it worse than Peter’s sin? How can this story encourage you? What do you need to repent of?**
 - *Maybe not just the sin. Instead, maybe you need to repent of not believing in God’s great forgiveness! Or of thinking you have to do something to fix*

it before you can really come to God – which is basically unbelief in what Jesus did for you.

- **Are there some sins or evils that you see and think to yourself, “I would NEVER do that!”**
 - **Are there hidden or internal ways that you actually DO that sin – in word, thought, attitude, action?**
 - **What do you need to repent of in this case?**
- **What is one of the signals (anger, jealousy, depression, etc.) that could alert you to a need for repentance in your life? Can you think of a time recently when this signal sounded and you did not repent? How would things have been different if you had let the signal (the feeling) lead you to turn back to Jesus in repentance?**

WORSHIP JESUS for his WONDROUS LOVE and FORGIVENESS! ASK HIM TO DAILY LEAD YOU to a NEWER and FULLER REPENTANCE by showing you every prideful leaning of your heart!

16. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the Fiery Furnace

Daniel 3:1-30

Key Theme: Idolatry

[Core Gospel Concepts: Sin, Identity in Christ]

THE STORY:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were close friends of Daniel and were Israelites living in exile in Babylon. They had followed the Lord faithfully and had high positions in Babylon.

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold thirty meters high and set it up out in a plain in Babylon. He then summoned all the leaders of Babylon to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. They all came and stood before it, and a herald loudly proclaimed, “This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: As soon as you hear the sound of the instruments and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.” Therefore, as soon as they heard the various sounds of music, all the people fell down and worshiped the image.

There were some people who hated the Jews and were jealous of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, so they told the king that these three refused to listen to the king, serve his gods or worship the image of gold he had set up. Nebuchadnezzar was very angry and called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and said to them, “Is it true, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the instruments and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace fully clothed and bound. The furnace was so hot that the fire killed the soldiers who threw them in.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we threw into the fire? Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire, and the leaders crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was the hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that if people of any nation say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they must be completely destroyed, for no other god can save in this way.” Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Exodus 20:2-5a:** “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God...”

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

According to these verses from Exodus 20:

- What are idols?—Who makes them? Who do we make them for? What can we make an idol out of? How do we tend to treat idols once we make them?

- **Why do you think we tend to make idols?**
 - *Desire to rule our own lives.*

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today's story is about people who chose to make and worship an idol, and about others choosing whether or not to bow down to it. It also helps us understand how to stand up to our idols.
- In the story of Peter's Denial of Jesus, we signals should have led him to repentance, including the sound of the rooster crowing. In today's story we will see that when these signals do not lead us to repentance, they instead lead us to idolatry!

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory:
 - Note all the words and actions of King Nebuchadnezzar. What do these things tell us about his heart?
 - Note all the words and actions of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. What do these things tell us about their hearts?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO:** What do we know about them?
- **THE IDOL / IMAGE:** What was it like? Who made it? How to worship it? Our idols today?
- **THREATS OR PROMISES:** From this statue for Israelites? From idols in our lives today?
- **SIGNALS:** For the Israelites? What signals us to "worship" false idols? What is the right and helpful way for us to respond to these signals? (repentance)
- **WORSHIP:** How did they worship? What are ways we worship our idols?
- **LIES:** What lies did Nebuchadnezzar's idol tell? What about our idols today?
- **RESISTING IDOLS:** What can we learn from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
- **TRUE DEFENDER:** Who "gets in the fire" with us?
- **JESUS IS BETTER:** Name specific ways Jesus serves us better than specific idols?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some of the main idols we see in our churches and church members today? What does this teach us about resisting the influence of idols in our lives? How can you begin to recognize when you have turned from hoping in God to putting your hope in one of your idols?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What idol am I struggling with today in my life? What signals in my life might show me that a good thing has turned into an idol?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

- **SHADRACH, MESHACH, and ABEDNEGO:** What were they like?
- **IDOL or IMAGE:** What was it like? Who made it? How were they to worship it? Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar set it up?

- **What are some of the IDOLS in our lives today?**
 - *Approval of others.*
 - *Being in control, in charge.*
 - *Being important or famous.*
 - *Desire for comfort, relief from pain.*
 - *Accomplishing big things.*
 - *Being better than others in some talent or skill.*
 - *Relationships: marriage, children, friends.*
 - *Education.*
 - *Wealth: cattle, money, house, car, etc.*
- **THREATS from IDOLS: What threats or promises did the idol make?**
 - **How do our idols today threaten us or make false promises to us?**
- **SIGNALS from IDOLS: What signaled or prompted the people to worship the image?**
 - **What kind of “music” signals or prompts us to give in to worshipping our idols?**
 - *Someone makes us angry, sad, or hopeless.*
 - *We envy others for beauty, talents, position, opportunities, wealth.*
 - *Some parts of our lives feel out of control.*
 - *We are insulted or our pride is hurt.*
 - *Something makes us afraid.*
 - **Notice that each of these refers to some feeling that we have!*
 - **What would be the right way for us to respond when we “hear” such signals or music in our own lives?**
 - *When we hear the signal that typically triggers us to worship idols, it really should be a signal that leads us to repentance. If we are living a lifestyle of repentance as we discussed in earlier lessons, we will more quickly recognise these signals, see our own weakness and sinful attitudes, and run to Jesus more and more quickly in repentance.*
- **WORSHIP of IDOLS: What did their worship look like? What were they to do?**
 - **What are some ways that we may “worship” our idols today? Give examples.**
 - *Harsh, critical words. Judging others. Bitter attitude. Depression, anxiety, worry. Gossip. Stealing. Lying. Coveting.*
- **LIES FROM IDOLS: The king tried to make the Israelites believe a lie that their God could never rescue them.**
 - **What kinds of lies do our idols tell us?**
 - *Your family will have problems.*
 - *Your family will not get food.*

- *Your children will not respect you or take care of you when you are old.*
 - *People will not like you and want to be friends.*
 - *If I don't take care of myself, no one else will.*
 - *If I do not do this bad thing, I cannot save myself.*
 - *If you're not successful, no one will respect you.*
 - *Pleasure and sex will make all of your problems disappear.*
- **What happened to King Nebuchadnezzar's followers and soldiers?**
 - *They died in the fire.*
 - **What might that tell us about following idols?**
 - *They have no power to protect us.*
 - *They only lead to destruction.*
- **RESISTING IDOLS: How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego resist idolatry? What can we learn from them about resisting our own idols?**
 - *Did not "pay attention" to the music. Did not serve, did not worship, but instead defied the Babylonians and their gods. Did not fear their threats because they knew who their true defender was. Were not afraid of being burned up. Knew about eternal life.*
- **TRUE DEFENDER from IDOLS: What did they know about their defender, their God?**
 - *Were confident he would save them even if it was not the kind of salvation they first expected or hoped for.*
 - *Even if they lost their lives, they knew he would defend them and save them. He is worth dying for.*
- **What kind of defender did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego experience when they were thrown in the fire? Who does this remind you of?**
 - *A defender who entered the fire with them.*
 - *Reminds us of Jesus Christ, because he suffered for us and with us so that we could be saved from a greater threat than a fiery furnace - the wrath of God.*
- **JESUS is BETTER than IDOLS: How does Jesus serve us better than some specific idols in our lives? Think of examples.**
 - *If I fear being lonely or rejected by others, I remember that Jesus was rejected by men and even by his Father in order to make me acceptable to God.*
 - *If I fear failure, I see that Jesus looked like a complete failure in the eyes of the world in order to purchase my pardon.*
 - *If I fear damage to my reputation, I remember that Jesus "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant... and became obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8) so that I could have a perfect reputation of righteousness before God.*

- *If I fear being provided for, I remember that through Jesus I am God's child, and that my Father owns the cattle on a thousand hills and will care for me.*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some of the main idols we see in our churches and church members today?**
- **What does this teach us about resisting the influence of idols in our lives?**
 - *First, we must **recognize** what our idols are.*
 - *Learn to recognize the music, i.e. the things that provoke us and make us fear or look away from God. Decide not to pay attention to them, asking God to help us.*
 - *Do **not serve** our idols, e.g. don't spend lots of time, money, or thought on them.*
 - *Do **not worship** them or give them **great value** in our lives.*
 - ***Remember** that we have a **true defender, Jesus Christ.***
 - *Resist what your senses are telling you.*
- **How can you begin to recognize when you have turned from hoping in God to putting your hope in one of your idols?**
 - *Notice our emotions.*
 - *Notice our fears, our great desires, and the things that you think about a lot.*
 - *Notice our sins, many of which are only surface sins. Ask God to help you see deeper into your heart and recognize deep-seated idols that you cling to.*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion)

- **What is the greatest idol in your heart these days? How might some of your emotions, fears, or temptations act as SIGNALS to reveal to you the idols in your life that you need to repent of?**
 - **How could it change your life to repent of these idols?**
 - **How does Jesus serve you better than these idols? Take your time to think through specifically how Jesus promises greater life than these idols.**

MORE SCRIPTURES about IDOLATRY. What do we learn about idols from each of these passages? How do they relate to the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

- *Isaiah 44:15-17; Psalm 115:3-4; Ezekiel 14:3; Jeremiah 2:13.*

17. Jacob, Laban, Rachel, and Leah

Genesis 29:15-35

Key Theme: Idolatry

[Core Gospel Concepts: Sin, Identity in Christ]

THE STORY:

In Jacob's dream about the ladder to heaven, God renewed his covenant promises with him (great nation, great name, blessing to him, blessing to all nations). After this Jacob went on his way to the land of his uncle Laban. After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be."

Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes¹, but Rachel was lovely in form and beautiful. Jacob was in love with Rachel and said to Laban, "I'll work for you for seven years in return for your younger daughter, Rachel."

Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her." So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her. . . When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also in return for another seven years of work."

And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. . . Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

¹ *(May mean weak or poor eyesight. Or might mean "soft" or attractive eyes. I.e. Leah only had pretty eyes, but Rachel was beautiful in face and form.)

When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben (from Hebrew word “to see”), for she said, “It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.”

She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.” So she named him Simeon (from “to hear”).

Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” So he was named Levi (from “to attach”).

She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “This time I will praise the LORD.” So she named him Judah ((from “to be praised”). Then she stopped having children.

Rachel had no sons for many years and was jealous of Leah, but finally God gave her two sons. However it was Leah’s son Judah who became the ancestor of King David and eventually Jesus Christ.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Jeremiah 2:13** - *My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **What kind of things do people do when they want something too much?**

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today’s story focuses on two people, Jacob and Leah, who found heartache when they put their hope in something other than God.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory:
 - Note all of the words and actions of Jacob in the story.
 - Note all of the Leah’s words, especially the names of her sons and their meanings.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **JACOB’S LONGING:** What was Jacob like at different points in his life? What idols were ruling his life at times?

- **LEAH'S LONGING:** What was Leah's life like? What was she trusting in to get love and meaning? What do we learn from the names of Leah's first three sons?
- **LEAH'S TRANSFORMATION:** What do we learn from the name of Leah's fourth son? What change does this show us in her attitude or faith? Why was Judah especially important?
- **GOD:** What do we learn about God from how he cares for Jacob and for Leah? What do we learn about his plan to bring a Savior? How is Leah's life a picture of the Gospel at work? What does the Gospel have to do with weakness?
- **IDOLS:** What can we learn from Jacob and Leah about the idols in our own lives? Who is the true answer for our idolatry - our true love or true bridegroom? How is he better than human love? What are some of the idols in our lives today?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What kind of ladders are people turning into idols. I.e. What ways other than Jesus are they trusting in to reach God or to get a better life?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What love are you putting your hope in today other than Jesus? I.e. something which makes you think, "If only I had _____ my life would be so good!"
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

(Let's look at main characters in the story and see what we learn about them, about us, and about God!)(Note: Ideas adapted from "Counterfeit Gods," by Tim Keller.)

JACOB'S LONGING:

- **Who was Jacob? What was he like at different stages of his life?**
 - **Back at home with father and mother?**
 - *Second, less important son; not much loved by father, loved by mom only; not the popular, strong man like Esau.*
 - *A deceiver, one who grasped for his place, for his identity, for his father's blessing and attention.*
 - **While traveling?**
 - *On the run, lonely, without his mother, penniless, in danger.*
 - *Had a powerful encounter with the LORD, the covenant God of Abraham & Isaac, experienced His promises.*
 - **At Laban's home?**
 - *He was looking for a place, an identity,*
 - *Trying to deal with disappointment, rejection of his dad, loss of his mother*
 - *Desperate for Rachel, longing for her.*
 - *Proposing foolish deals because blinded by longing. Did not even wait to first hear Laban's price! Or to negotiate a reasonable price. Was full of lust and desire.*
 - *"I want to lie with her!" - What does this show? Overwhelmed with desire.*
 - *Was himself cheated, the victim of another deceiver.*

- **In this story, what was Jacob looking to for hope?**
 - *Getting Rachel, his one true love!*
 - *Love, significance.*
- **What did Laban tell Jacob when he accused him of deceiving him with Leah? What might this have reminded Jacob of?**
 - *He said, "It is not our custom to put the younger before the older."*
 - *Would likely remind him of how he deceived his own father into thinking he was his older brother. His own sin had turned on him!*
- **What was ruling Jacob's life? What was influencing the way he lived?**
 - *Earlier the desire for his father's love & blessing & inheritance.*
 - *Longing for Rachel.*
- **What is wrong with this? These seem like good things.** (love from father, love for woman)
 - *He was looking to people (his dad, Rachel) for identity and meaning in life RATHER than looking to God.*
 - *Deep down he thought that having Rachel would make him valuable!*
 - *He was taking good things (love from father, love from a woman) and making them the most important things, more important than trusting God to manage his life.*
- **So what about Jacob's encounter with God in the dream? Did his faith at that time mean nothing? Was he just pretending to trust God?**
 - *No, he was a believer in God, but, like all of us, his faith was weak at times.*
 - *God's work in our lives is a process.*
 - *Slowly by slowly God shows us the idols of our lives, the things we turn to instead of God for love and meaning so that we may repent.*
- **What was the result of Jacob putting his hope in the wrong things (ex. Rachel, his father's blessing)?**
 - *He was deceived and disappointed. He discovered that these things do not really satisfy.*
 - *Family discord.*
 - *No matter how good and promising something seems to us, if we are trusting it to fulfill us, it will disappoint, i.e. When you strive after an idol, "You may go to bed with Rachel, but it is ALWAYS LEAH in the MORNING!" (Keller)*

LEAH'S LONGING:

- **Who was Leah? What was her life like?**
 - *First born daughter, but ugly, unattractive, lived in the shadow of a very beautiful younger sister, Rachel.*
 - *She was so unattractive her dad had to trick someone into marrying her!*
 - *Unloved by her husband, had never been wanted by him.*
 - *Deeply jealous of her sister. Desperate for her husband's love and respect.*
- **How did Leah try to get love and meaning in her life?**
 - *Through having sons, through family, through rightly fulfilling her purpose in life (being a mother)*

- **What were the names of Leah's first three sons? What did their names mean? What did she most want each time?**
 - *Reuben – to see – God saw my misery. Maybe now Jacob will see me! Wanted husband's love. She wanted to be seen.*
 - *Simeon – to hear – the Lord heard me, that I'm not loved. Maybe now will hear me! Wanted husband's love. She wanted to be heard.*
 - *Levi – to attach – maybe now he will be attached to me (husband's love). She wanted to be attached to a husband who would love her.*
- **How was she trying to get satisfaction, get her husband's love?**
 - *Through bearing kids*

LEAH'S TRANSFORMATION:

- **How is her approach to the coming of the fourth child different? What was his name?**
 - *Judah – praise – “Now I will praise the Lord?”*
 - *Her focus is finally on the Lord. Before it was on the Lord only as a means to getting the thing she really wanted – her husband's love. Now it is simply praise. No mention of husband or having succeeded.*
 - *Now she gives up trying, stops having kids. Trusting God. (Later, just like Jacob's ongoing struggle, she struggles again later with this. God is still at work in her life!)*
- **Do you know why Judah is probably the most important of Jacob's sons?**
 - *The line of the promised Savior continued through him!!!*

GOD

- **What does this teach us about God? About his plan for bringing a Savior?**
 - *Merciful, compassionate upon the oppressed, the unwanted, the rejected*
 - *His plan for bringing a Savior is different than how man thinks. He is coming through weakness, through the rejected of the world.*
 - *Leah's struggle is picture of the Gospel. God uses the weakest. The Savior would come in weakness, giving up his life for others, not in might and military victory.*

IDOLS

- **What does this teach us about IDOLS in our lives?**
 - *Whatever besides Jesus you are putting your hope in for life, for meaning, for love, for fulfillment – it may seem Rachel at night in the dark, but it will be Leah in the morning! (Disappointment, not fulfilling, not enough)*
 - *Jesus is the TRUE BRIDEGROOM! The only ONE who will really make your life whole! He lays his hand on Leah, and he lays his hand on us, no matter how ugly we are. He died to make us his bride.*
- **What can the ladder in Jacob's dream teach us about idols?**

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with group)

- **What kind of ladders are people turning into idols. I.e. What ways other than Jesus are they trusting in to reach God or to get a better life?**
 - *In all other religions or ways of trying to reach God or to get real LIFE, humans have to climb the ladder to God step by step – through righteous acts, morality, bringing sacrifices, avoiding bad things, or right knowledge.*
 - *Jacob looked to having Rachel as his wife. Leah looked to having the love of Jacob.*
- **For Christians, what is our ladder?**
 - *We don't climb the steps of the ladder. We depend on the only LADDER – Jesus! He IS the ladder!*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What one true love are you putting your hope in? Is there something in your life which makes you think, “If ONLY I had _____, my life would be so good! I would be satisfied and complete!” If this is not Jesus, it will never fulfill you for long!**
- **REPENT of looking for TRUE LOVE anywhere besides the only true bridegroom, the only ladder – JESUS!**

18. The Cleansing of Naaman **with the Healing of Blind Bartimaeus**

2 Kings 5:1-15

Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43

Key Theme: Sanctification by Faith

[Core Gospel Concepts: Sanctification, Nature of Faith, Sin]

THE STORY:

Naaman, the commander of the king's army, was a very great man in Syria. He was a brave soldier and had all that a man could want – power, fame, and riches. But he also had a terrible skin disease for which there was no cure.

On one of their raids into Israel, the Syrian army captured a little Israelite girl who became a servant to Naaman's wife. When she saw Naaman's problem, she said to his wife, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his disease."

When Naaman told his king what the girl had said, he encouraged him to go to Israel. And the king of Syria sent with him a letter for the king of Israel, along with lots of gold, silver, and fine clothes. When the king of Israel heard Naaman's request to be healed, he was afraid and didn't know what to do because he feared the Syrians, and he knew he could not cure his disease. But when Elisha the man of God heard about this, he sent a message saying, "Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." But Naaman went away angry. He was insulted because he expected the prophet to come out and perform a dramatic healing with his hand. He said, "We have much cleaner rivers in my own country. Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he went off in a rage.

But Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? Why not do this simple thing?" So Naaman went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as Elisha had said, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel."

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Psalm 20:7:** *"Some trust in chariots, some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **What is something about yourself that you would really like to change? How would you start?**
- **When you think of successful or influential people, how do they usually go about solving a problem or fixing a situation? What do they use?**
 - *Possible answers: power, position, influence, connections, obligations.*

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- All of us, if we are honest, have ways that we would like to change. But many times we put our hope for changing in things other than God (even when we are seeking spiritual change!). Our story today is about someone who really needed help to change but went about it the wrong way until God showed him a better way.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - To what or whom does Naaman usually turn to for help in solving his problems?
 - Does Elisha respond to Naaman's arrival the way he expected him to? Why or why not?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **NAAMAN:** What was he like? What was good? What was not good? What does he want to change?
 - **How does Naaman seek change?** Where is his trust? Who does God use in his life to help him?
- **GOD:** How does God want Naaman to seek change?
- **ISRAEL:** What is the lesson for Israel at that time?
- **BARTIMAEUS:** What was he like?
 - How was his approach to seeking change or healing different from Naaman's?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some ways that we resemble Naaman at times when we are searching for help or trying to change ourselves? What personal gifts or attributes do we try to depend on before we turn to God - or even in addition to depending on God?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** How are you like Naaman in your life today? What are some of the gifts, strengths, or advantages that you have in your life which you have depended on more than God?

- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

NAAMAN:

- **Who was Naaman? What was he like? What were his strengths?**
 - *He was famous, successful, powerful, rich. Had soldiers, horses, chariots.*
 - *He had authority (letter) of the king, the power of being a leader in a dominant country, was willing to do a heroic deed in order to "earn" his own solution.*
- **What was his problem?**
 - *Leprosy, but also pride!*

NAAMAN'S SOLUTION:

- **What was Naaman's approach to solving his problem? What riches, abilities, or position did he use to help get a solution? I.e. What parts of the solution did he try to provide himself?**
 - *Pride, wealth, position, great deeds.*
 - *Wanted to earn the prophet's favor – felt that he deserved respect and the prophet's favor.*
 - *Brought expensive gifts with him to Israel, as well as the king's letter.*
- **Did Naaman have any faith? What was his faith in?**
 - *The little faith he had was just head knowledge, not a faith that was willing to surrender all of his own self-dependence.*
- **Who led him to a solution? How did they do it?**
 - *Israelite slave girl and his servants – lowly people.*
 - *They approached him in love and humility.*

GOD'S SOLUTION:

- **What did Elisha do when Naaman came to him? What did he not do? What did he tell him?**
 - *Sent a servant out to speak to him.*
 - *Did not come himself, recognize Naaman's position, or perform a grand healing.*
 - *Told him to wash in the Jordan River seven times.*
- **What was God's solution for Naaman? What did he require? Why? Why was this so difficult for Naaman?**
 - *Humility before his servants, giving up position, wealth, power as means to change. To strip himself of every form of self-dependence!*

- *Faith in God alone, complete dependence on him and his way.*
- *Imagine a powerful war commander stripping in front of his servants and washing himself in dirty water in front of them.*
- **We all long to change, to be better, to be more holy, to be more productive for God, to be healed. We see in this story two possible approaches to seek deep change in our lives.**
- **What are they? How would you describe them? Which one works? Which one does not?**
 - **Self-dependence** *(Naaman's approach)*
 - *Obedience to law to earn our righteousness, worldly wealth, reputation, power, position, inherent goodness.*
 - **God-dependence** *(God's approach)*
 - *Humility, surrendering all that we depend on for righteousness, repentance of sin, faith in God alone, give up position, be willing to get dirty.*
 - *Based on relationship with God.*
 - *God wants to strip us of all of our efforts to fix ourselves, just as he wanted Naaman to strip off his clothes to enter the water!*

ISRAEL:

- **Why was this story needed for the Israelites at this time?**
 - *They needed to let go of their own pride and trust God instead of themselves.*
 - *They needed to be reminded that God has come to have mercy on the Gentiles as well as themselves. (God's promise to Abraham)*
- **To review:**
 - **Naaman had many strengths and advantages in life. What were they?**
 - *Military power and success, a good reputation, a high position, a letter from a powerful king, wealth.*
 - **These things blocked his knowing and depending fully on God. How?**
 - *Because he depended on himself and his gifts and abilities.*
 - **For God to heal or change him, he had to give up all these things. How?**
 - *He had to give up or lay aside all that he had to offer and boast of and simply dip himself into the dirty Jordan River.*

Transition statement: Let's look at another story in order to contrast how this man seeks a solution to his problem and how Naaman sought change.

THE OTHER STORY:

The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43

As Jesus and his disciples passed along a road outside of Jericho, they were followed by a large crowd. While they were walking, they passed a blind man, Bartimaeus, who was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God. And that's the end of the story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

BARTIMAEUS:

- **Who was Bartimaeus? What was he like?**
 - *Blind, a beggar, poor, likely an outcast, dependent on others for much in life.*
- **What was his problem?**
 - *He was blind.*
- **How was Bartimaeus like Naaman?**
 - *Had a problem.*
 - *Sought an answer.*
 - *Wanted to be healed.*
 - *Could not heal himself.*
- **What was Bartimaeus' way of solving his problem?**
 - *Was humble, disregarding his reputation or dignity, enduring verbal abuse of others, desperate, pleading for help to the only one who could help.*
- **How was Bartimaeus's approach different than Naaman's?**
 - *Cared not for his reputation or about what others thought of him.*
 - *Pleaded, ran after, yearned for the Son of David's touch.*
 - *Key Difference:* *Naaman is a man who seems good depending on his own goodness compared to Bartimaeus, a sinful man (i.e. who understood his own sinfulness) humbling himself before God.*

- *Naaman and Bartimaeus were alike because they were equally needy and equally sinful, but only one of the two really saw his sin and his neediness.*
- *It is wrong to think the gospel is only for poor or weak people. It is also for rich, powerful people who understand how weak and helpless they are!*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **Naaman and Bartimaeus were, in reality, both “blind beggars.” Naaman was slow to see and admit his spiritual bankruptcy, while Bartimaeus was completely honest with himself and ready to cry completely for help. What are some ways that we resemble Naaman at times when we are searching for help or trying to change ourselves? What personal gifts or attributes do we try to depend on before we turn to God - or even in addition to depending on God?**
- **Naaman would have been willing to do some great deed to merit or deserve healing.**
 - **What kind of great things are people willing to do in service to God?**
- **God wanted Naaman to be willing to dip in the dirty Jordan River seven times to show his faith. Are there some small humbling things that God could want us to do to show our trust in him?**
- **Maybe sometimes you feel like a small person like the young Israelite girl or the servants of Naaman. These people, the lowest, weakest people in his house, led him to change. What was their approach? How can we be like them? In other words, how can God help you to be such an agent of change for others?**
 - *Humility, respect, and earnest love.*
- **Naaman found God because of his leprosy. He was not looking for God, only for a cure, but God changed his heart as well. What might be the “leprosy” in your life? What hurt, pain, or weakness might God be using in your life to break your pride and self-dependence so that you will turn more fully to him?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **How are you like Naaman in your life today?**
 - **i.e. What are some of the gifts, strengths, or advantages that you have in your life? How do you depend on these things in your heart to get God’s favor, instead of depending on his grace alone?**
- **What big thing would you be willing to do for God? What small, humbling thing (like dipping in the Jordan) would you struggle to do before God?**
- **God used small people in the life of Naaman - the Israelite slave girl and his own servants - to help him see his need for change. Who are some of the small people or humble situations that God could use to help leaders depend more on God?**

19. Paul Rebukes Peter

Galatians 2:11-15,20,21

(Also see Acts 10:1-11:18; 15:1,2,5,7-11; 1 Peter 1:13-2:10)

Key Theme: Living in Step with the Truth of the Gospel

[Core Gospel Concepts: Sanctification by Faith, Faith Expressing Itself in Love, Sin]

CONTEXT: *(Teacher, just summarize this once for the class before telling the story the first time.)* The apostle Peter is one of the great fathers of the Christian faith. He was chosen by Jesus to be his disciple and walked with Jesus for three years of ministry, often showing great faith and courage in standing with Jesus. But he also had moments of great doubt and failure like when he abandoned Jesus before the crucifixion. But after the resurrection when he humbly experienced Christ's forgiveness for this betrayal, and after the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter became bold in his preaching of the Gospel even at the risk of his own life. God was continuing to work in Peter's life to change and grow him, but it was a process that continued with both progress and failures along the way.

THE STORY:

Peter had been the first Jewish Christian leader to recognize Gentile Christians when God led him through a dream to visit and baptize Cornelius and his family (Acts 10 & 11). Also he, along with other leaders in the Jerusalem church had affirmed God's calling on Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15). So Peter typically welcomed uncircumcized Gentile believers into the church! However, even Peter sometimes failed to act out what he believed.

Paul wrote to the Galatian church that he had needed to confront Peter in front of the whole church in Antioch. When Peter first came to visit the church there, he had gladly eaten with the Gentile believers and been so friendly to them. But later some of the Jewish believers from Jerusalem came to visit the Antioch church. These were those pushing for the Gentile Christians to be circumcised and to follow the Jewish customs. When they arrived, Peter became afraid of what they might think, so he began to avoid the uncircumcized non-Jewish believers. Many of the other Jewish believers also were led astray and joined him in this hypocrisy, even faithful Barnabas!

Paul told them that they were "not acting in line with the truth of the gospel." He told Peter in front of them all, "If you, a Jew, freely live like a non-Jew when these Jewish guys from Jerusalem are not watching you, what right do you have to require non-Jews to follow Jewish customs just to make a

favorable impression on your old Jerusalem friends?” He went on to say, “Even we Jews all know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.”

Peter clearly repented of this because later at the great council of Jerusalem, he stood with Paul against those people who wanted to add circumcision as a requirement for all Christians. Later, nearer the end of Peter's life, when he wrote letters to scattered persecuted Christians, he repeatedly urged them as members of Christ's family to live holy lives consistent with the new identity they had because of the Gospel.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Galatians 2:20:** *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **What do you think it means to act in a way that is in line with the Gospel? Can you think of a recent situation in which you acted in a way that was not consistent with your being a Christian?**

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7:18,19 of the battle in his own life to live consistently in a way that pleases God. He said, *“For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”* This is the up and down struggle against the flesh that all believers go through as we grow closer to Jesus. The apostle Peter is one of the most helpful examples of this up and down process of growing in the Lord.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER:(Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory:
 - Note all the actions of Peter mentioned, both good and bad.
 - What was Paul's big concern about Peter?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **PETER'S LIFE:** What do you remember about his life's ups and downs? How did he treat Gentile believers well at times?
- **PETER IN ANTIOCH:** How was he a hypocrite?
- **THE GOSPEL - LIVING LIKE WE BELIEVE:** What is the gospel? What promises? What does it mean to act in line with it? Examples? Or to not act in line with it? Examples?

- **PETER'S OLD AGE LETTERS - 2 PETER 1:3-9:** What belief is a foundation for us to continue to grow and be productive in Christ? What does this show about Peter's continued growth in his life?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** List some specific ways that we as believers might act in a way “not in line with the truth of the Gospel.” With each sin we mention, describe how this sin reveals some type of unbelief in the Gospel.
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Share one way in which you did not act in line with the truth of the Gospel this past week. What would repentance look like?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

PETER'S LIFE:

- **What are some of the ups and downs in Peter's life that you can remember from the Gospels and Acts? What do these things show us about Peter - his character, his personality, and his beliefs?**
- **When did Peter treat Gentile Christians well in this story? How did he treat them well?**
 - *Obedied God by going to share the Gospel with Cornelius and by listening to God's words in the dream to not treat what God had made clean (Gentile believers) as unclean.*
 - *There he recognized the filling of the Holy Spirit on these Gentiles.*
 - *He approved of and encouraged Paul in his call to reach the Gentiles.*
 - *When he first came to Antioch he ate and had fellowship with the Gentile believers and did not require them to follow Jewish customs like circumcision in order to be a full part of the church.*

PETER IN ANTIOCH

- **In what ways did Peter act as a hypocrite and change the way he treated Gentile believers? Why did he do this?**
 - *When he first came to the church at Antioch he gladly ate and associated with the Gentile believers and made them feel completely welcome to Christ's church based on their faith in Christ alone. Later, Jewish believers from Jerusalem visited, and Peter acted differently toward the Gentile believers because he worried about what the Jerusalem people would think. He knew that they did not approve of people who had not been circumcised and become full Jews in all their practices.*
 - *A hypocrite changes his words and actions according to different situations and according to whom he wants to please or impress.*
 - *He failed to love those Gentile believers because he was not living by faith at that moment. He even failed to love the Judaizers because he did not correct them or even set them a better example.*

- *At that moment Peter made an idol of his reputation in front of certain “important” people. He cared more about what they thought of him than about doing what was right. He made an idol out of their approval.*

THE GOSPEL - LIVING LIKE WE BELIEVE

- **What is “the gospel”? How would you summarize it? What are some big promises and benefits that we receive when we believe the Gospel?**
 - *The gospel is the good news that God in Jesus Christ has fulfilled his promises to Israel, and that a way of salvation has been opened to all.*
 - *The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and all that it accomplishes for us.*
 - *All people have sinned against God and deserve his eternal punishment. But is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. (Romans 1:16)*
 - *Promises for those who believe in the Gospel include:*
 - *eternal salvation,*
 - *being born again or made alive spiritually,*
 - *having restored fellowship with the Father through the Son and by the Spirit,*
 - *becoming children and heirs of God, being forgiven of all sins past, present, and future, and being credited with the righteousness of Christ in God's eyes. It means we are no longer enemies of God but have been brought into his family and that other believers are our brothers and sisters in Christ. It includes an eternal hope of our own physical resurrection, glorification, and presence with God in the new heavens and earth.*
 - *In the Gospel all believers are promised the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.*
- **Thinking about all these promises and blessings, what does it mean to “act in line with the truth of the gospel”? Give specific examples.**
 - *It means that we should act, speak, and believe in a way that shows we believe these promises are true.*
 - *Examples are many. Here are a few:*
 - *If we believe that Christ died for the salvation for any who believe, Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free, then we will not treat any people with favoritism or others with disfavor just because they are different than we are .*
 - *If we believe that none of us deserve God's favor because of our sin and are all dependent on his grace to save us, then we will look on others as fellow sinners in need of Jesus just like ourselves. And we will look on all other believers as equals.*
 - *If we believe that through the Gospel we are fully forgiven, then we will not keep trying to earn our position with God through good works.*
 - *If we believe the Gospel, then we will want to obey God's commands out of thankfulness for his grace.*

- *If we believe that God has forgiven us of our deep sinfulness, then we will be ready to extend forgiveness to those who sin against us instead of treating them with contempt or unkindness.*
 - *Treating poor and rich, educated and uneducated, leaders and followers, with the same love and respect.*
- **What does it mean to “NOT act in line with the truth of the gospel”? Give a few specific examples.**
 - *It means that the way that we act or the words that we speak, or the attitudes that we have make it seem as if we do not believe that the gospel is actually true.*
 - *So many examples, such as:*
 - *Being anxious or worried. Cheating or being greedy because we fear being poor or being without something we need.*
 - *Doing what we know is wrong because we fear the judgment of certain people. We fear certain people when we are doubting that we have truly been made righteous by Christ or that God's approval is all that we truly need.*
 - *Treating important people with respect and kindness while being less kind or respectful to “small” people.*
 - *Being corrupt or cheating other people or refusing to be generous or to share because we do not believe that the same God who saves our souls will also provide what we need in this life so we have to grab what we need or want.*
 - *Refusing to forgive someone who has offended us shows that we believe that we are better than them, that we are not really sinners in equal need of God's mercy. Seeking revenge, holding a grudge*
 - *Acting hateful or disrespectful toward a person of another tribe or race.*
 - *Failing to listen to someone's ideas or their troubles.*
 - *Failure to share the Gospel because deep down we don't really believe that it is the best news in the world, that it is the power for salvation for any who believe. We don't believe that our identity as God's precious children is secure so we fear that when we share the Gospel we will look foolish to other people.*
 - *If we insist that people worship the same way we do or believe all the less important doctrines the same as we do. If we look down on others we disagree with, especially other Christians, it is like we are adding something to the Gospel that must be done in order for God to approve of us.*

PETER'S LETTERS IN HIS OLD AGE - READ 2 PETER 1: 3-9

- **What was the fruit of a growing belief in the Gospel according to verses 5-7?**
 - *Growth in goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love as well as faith.*
- **When he says, “for this very reason”, what reason is he talking about?**
 - *the promise that God has given us all that we need to live godly lives through our knowledge of or relationship with him through his grace.*
- **If we are failing to grow in these ways, what is the real issue, according to verse 9? What does this teach us about how to grow and be more productive in following Jesus?**
 - *It is because we have forgotten the great forgiveness of sins that we have in Christ!*
 - *I.e. it is because we have forgotten the Gospel and are not living “in line with the truth of the Gospel”*
 - *We can only be productive in the service of Jesus as we continue to believe the basic truths of the Gospel, the truths about sin and forgiveness through faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection.*
 - *The first “work” we have in growing in God is faith. John 6:29 - Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*
- **Peter wrote these letters in his old age. This shows that he was continuing to grow in the Lord even though his life was filled both with great acts and words of faith and with times of failure to “act in line with the truth of the Gospel.” What does this teach us about our God and about how he works in the lives of believers?**
 - *God was faithful to Peter throughout his whole life and was continuing to help him grow. He never gave up on Peter; but was patient to complete the good work He began.*
 - *God is always faithful to us, to remind us of the gospel, of our forgiveness, of all his promises to us.*
 - *He is always merciful and patient with us to bring us back “in line with the truth of the Gospel.”*
 - *Our growth (sanctification) in the Lord is not a straight line of progress. We will battle our flesh and its fears and thus fail at times, even need to be rebuked so that we can repent.*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **List more specific ways that we as believers might act in a way not in line with the truth of the Gospel. With each sin mentioned, describe how this sin reveals some type of unbelief in the Gospel.**
 - *Ex. When I look down on someone from another church that worships in a different way than I do, it reveals that I don't believe deeply that those people are God's children as much as I am.*

- *Ex. When I gossip, it may reveal that I want people to think I am better than that other person. That shows that I don't really trust that being God's child is all the identity that I need. I believe deep down that I need the approval of other people too.*
- *Ex. When I refuse to help someone who asks for help when I am able to help, it reveals that I have forgotten the love showed to me.*
- *Ex. When I refuse to forgive, I am forgetting how much Christ has forgiven me.*
- *Ex. When I give in to worry and anxiety, and start looking to other "gods" to save me, I am not believing Jesus' words, "All these things will be added unto you." (Matt 6:33) or Paul's words, "the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:7)*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **Share with the group one way in which you did not act in line with the truth of the Gospel this past week? How does God want you to repent? What specifically do you need to remember and believe about the Gospel in this situation?**

20. The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Matthew 18:21-35

Key Theme: Forgiveness

[Core Gospel Concepts: Forgiveness, Kingdom, Sin]

THE STORY:

One day Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went away and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed."

And Jesus said, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Matthew 18:32b-33:** *"I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **What does it mean to forgive someone? What effect should forgiveness have on you and others?**

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- One of the most difficult things for us to do is to forgive those who have hurt us. We can think of so many reasons not to forgive others. In today’s story we will see what Jesus says about forgiving others.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory:
 - Note all the words and actions of the king.
 - Note all the words and actions of the first servant who had his debt canceled by the king.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **PETER’S QUESTION:** How did Peter’s view of forgiveness differ from Jesus’ view?
- **THE PARABLE:** Characters? What’s the value of a denari and a talent?
- **THE FIRST SERVANT:** His problem? His actions?
- **THE MASTER:** His actions? How was he like Christ? Who paid the debt?
- **THE SECOND SERVANT:** The problem? Excuses for not forgiving? What should have helped him to forgive his fellow servant?
- **THE OTHER SERVANTS:** How were they affected?
- **OUR DEBT:** How did the second servant’s debt compare to the first servant’s? How does my offense to God compare to the other person’s offense to me?
- **JESUS - the SOURCE of FORGIVENESS:** Who pays the debt of forgiveness? How does Jesus help us pay the debt of the person who hurts us?
- **ASSURANCE OF SALVATION:** What is a sure sign that we are experiencing God’s forgiveness of our sin?
- **THE KINGDOM OF GOD:** If “the kingdom of heaven is like” a king who forgives and expects his servants to forgive, then what does this story teach us about God’s kingdom?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some of the ways that we try to “collect the debt” from those who have hurt us? In other words, what are some ways that we show unforgiveness in our actions and attitudes?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** In what way am I trying to “collect the debt” from someone who offended me? Where do I need to forgive? How might forgiveness in my heart change my behavior?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

PETER’S QUESTION:

- **What was Peter's question to Jesus? Why do you think Peter was asking this question? Do you think Peter thought seven was a generous number of times to forgive?**
 - *How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me, up to seven times?*
 - *Yes, the Pharisees often required someone to forgive another person up to three times. So Peter must have thought that seven was extremely generous!*
- **How did Jesus answer Peter? How was Jesus' view of forgiveness different from Peter's? What did he mean by seventy times seven? Was this surprising to Peter?**
 - *Jesus said, "Not seven times, but seventy seven times." Then he told him the story of the unmerciful servant.*
 - *Jesus was teaching Peter that there should be no end to our forgiveness for others. Seventy seven was a number of complete wholeness, and in this case, it indicates limitless forgiveness.*
 - *Peter must have been shocked. Seventy seven times - that's impossible!*

THE PARABLE:

- **Who were the characters in the parable, and who did they represent?**
 - *The king who was settling accounts with his servants. He represented God.*
 - *The servant who owed the king ten thousand talents. He represented me.*
 - *The other servant who owed one hundred denarii to the forgiven servant. He represented someone who has hurt or offended me.*
 - *The king's other servants who saw how the forgiven servant treated the other. They represent the family or community around us who will be affected when we refuse to forgive someone.*

***Note: Denari and Talent**

- **Denari:** *One denari was the typical daily wage for a casual laborer.*
- **Talent:** *One talent was equal to 6000 denari. Imagine how much 10,000 talents was! Far more money than a laborer could earn in a lifetime. A truly unfathomable number.*

THE FIRST SERVANT:

- **What problem did the first servant have? How great was his debt? What was the man to pay to make up his debt?**
 - *The first servant had a debt of ten thousand talents that he owed the king.*
 - *Needed to pay everything – himself, his family, his whole life.*
- **What did the servant do?**
 - *Begged for mercy!*
 - *Promised to pay it all in time.*

THE MASTER:

- **What did the master do? Why? Who took the punishment for the huge debt? What did it cost him?**
 - *He forgave the debt completely.*
 - *Just because the servant asked.*
 - *The king paid the debt himself. It cost him 10,000 talents.*
- **How does this remind us of Jesus Christ?**
 - *Jesus paid the incomprehensible debt of our sin by shedding his blood on the cross for us. He canceled our sin debt by taking the debt upon himself.*
 - *When we cry out to God to forgive us for our sin, he will forgive us on the basis of the blood of Christ.*

THE SECOND SERVANT:

- **What problem was there between the first and second servants? How did the first servant respond when the second servant asked for patience?**
 - *The second servant owed the first servant one hundred denarii.*
 - *He refused to forgive his fellow servant. Instead he had him put in prison.*
- **What excuses might he have made for his behavior?**
 - *I need that money now to show the king my gratitude.*
 - *I have no money now - I have to provide for my family.*
 - *This man doesn't appreciate what I've done for him.*
 - *I've waited for this money long enough!*
 - *I want justice! This man deserves this.*
- **How do these excuses look in comparison to the debt he was forgiven by the master?**
 - *Unimportant and foolish, he doesn't truly understand what the king has done for him. The king's kindness hasn't affected his heart.*

THE OTHER SERVANTS:

- **Did the servant's unforgiveness affect his fellow servants? How does unforgiveness affect more people than just you and the offended party?**
 - *It also affected the other servants who saw what happened. The incident disturbed them, they knew it was wrong.*
 - *Unforgiveness can also hurt those you are in community with, those who see the devastating effects of unforgiveness between two people. It can cause distress, confusion, and anger.*
- **What did the master do when he heard what the servant did to the other servant? Why?**
 - *He punished the servant because he should have shown mercy to his fellow servant the way the king showed mercy to him.*
 - *The servant's life and actions should have demonstrated and reflected the life-altering impact of the mercy that was shown to him.*

OUR DEBT - REMEMBERING & COMPARING:

- **What should have helped the servant to forgive the debt of his fellow servant?**
 - *Remembering the inconceivable debt of his that had been forgiven.*
 - *Remembering the mercy of the Father.*
- **Was the second servant's debt to the first significant?**
 - *Yes, it was equal to 100 days' wages for a worker.*
 - *Not as great as the first servant's debt, but nonetheless a large amount for a common worker.*
- **So the second servant's debt was great, but nonetheless his fellow servant should have forgiven him. What does this teach us about forgiving people who have offended us?**
 - *We cannot make the excuse, "They hurt me too much for me to forgive them!"*
 - *Like the servant and his master, we have hurt Christ so much that it doesn't compare to anything others have done to us.*
- **What did the master say to the servant when he heard what he had done?**
 - *"You wicked servant! I forgave that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had on you?"*

JESUS - the SOURCE of FORGIVENESS:

- **Who pays the penalty for our sin?**
 - *Jesus pays it all. He takes the penalty on himself.*
- **What does Jesus want us to do with those who offend us?**
 - *Be willing to take the punishment on ourselves.*
 - *Release them from the debt they owe us.*
 - *To pay the price of the debt ourselves by absorbing it.*
- **Where does the power to forgive come from?**
 - *The Holy Spirit. We must plead with God for help to constantly remember his great mercy for us and to help us "pay the cost" of forgiving others.*
 - *To remember how he paid the cost for us on the cross.*

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION:

- **Does our forgiving others earn God's forgiveness for our sins? If not, then what did Jesus mean when he said, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart"?**
 - *If we are not living in the forgiveness that Jesus has given us - that is, if we are not remembering all that he has forgiven us - then we will struggle to forgive others.*

- *When we have a hard time forgiving others, it is because we are struggling to really believe and apply the forgiveness God has shown us. We have forgotten how great our own sin is and how great God's mercy is.*
- *Our unforgiveness is EVIDENCE that we are not really believing and applying the gospel to our lives. not really believing that we too are great sinners depending on an incomprehensibly great Savior.*
 - *Unforgiveness is a warning sign of our own need to repent! As we remember God's mercy toward us, our hearts change and we want to extend that kind of mercy to other sinners.*
- *Our forgiving others is EVIDENCE that we are truly believing that we ourselves are forgiven.*
- *One of the surest signs that we have truly experienced God's forgiveness is that we will be more ready to forgive others who hurt us. If we stubbornly refuse to forgive someone because their sin is "too great," we have no right to assume that we have been born again.*

KINGDOM OF GOD:

- **What phrase does Jesus use to introduce the parable? If "the kingdom of heaven is like" a king who forgives and expects his servants to forgive, then what does this story teach us about God's kingdom?**
 - *He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like . . ."*
 - *Kingdom living will be characterized by people, forgiven by God through Jesus, habitually extending forgiveness to those who sin against them and pursuing peace and reconciliation in their lives and communities.*

EXTRA READING:

"God's love and mercy can be unpredictable and shocking. Many people end up receiving far more than they expected. For example in the parable of the two lost sons, the rebellious son received far more than he could have imagined when he returned to his father. In this parable about the kingdom, some workers receive more than they deserved. In both stories, other people became angry and jealous. So God's mercy can bring out both the best and the worst in us! **The grace of God is so overwhelming and extravagant that it cannot fail to confuse and amaze us and turn our world upside down.** It reveals what we really think about ourselves and other people. In the story of the unforgiving servant we cannot begin to understand the greatness of the debt (10,000 talents!) which we owe God and the greatness of God's mercy toward us. But when we are honest with ourselves we begin to see that we are just like the unforgiving servant, withholding mercy toward other people even though God did not withhold mercy from us. That's what happened in today's story." (from Living in Light of the Kingdom)

In Summary:

- We are part of something far greater than just our own individual transformation. Our own growth is an important part of God's kingdom expansion, but it is much more.
- The characteristics of the kingdom are contrary to the way we normally think.
 - the first are last
 - winners are losers
 - the rich are poor
 - God opposes the proud yet is kind to the humble
 - those who think they have everything in the world have nothing at all
- To live in light of the kingdom is to be a part of God's plan for this world. It is to be involved in something much greater than our own lives.
- Encouraging believers to be involved in God's work of restoration of all broken things
 - consider affinities, abilities, and opportunities
- Keeping the Gospel fresh for myself is vital to joining God in His kingdom purposes

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **PAYING THE DEBT (forgiveness) VS. COLLECTING THE DEBT (unforgiveness):**
 - ***When we refuse to forgive someone who has hurt us, it is as if we are trying to force that person to pay us back the debt they owe us. Forgiveness is costly. In order to truly forgive someone, we have to be willing to take the cost of their debt to us on ourselves instead of trying to “collect” from our debtors through various forms of unforgiveness.**
 - **What are some of the ways that we try to “collect the debt” from those who have hurt us? In other words, what are some ways that we show unforgiveness in our actions and attitudes?**
 - **“Collecting the debt”:** *According to Tim Keller, here are some ways we attempt to “collect the debt” when we are struggling to forgive others:*
 - *Act cold toward them. Avoid them.*
 - *Become demanding.*
 - *Damage their reputation by warning others about them (gossip) or publicly “sharing our pain.”*
 - *Rejoice when they are hurt or fail.*
 - *Act merciful but with a self-righteous, proud heart. Instead of really forgiving that person “from the heart,” you make them feel more in debt to you because you make them feel like you are better than them.*
- **Can anyone give an example of how unforgiveness by someone in your family or church between two people has affected the rest of the church or family?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **Think of a person you are having a hard time forgiving. How would it hurt you to have to forgive him or her? What would it cost you? What would you be giving up? Can you trust Jesus with that hurt?**
- **What is a way that you have recently tried to “collect the debt” from someone who has sinned against you? How can the Gospel free you to forgive them instead? How can remembering how much Christ forgave you help you to forgive your brother or sister?**
- 2 Corinthians 13:5: *“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless of course, you fail the test?”*
 - **Take time to examine your own life. Are you believing the gospel enough to forgive others?** Are you confessing your sin freely to God, and depending by faith on Jesus to save you? Does the mercy God has shown to you cause you to be merciful to others? If not, it is time to repent. You need to look closely at your own unforgiving heart.

****Note to Teacher: This is a great lesson to share your own stories or examples of forgiveness (or lack of forgiveness).*

21. Joseph Forgives His Brothers

Genesis 37, 39-50

Key Theme: Forgiveness

[Core Gospel Concepts: Forgiveness, Sin, Faith]

Jacob had twelve sons. His youngest-but-one was named Joseph. Jacob loved Joseph more than the other sons. He even gave Joseph a beautiful coat with many colors. When the other sons saw that their father Jacob loved Joseph more than them, they hated Joseph. When he told them about his dreams that suggested they would some day bow down to him, they hated him even more.

One day Joseph went to the place where his brothers were taking care of the sheep and goats. At first the brothers planned to kill him, but ended up selling him to some merchants on their way to Egypt. After that they slaughtered a goat and covered the coat with blood, and then took it home to Jacob, who mourned Joseph's death, thinking a wild animal had killed his son.

In Egypt Joseph became the slave of a man named Potiphar. Even though Joseph served his master well and brought God's blessing to his home, he was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife of seducing her and was thrown into jail. Even in jail God blessed Joseph. He became known as one who could tell the meaning of dreams. When Pharaoh had a troubling dream, God showed Joseph the meaning to give Pharaoh. There would be seven years of good harvest and seven years of famine. Pharaoh was so happy that he made Joseph governor over all Egypt so that he could oversee the preparation for the famine.

After seven years, there was a famine in Egypt. There was also a famine in Canaan, where Jacob and his sons lived. But there was still grain in Egypt because Joseph had stored grain during the seven years of good harvest. Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, so he sent ten of his sons to get grain. When Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt, Joseph recognized them, but they did not recognize Joseph. They came to Joseph and bowed down before him, because Joseph was the governor of Egypt. After some time, Joseph saw that they were truly sorry for selling him into slavery. Then Joseph tearfully revealed himself to them. He said, "I am Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed because it was God's plan to send me here. There will be seven years of famine. But God sent me ahead of you to save your lives by making me ruler of all Egypt under Pharaoh."

After this, Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, and all his family. Jacob lived there in Egypt seventeen years before he died and was taken back to Canaan to be buried. After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers were afraid Joseph would punish them for what they had done to him, so they begged him again to forgive them. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Genesis 50:19-21** - *But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION (discuss with neighbor):

- **Can you think of a situation where someone hurt you and you found it hard to forgive them?**

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- One of the hardest commands that Jesus gives his followers is the command to forgive those who have hurt you. In today's story we are looking at someone who had a lot of hurt to forgive and see what we can learn.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory:
 - List all the trials that Joseph went through.
 - What exactly were the words of Joseph to his brothers after his father died?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **JOSEPH:** What was he like? How did his brothers hurt him? What excuses could he have used to not forgive? What attitude or belief helped him to forgive them?
- **JOSEPH'S WORDS:** What did Joseph tell his brothers when they feared him? (Not taking God's place; taking God's view; showing God's love) What do these words teach us about forgiveness?
- **COLLECTING the DEBT:** Ways we act when we refuse to forgive.
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some of the ways that we put ourselves in the place of God when someone sins against us? What are some of the ways that we try to "collect the debt" from those who have hurt us?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Who in my life am I having a hard time forgiving? How can this story help me forgive them, i.e. be willing to pay the debt myself for their sin?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

JOSEPH:

- **Where did Joseph's problem start with his brothers? Why?**
 - Jealousy; was father's favorite; dreams revealed Joseph's pride; had beautiful coat; was more loved. Was from the favorite mother.
- **How did the brothers hurt Joseph?**
 - Plotted against him
 - Sold into slavery
 - Lied to father about his death. Robbed him of relationship with father for many years

- *Suffered slavery under Potiphar; false treatment by Potiphar's wife; time in jail for years*
- **What reasons would there be for Joseph to NOT forgive his brothers? Did they deserve forgiveness?**
 - *They had planned to kill him.*
 - *They had robbed him of his family.*
 - *They stole the gifts he was given. Were jealous of him.*
 - *He had not deserved such ill treatment.*
 - *He was even coming to help them out at the time they captured him.*
- **How was Joseph able to forgive his brothers?**
 - *He saw their remorse and responded with mercy.*
 - *He knew that God had orchestrated everything. Was confident in **God's sovereignty** and his **plan to save lives, including his own**. But he **knew he was under God's mercy**.*
 - *He was **able to keep trusting in God** through all the ups and downs of life.*
 - *God had used many trials to grow his faith.*
 - *By God's grace he did not become more proud, but was humbled by God's hand in his life. He remembered how God had saved him..*
 - *Instead of being bitter over his brothers' offenses, he rejoiced in all God's mercies.*
 - *Joseph, (unlike Jonah (Jonah 4)), **remembers all of God's mercies** for him. This helps him to really love his brothers and truly forgive them.*

JOSEPH'S WORDS to HIS BROTHERS:

- **KEY STATEMENT:** Think about the end of the story. Joseph said to his brothers, **"Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.**
- **What do we learn from this about forgiveness?**
 - Joseph shows us **what faith should look like in our lives, especially when someone sins against us.**
 - **He avoids taking GOD's PLACE** ("Am I in the place of God?")
 - *He did not hold a grudge and take vengeance into his own hands. He did not assume that he knew what was right and wrong but entrusted it to God.*
 - *He knew that he himself was a sinner, deserving God's wrath. Had no right to judge.*
 - **He takes GOD'S VIEW** ("You intended for evil, God intended for good, the saving of . . .")
 - *He understood that God was at work even in the midst of his own suffering. He also remembered that he himself was*

a weak sinner who had no hope except in the forgiveness and grace of God.

- *Came to see and believe that no one, even his brothers, could ruin his life, because of God.*

- **He shows GOD's LOVE – loved his enemies,**

- *This was only possible because 1) Joseph was not trying to be in God's place (humble, depending on God's forgiveness himself), 2) was taking God's view (confident in God) . Humility makes us realize we are not better or more deserving than other sinners. Confidence that God is working for good helps us see things differently and patiently. Joseph knew God loved him though he did not deserve it. He knew he had been prideful.*

- **We are able to love our enemies because of what Jesus did for us.**

- *He took ultimate suffering willingly, refused to stay in God's place (though He WAS God), took God's view of working good, did it all for me.*

- **How did Joseph forgive his brothers? Did it cost him anything to forgive them?**

- *He remembered that he is not God and that he also was a sinner in need of God's grace. He refused to count his brothers' sins against them. He refused to punish them as he could have. It cost him because he took the impact of their sin on himself alone.*

COLLECTING THE DEBT (unforgiveness) vs. PAYING the DEBT ourselves (forgiveness):

- **When we refuse to forgive someone who has hurt us, it is like we are trying to force that person to pay us back the debt they owe us.**
- **What are some ways that Joseph could have chosen to “collect the debt” from his brothers?**
 - *He could have killed them, put them in prison, let them starve to death.*
 - *He could have fed them but still treated them with coldness and an unkind attitude.*
 - *He could have forced them to serve him the rest of their lives.*
 - *He could have laughed at their suffering.*
 - *He could have turned their father against them.*
- **Forgiveness is costly. In order to truly forgive someone, we have to be willing to “pay the debt ourselves”, i.e. to take the cost of their debt to us on ourselves instead of trying to “collect” from our debtors through various forms of unforgiveness. How does Jesus help us in this?**
 - *We can do this because we know Jesus has already done it for us!*

- **How did Joseph's willingness to forgive become a blessing to all of his family and even to the world?**
 - *Through it God preserved the family of promise, Abraham's seed, the family through whom the whole world would be blessed by the Promised Savior.*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some of the ways that we put ourselves in the place of God when someone sins against us?**
 - *Try to be my own authority, to decide for myself what is right and wrong*
 - *Look to other people instead of God to meet your deepest needs*
 - *Give in to worry, doubting that God really has your best in mind*
 - *Hold a grudge, refuse to forgive someone*
- **Give an example of someone sinning against us and how taking God's viewpoint instead of man's viewpoint can help.**
- **What are some practical ways that we might show God's love to someone who wrongs us?**
- **What are some of the ways that we try to "collect the debt" from those who have hurt us? In other words, what are some ways that we show unforgiveness in our actions and attitudes?**
 - **"Collecting the debt":** *According to Tim Keller, here are some ways we attempt to "collect the debt" when we are struggling to forgive others:*
 - *Act cold toward them. Avoid them.*
 - *Become demanding.*
 - *Damage their reputation by warning others about them (gossip) or publicly "sharing our pain."*
 - *Rejoice when they are hurt or fail.*
 - *Act merciful but with a self-righteous, proud heart. Instead of really forgiving that person "from the heart," you make them feel more in debt to you because you make them feel like you are better than them.*
- **Can anyone give an example of how unforgiveness by someone in your family or church between two people has affected the rest of the church or family?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What pain has someone caused you that you still need to forgive?**
 - **If you don't try to take God's place, but really trust him to be in control over your life, how can this help you to forgive this person?**
 - **How can taking God's view toward yourself and toward this other person help you to be merciful like him? How should this help you to forgive in this situation?**

- How can you treat this person with kindness?
- What is a way that you have recently tried to “collect the debt” from or “take the place of God” toward someone who has sinned against you? How can the Gospel of Jesus free you to forgive them instead? How can remembering how much Christ forgave you help you to forgive your brother or sister?

****Note to Teacher: This is a great lesson to share your own stories or examples of forgiveness (or lack of forgiveness).*

22. Jonah's Anger and God's Compassion **with Jesus and the Sinful Woman**

Jonah 4:1-11 / Luke 7:36-50

(Background: Jonah 1:1-3:10)

Key Theme: Faith Expressing Itself in Love

[Core Gospel Concepts: Love, Sanctification, Nature of Faith, Forgiveness, Sin]

CONTEXT: Jonah and his people, the Israelites, hated the Ninevites because they had been their enemies and conquerors for a long time. In Jonah 1, God commanded Jonah to go preach to the wicked, idolatrous Ninevites. Jonah refused, got on a ship, and headed toward Tarshish. God sent a great storm to punish and stop him so that he was cast into the sea. But God mercifully sent a great fish to swallow him. In Jonah 2, the prophet prays a prayer of deep repentance. He recognized (his sin), remembered (God and his mercy), repented (turned from his own path and toward God's saving help), rejoiced (as he experienced the wonder of God's mercy), and renewed (his vow to follow the saving God)! And God commands the fish to vomit Jonah back to dry land. Then in Jonah 3, God commands Jonah again to preach judgment to Ninevah. All of the people repented, and God showed compassion on them and did not destroy them after all.

THE STORY:

After the people of Nineveh repented of their sin, and God had compassion on them and did not destroy them, Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." But the Lord replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

So Jonah went out and sat down at a place outside the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.

But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God sent a scorching wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It

would be better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."

But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **2 Peter 1:9:** *But if anyone does not have them (qualities such as love that make our faith effective) , he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **Share about a time when you repeated the same sin which you had already repented of. How did you cope with that?**

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- In the book of Jonah, this prophet has run away from God's command, been brought back to his senses, repented thoroughly inside the fish of his rebellion, obeyed God and had a very fruitful ministry. But now he is so angry because God has forgiven his enemies. It makes us wonder if he had truly repented in the first place.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - Why is Jonah angry? What about God makes Jonah angry?
 - What is God most concerned about in this story? What is Jonah most concerned about?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **GOD and the NINEVITES:** How does God treat the Ninevites and Jonah? What do we learn about his heart?
- **JONAH and the NINEVITES:** How is Jonah different than God toward the Ninevites? Why? Was his earlier repentance false? So why did Jonah fail to love, even though a believer?
- **THE PHARISEE and the SINFUL WOMAN:** How were they different - in how they approached their own sin? In how they treated other people?
- **LUKE 7:47:**

- “Her many sins are forgiven for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”
 - Why did the Pharisee fail to love the woman or Jesus? What does this teach us about our own failures to love?
- **JONAH FORGETS MERCY:** Why did Jonah fail to love the Ninevites? Because he forgot about the great forgiveness he had received.
- **THE VINE and THE WORM:** What distracted Jonah from loving like God loved? What distracts us? What happens when a worm destroys the distraction we love?
- **2 PETER 1:5-9:** What is the main problem when we don’t show love and all the other fruit of the Spirit? We have forgotten how God forgave us of our sins.
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** Who are some of the NINEVITES in our lives? What are some of the VINES in our lives?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** When lately have I forgotten the great mercy God has shown me? How did this result in my failure to love someone?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

GOD and the NINEVITES:

- **What do we learn about God from how he treats the Ninevites?**
 - *God’s heart for people who are lost, he cared about the Ninevites, and was merciful to them when they repented.*
- **What did God do to or for Jonah? What does that show us?**
 - *God challenged his attitude, giving Jonah an opportunity to repent of his heart being hard toward the Ninevites.*
 - *He cared about heart sin as well as external obedience and disobedience.*
 - *God showed mercy to Jonah by providing shade for him, and then by taking the shade away! He loved him because he was patiently showing him the sin in his heart so that he could repent of his lack of love.*
- **What is God most concerned about?**
 - *He was concerned about the Ninevites hearts. He grieved for their hardness of heart and longed for them to repent and turn to him and be saved. he loved them.*

JONAH and the NINEVITES:

- **What do we learn about Jonah from how he feels about the Ninevites and their welfare?**
-
- **In Jonah 2 when Jonah was inside the fish, he prayed a prayer of deep repentance as if his heart was changed.**
 - **He displayed this repentance by obeying God when he commanded him a second time to go and preach to Ninevah. But now his hatred for the Ninevates comes out again.**
 - **So was Jonah’s repentance in Jonah 2 a true repentance or was he pretending?**

- *Yes, it was real, but it was not complete! He was just like you and me!*
 - *Jonah needed daily repentance for the struggles in his heart against the Ninevites, who had been the enemies of Israel.*
 - *All of us need to look at our lives day after day and see the sin that comes out in various ways. We need to live lives of ongoing repentance and trust in the Savior.*
- **What happened when Jonah stopped remembering God's mercy and forgiveness to him when he first repented? What was Jonah most concerned about in this part of the story?**
 - *He failed to love the Ninevites again!*
 - *Even though he gave them God's message and warned them about their coming destruction, he still did not love them. He had no desire for them to repent and experience God's mercy.*
 - *He was most concerned about his own comfort, his own national pride, and the punishment of his enemies.*
- **Why did Jonah lack love for others? Where does true love come from?**
 - Let's look at another story to explore these questions.

THE PHARISEE and the SINFUL WOMAN: Luke 7:36-50

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an expensive jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is - that she is a sinner."

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the greater debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little, loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

- **Repeat verse 47 as a group:**
 - *"Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little, loves little."*
- **There are two main characters (besides Jesus) in this story. Who is the sinner of the two?**
 - *Both! The woman's sin had been a wayward life, probably of prostitution. Simon's sin was pride and self-righteousness.*
- **Who was forgiven? Who was not?**
 - *The woman was forgiven. The Pharisee was not.*
- **So what was the difference between the two people in how they dealt with their own sin?**
 - *The difference between the two was that the woman knew and admitted her sin. She knew she needed a Savior, and she rejoiced to find him.*
 -
- **And what was the difference in how they treated other people?**
 - *Because the woman experienced the love and mercy of the Savior, she was able to show her love openly. She did not fear what others thought. She loved the Savior. Because she loved Christ, she was able to love others as well – to tell other sinners where she found help.*
 - *The Pharisee was proud, judgmental, and hateful. He did not realize that he was needy. He cannot see his own danger.*
 - *Because of this, he was not able to love others. He hated others and only loved himself.*
- **Why was she forgiven?**
 - *"Your faith has saved you."*

LUKE 7:47: "Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little, loves little."

- **What comes first – the forgiveness that she experiences or the love that she shows to Jesus?**
 - *The forgiveness she receives. Love is the evidence or proof of her forgiveness and salvation.*
- **So what does this teach us about the reason we fail sometimes to love others like Christ did?**
 - *We have stopped remembering and experiencing the great love and mercy of God that is always there for us!*

- *We first need to repent of our unbelief and forgetfulness of his mercy and of the ways we fail to love someone else.*

- **Summary**

- *One who is forgiven and knows it and believes it and lives in it will show love to both God and other needy people like themselves. **Love is the evidence of forgiveness working in someone's heart.***
 - *What is the gospel? It is like one beggar finding food and leading other beggars to that food.*

JONAH FORGETS MERCY:

- **In Jonah 4, was Jonah like the woman or the Pharisee in the story we just told?**
 - *Jonah was like the Pharisee even though he did repent earlier.*
 - *Did not remember his forgiveness – the gospel in his life.*
 - *Jonah had tasted God's grace, but forgot it and was not living in it.*

THE VINE and THE WORM:

- **What distracted Jonah from caring about what God cared about or from loving what God loved? Was this distraction a good thing? What happened when it was taken away? How could the loss of the vine help Jonah?**
 - *The vine. It was a good thing, but it had become too important to Jonah. He trusted in the vine rather than trusting in God and finding out what God cared about most? He did not trust His Father's heart.*
 - *When it was taken away, it helped reveal Jonah's heart and how far it had gone from God's heart.*
 - *Losing it showed Jonah that he needed to repent of his failure to love and to ask God to give him that same heart of love.*

2 PETER 1:5-9:

- *For this very reason, **make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, LOVE.** For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. **But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has FORGOTTEN THAT HE HAS BEEN CLEANSED FROM HIS PAST SINS.***
(emphasis mine)
- **How do these verses support our conclusion about Jonah's failure to love?**

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **Who are some of the NINEVITES in our lives? The people we have a hard time loving? (In our country, our community, our church, our family?)**
- **What are some of the VINES in our lives? The good things that distract us from loving like God does, that make us forget God's great mercy for us?**
 - *Ex. money, a good reputation in the church or community, a good family, many children, a large home, good health, a good education, etc.*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **Who are the Ninevites in your life these days?** Who are the people you hate or dislike? Can you confess this to God – that you struggle to love them? How can remembering your own salvation help you to love them better?
- **What are the vines in your life?** In other words, what are some of those things which block you from loving God and other people?
 - Ask the Lord to help you see these things.
 - **“Search me, O God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” Psalm 139:23.**
- **Has God recently sent a “worm” into your life?** That is, something that messes up the vines that you put your focus on rather than God? How has this worm been God’s mercy in your life? Can it help you repent and shift your trust back to God?

23. Jesus Washes his Disciples' Feet

Luke 22:24-27; John 13:1-9, 12-17

Key Theme: Humility & Servant Leadership

[Core Gospel Concepts: Love, Obedience, Nature of Faith]

THE STORY:

It was at the time of the Passover Feast when Jesus broke the bread and poured out the wine and instituted the Lord's Supper with his disciples in Jerusalem. Some other important events occurred during that evening at the table.

A dispute arose among the disciples as to which of them was considered to be the greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and yet they are proud because they think themselves to be gracious and good leaders. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves... But I am among you as the one who serves."

Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. He knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and he knew that he had come from God and was returning to God; Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." Later that evening, Jesus was betrayed into the hands of the Jewish leaders to be crucified.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Luke 22:25-27:** *“Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and yet they are proud because they think themselves to be gracious and good leaders. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.’”*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **Would it be difficult for you to wash the feet of a street boy? Why?**

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- In today’s story Jesus does something very humbling and shocking. We want to look closely at his example – not just *what* he does but perhaps *how he gets the motivation* to humble himself before his disciples.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - Why do you think the disciples were debating who among themselves was the greatest?
 - After Jesus washes his disciples’ feet, what does he encourage them to do?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **THE ARGUMENT:** What were they arguing about? Jesus response?
- **THE FOOT WASHING:** Details? Why would it be hard for someone in Jesus’ position? What would foot washing look like in our lives and ministries?
- **WHAT JESUS KNEW (BELIEVED):** What three specific things did he “know” or believe which helped him humble himself? What similar things can we believe or know that give us strength to humble ourselves to love others?
- **PETER’S PROBLEM:** Why was Peter resistant to having Jesus wash his feet? What did this reveal about his heart? How are we like Peter?
- **FULL EXTENT:** What does this mean - that he now showed the “full extent” of his love?
- **PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11:** What did Jesus NOT GRASP or cling to? How does this apply to our lives?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some ways that God might be calling us to “washing the feet” of others in our lives today? Give examples.
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Who is Jesus calling you to serve in humility (wash their feet) this week? What truths can we trust in which will help us do this?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

THE ARGUMENT:

- **What were the disciples arguing about? What was Jesus’ response to them? What does that teach us for today?**

THE FOOT WASHING:

- What did Jesus do for his disciples? How was this described? Give specific details. Why would this have been a difficult thing for someone in Jesus' position to do?
 - *deep humbling of self, the work of a slave*
- What does Jesus' example teach us that we ought to do in our lives?
- What might foot washing look like for us? What are some practical ways that we as believers could "wash someone's feet"?

WHAT JESUS KNEW (BELIEVED):

- What **THREE** specific things did Jesus **KNOW**, according to the words of this story, which enabled him to wash his disciples' feet?
 - **TIME** - *The time had come for him to leave this world and go to his Father.*
 - **POSITION** - *The Father had put all things under his power.*
 - **FUTURE** - *He had come from God and was returning to God.*
- How did knowing (believing) these three things help Jesus to be both humble and joyful enough to wash the feet of his followers?
- What can we as believers **KNOW** that are similar to these three things? How can believing these truths help us to joyfully and humbly serve others?
 - **TIME** - *The times of our lives are secure in our Father's hands. He is sovereign and good.*
 - **POSITION** - *In my own strength I am a sinner who cannot save himself. But through faith in Jesus I am a child of God, forgiven, made righteous, chosen, an heir to the Father, a family member with brothers and sisters, precious to God, beloved, justified, being sanctified, etc.*
 - **FUTURE** - *My future is secure with my Savior in heaven!*
 - **CONFIDENCE IN THESE THREE TRUTHS** gives us a sure foundation from which we can obey Christ even to the point of great humility because no one can take these away from us. We can trust that he will give us all that we need to put others before ourselves.

PETER'S PROBLEM:

- What happened when he came to Peter? What did Peter say? What did this reveal about Peter's heart and attitude? What did Jesus mean about our need to be washed?
 - *Peter felt that his refusal of Jesus' washing his feet to be the appropriate way to relate to his master. It seemed right and humble.*
 - *He was concerned about what was appropriate based on a person's rank in society.*
 - *Peter did not understand that Jesus was pointing to what he must do to bring cleansing to sinners, i.e. that he must cleanse them from sin. (cf. Mark 8:32-33)*

- Peter did not want to be completely broken, to give up his position as the most committed disciple, in order to simply receive what Jesus wanted to give him.
- Jesus was showing Peter that receiving the cleansing that he offered would be the ultimate bridge to a relationship with him (“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”)
- Proud people naturally resist divine cleansing, thinking they can save themselves.
- **He needed faith to receive Jesus’ washing!**

FULL EXTENT:

- **What did it mean for Jesus to show them “the full extent” of his love, or to love them “to the end.” What happened after they left their meeting place?**
 - It pointed to his death on the cross on their (and our) behalf. This happened just after this gathering.
 - The foot washing also served as a symbol describing what he was doing on the cross - the humility he would display, the cleansing he would provide for sinners, and the price he would pay for our redemption.
 - Just as the disciples had to receive the unexpected demonstration of Jesus’ love in washing their feet, so we today must receive his undeserved love through faith in him and his finished work on the cross.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11:

- **How do these verses remind you of the picture of Christ in this passage?**
 - Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.
 - Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
 - Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but gave himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
- **MAIN POINT** We see that Jesus gave us an example that we “should” follow. But he also sets us an example regarding “how” we can have the joy and humility needed to do such a menial thing as serving and loving others. He knew his times were in the Father’s hands. So can we! He knew his position with God. So can we! He knew his future? So can we!

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some ways that God might be calling us to “washing the feet” of others in our lives today? Give examples. What are some wrong motivations we believers sometimes have for trying to obey God? What are some right motivations to love others in humble service? I.e. What truths can we know and believe which will help us?**
 - acts of service or kindness, giving money or assistance to, listening to, taking time to be with, forgiving, apologizing
 - Also notice list below.

- **Who are some of the types of people whose feet it would be very hard to wash?**
 - *dirty, smelly, rejected by society, sinful, drunk, below us in society, under our authority, younger than us, opposite sex, another people group or religion*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **Name someone in particular that God is calling you to humbly serve (wash feet) this coming week? How specifically can you serve them?**
 - **How can reminding yourself of what is true (TIME, POSITION, FUTURE) help you to do this with true joy and humility?**

Extra Examples of Foot Washing (for preachers and church leaders): (from Sonship for Africa by Johnny Long)

- **In preaching and teaching?**
 - *We preach Christ, not ourselves (2 Cor 4:5-7).*
 - *Public confession in teaching: remember the gospel about ourselves – we are great sinners in need of a great Savior.*
 - *Preach the gospel, not just the law.*
 - *Become self-forgetful rather than self-conscious. Become focused on others and on God, not only on yourself.*
- **In counseling?**
 - *Attitude of a beggar who has found food telling another beggar where to find it too. Instead of being the “expert” who has it all together.*
 - *Knowing the state of your own heart.*
 - *Being transparent and honest. Admit weakness and lack of answers.*
 - *Point toward Jesus – a person, not a technique.*
 - *Have the attitude of a wounded healer. When we are counseling, it can help those we are counseling to know that we also have our own hurts and sins and are in need of God's help. It helps us to relate and connect.*
 - *Help people see the roots of their sin, not just fruits.*
 - *Seek counsel yourself.*
 - *Private counseling and public vulnerability cannot be separated.*
- **In leading the church?**
 - *The right to lead must be earned through godly character (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9).*
 - *Lead in a way so that people feel loved and Christ is magnified.*
 - *Servant leadership (shared with other church leaders):*
 - *Show others the value of their work for Christ. Thank them.*
 - *Initiate dialogue when there is controversy. Be a peacemaker. Deal with sin, but do so as a fellow sinner.*

- *Empathize with or relate to other leaders.*
- *Meet one-on-one with leaders. Know them and be known by them.*
- *Ask for help.*
- *Invite constructive comments. Repent with them.*

○ **In evangelism?**

- *God uses even flawed evangelism. Be humble, appreciate other peoples' efforts.*
- *Content of the message: Is Christ, not how they need to change their behavior!*
- *Spirit: You need His help always in evangelism.*
- *Motive: Is it for my glory or for His glory?*
- *Evangelism through compassionate love: "Like one beggar telling another beggar where to find food."*

24. Rehoboam and the Divided Kingdom

1 Kings 11:1-4, 9-13; 12:1-19

(cf. 2 Chronicles 10:1-19)

Key Theme: Handling Conflict

[Core Gospel Concepts: Sin]

THE STORY:

Solomon, David's son, succeeded him as king of Israel once David died. Though as a young man King Solomon listened to God and was blessed with God's wisdom, as he grew older he disobeyed God by marrying many foreign wives, who finally turned his heart after other gods so that he was not fully devoted to the Lord as his father David had been, despite God's warnings. And the Lord became angry with Solomon and told him he would tear the kingdom from him and give it to one of his servants, though for David's sake, he would leave one tribe (Judah) in the hands of Solomon's son. This came to pass in the days of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, who succeeded him as king. Here's what happened.

After Solomon died, Rehoboam went to Shechem to meet all the Israelites and to be made king. The Israelites said to him, "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you." Rehoboam answered, "Go away for three days and then come back to me." So the people went away.

Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. "How would you advise me to answer these people?" he asked. They replied, "If today you will be a servant to these people, be kind to them, and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants."

But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. They replied, "Tell these people, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.'" Three days later the people came, and Rehoboam rejected the advice of the elders and gave them the harsh answer of the young men.

And when all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, the Israelites went home and rejected Rehoboam as king. They even stoned one of Rehoboam's commanders and Rehoboam escaped with his life to Jerusalem. Only those living in Judah and some of the tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to him. So, just as God had told Solomon, his kingdom was divided, and most of it given to another man to rule.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Proverbs 15:1:** *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*
- **Philippians 2:4:** *Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **Think of a conflict or disagreement with another person that you have been a part of. In what ways did you and the person you were in conflict handle it well? In what ways did you handle that conflict poorly?**

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Conflict will happen in this world. It is inevitable. As you will see in this story, we often handle conflict destructively. Let's see what we can learn and how we might approach conflict in a more constructive and gospel-centered way.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - Did Rehoboam do anything wise when he first became king? Like his father Solomon before him, when did Rehoboam turn away from wisdom toward foolishness?
 - What was the difference between the elders' advice and Rehoboam's young friends?
 - What did the people of Israel think of Rehoboam's response to them after three days?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **DESTRUCTIVE (Harmful) APPROACH to CONFLICT:** How do Rehoboam and his friends demonstrate a destructive approach to conflict?
- **CONSTRUCTIVE (Helpful) APPROACH to CONFLICT:** In what ways does anyone in the story demonstrate a constructive approach to conflict?
- **MOTIVES:** How did Rehoboam's motives or desires lead to destructive conflict? How about our desires in our conflicts? What are right motives that lead to constructive conflict?
- **CONSEQUENCES:** What results from selfishly motivated destructive conflict? How could things have turned out differently?

- **JESUS'EXAMPLE** - Philippians 2:5-8: What can we learn from Jesus' motivations that can help us handle conflict more constructively?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some examples of ways that we GRASP for or cling to our positions or reputations? How does this lead us into conflict?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What conflict are you in the midst of right now? How can Jesus' example in Philippians 2 and the good news of the Gospel help you approach this conflict more constructively?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

DESTRUCTIVE APPROACH to CONFLICT:

- **In what ways does this story show us a destructive approach to conflict or disagreement? What does Rehoboam do that is destructive?**
 - *Failing to listen to people. Failing to be compassionate or to put himself in their shoes. Failing to listen to the elders.*
 - *Listening only to those who support his own desires. Not taking responsibility. "Let us give them an answer."*
 - *Harsh, threatening, heavy handed words. Demanding his own way. Determined to win.*
 - *Blamed the people for complaining instead of looking at his own sin. Unwilling to humble himself and admit that his family had ruled harshly. No humility or sense of his own dependence on God and others. No repentance!*
 - *Unwilling to be a servant leader.*
 - *His response led to the division of Israel. Led to his own downfall and failure.*
 - *Did not see himself as a sinner in need of God's mercy and compassion. Therefore unable to show mercy and compassion to others.*

CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH to CONFLICT:

- **In what ways does this story show us a constructive approach to conflict or disagreement? Who does something constructive? What do they do?**
 - *Israelites: they made an honest request to their new ruler.*
 - *Rehoboam: appeared constructive by asking advice from the elders, but showed his true heart later by refusing to listen to their advice.*
 - *Elders: gave very constructive advice – "If you will listen to them and serve them, they will always serve you."*
 - *Took time to hear the people's request – three days – instead of immediate reaction.*
- **How was the elders' advice constructive? What could have happened?**
 - *One's attitude toward another person should be humble, servant-like. This would soften the people's attitude toward the king, and make them happy to serve and collaborate in the kingdom. Slaves do not love a master. People will love a king who loves them and sacrifices himself for them.*

- *Ironically, Rehoboam would have gotten much nearer to what he wanted – the service of the people – had he himself been willing to humble himself even a little and serve them.*

MOTIVES (leading to destructive or constructive conflict):

- **What motivated Rehoboam's response?**
 - *Motivated by selfish ambition, pride.*
 - *Not motivated by God's glory or the good of the people.*
- **James 4:1-3 - Read -**
 - *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*
- **How do these verses this help us understand Rehoboam's motives? What were his real desires? What better desires should he have had?**

CONSEQUENCES:

- **What are the consequences in this story of conflict handled destructively? How could things have been different?**
 - *Destruction: division, rebellion, killing, war, pain. Continues to add up and is compounded.*
 - *No blessings. Only scars. Rehoboam hurt not only the people but himself.*
 - *If he had listened to the people and to the elders and been willing to lead the people through humble service, the kingdom could have stayed together in peace.*
- **How would you summarize the difference in destructive and constructive conflict? (Think about the “fuel” and attitude required for each.)**
 - ***Destructive conflict*** *is fueled by selfish ambition or envy, and is set ablaze by misuse of the tongue. Feeling like you need to “win”*
 - ***Constructive conflict*** *is fueled by humility that comes from wisdom. It can only be accomplished by people who are approachable and open to correction, people who are gentle in the way they approach others to correct them. Not with a judgmental attitude. This attitude is motivated and empowered by understanding the gospel - realizing that we are all desperately sinful and in need of a loving, powerful Savior.*

JESUS' EXAMPLE: Philippians 2:5-8

- **How does Jesus make constructive conflict possible? In other words, Rehoboam felt he had to exert his authority, to “grasp” his position as king. Read Philippians 2:5-8. How does Rehoboam’s attitude differ from Jesus’ attitude?**
 - *He gives us an example:*
 - *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!”*
 - *i.e. He did not GRASP after his own rightful position. In contrast to Rehoboam who grasped for authority and power.*
 - *He gives us a new identity that makes it possible to follow His example:*
 - *Christ died and rose again to purchase our forgiveness and give us his perfect righteousness. We receive this by repentance and faith in Christ. The humility and love that is the fruit of this relationship with God through Christ is the basis for constructive handling of conflict.*
 - *Because of Christ, we are set free from having to dominate others or exert our authority over them in conflict. We don’t have to win! We can instead trust and depend on God’s grace in Christ, and approach others in humility.*
 - **So, for a believer, where does humility, gentleness, and wisdom come from in the midst of conflict?**
 - *the Gospel - realizing our own deep sinfulness, including specific areas of sin, seeing our deep need for a Savior; putting all of our trust in Jesus and the salvation He provides.*
- **What previous Sonship stories would help us, especially regarding our attitude, to handle conflict more constructively? Are there other stories from the Bible that could be helpful?**
 - *Philemon and Onesimus*
 - *Abram and Lot*
 - *Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar*
 -

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- Rehoboam felt he had to exert his authority, to “GRASP” his position as king. Thinking about Philippians 2:5-8 and how we see that Rehoboam’s attitude differed from Jesus’ attitude, consider this:
 - **What are some examples of ways that we GRASP for or cling to our positions or reputations? How does this lead us into conflict?**

- **How might this lead to conflict in our roles as parents? Employers? Church leaders?**
 - **How can a deeper understanding of the gospel, what Christ has done for us, lead us to demonstrate true humility and deep repentance in some of these areas?**
- **In this story, what have you learned to help you in avoiding destructive conflict in your church, family, or neighborhood?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **Think of a conflict you are actually in or have recently been in with a church member, someone in your family, or another pastor. How have you made this conflict destructive? What attitudes or actions do you need to repent of? What forgiveness do you need to offer? What have you or the other person done that has helped to resolve the conflict?**

25. Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus

Introduction: In the days of the early church there was a believer named Philemon who probably lived in Colossae in Asia Minor and was a dear friend of the apostle Paul. He owned a slave named Onesimus who had run away and possibly robbed Philemon in the process. Onesimus had met Paul and through that relationship had been converted to faith in Christ. He had become very close to Paul and had helped and encouraged him while he was in prison in Rome. Finally Paul sent Onesimus back to Colossae with a letter addressed to Philemon, his wife, and one of the local church leaders. In this letter he pleads with Philemon to forgive Onesimus and reconcile with him. This is how he spoke about this:

[Note: Read this part aloud several times if this is too hard to memorize.]

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love . . . I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending him-- who is my very heart-- back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good-- no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back-- not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Colossians 3:12-14:** *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the*

Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **Think of a conflict or disagreement with another person that you have been a part of. In what ways did you and the person you were in conflict handle it well? In what ways did you handle that conflict poorly?**

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Conflict will happen in this world. It is inevitable, even between Christian brothers and sisters. We will see in this story how Paul helps two brothers who are in conflict. Let's see what we can learn and how we might approach conflict in a more constructive and gospel-centered way.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - List all the encouraging things Paul said about Philemon.
 - List all the positive things he said about Onesimus.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **DETAILS of the CONFLICT:** Where? When? Who? The Cause? The Offense?
- **PREPARATION for CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT:** How does Paul begin the letter? What is he asking for?
- **FOUNDATIONS for CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT:** What attitudes and approaches of Paul encouraged constructive conflict?
- **PAYING the DEBT for CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT:** What was Paul willing to sacrifice to help Philemon and Onesimus reconcile? What does this teach us about helping two brothers in conflict?
- **LOVE, HUMILITY, and COMMITMENT** - How did Paul show these three qualities in helping these two brothers in their conflict?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some ways today that we see conflict handled destructively? In our communities? Our churches? Our families or marriages? How can a deeper understanding of the gospel lead to more constructive conflict?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What conflict are you in the midst of right now? How can Paul's approach with Philemon and Onesimus and his reminder of the Gospel help you approach this situation more constructively?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

DETAILS of the CONFLICT:

- **Where and when did this story occur?**
- **Who was Philemon? Who was Onesimus? What was their relationship?**

- What was the cause of the conflict between Philemon and Onesimus? How had Philemon been offended?
- What relationship did Paul have with Philemon and Onesimus?

PREPARATION for CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT:

- How does Paul begin his letter? How could this help prepare the way for seeking reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus?
 - He encourages Philemon, praising God for his faith and love for others. Tells him of his prayers for him.
 - Reminds him of the Gospel – “every good thing you have in Christ”
 - Exhorts him to share that Gospel
- What does Paul ask Philemon on Onesimus’ behalf?
 - Welcome him back as a brother, not just as a slave
 - Forgive his debt. Charge it to Paul if necessary.
 - I.e. be reconciled.

FOUNDATIONS for CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT:

- On what does Paul base his request to Philemon?
 - On Philemon's relationship with Christ. I.e. on God's mercy to Philemon.
 - On the call to Christian love
 - On relationship – Paul’s mutual brotherly relationship with both Philemon and Onesimus. Their value in the Lord. Their new relationship as brothers.
 - On Onesimus’ usefulness in the Gospel
- Why was Paul motivated to intercede for Onesimus?
 - He loved Onesimus dearly and cared about his life and his relationship with Philemon.
 - He loved Philemon and longed for them to be reconciled. I.e. loved both parties.
 - He loved the church too, and wanted to see its members at peace in the Gospel.

ATTITUDES behind CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT:

- What attitudes did Paul have that were constructive or helpful to resolving the conflict?
 - He was gentle in his approach, but he was still straightforward.
 - He appealed to Philemon in love rather than trying to exercise his spiritual authority over him.
 - He referred to his strong relationship with each of them.
 - He reminded Philemon of the Gospel (that he owes Paul his very self - i.e. Paul led him to salvation. “Since Christ has saved and forgiven you, should you not do the same for your brother, Onesimus?”).

- *The Gospel changes the way we relate to others, especially to a brother like Onesimus. It reminds us of*
 - For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is **neither slave nor free**, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:27-29)
 - But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are **no longer a slave but a son**, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Gal 4:4-7)
 - *i.e. Because we are God's sons through Christ, we are empowered and encouraged to treat other Christians as brothers, co-heirs with Christ, not as slaves. I.e. with kindness, with mercy, with forgiveness, with compassion*
- He was **not afraid** to tell him what he ought to do.
 - He **spoke encouragingly and truthfully about both parties** – about Philemon and his faithfulness and love in the church, and about Onesimus, whose life had been transformed and had become a valued servant of the Gospel.
 - He **took responsibility** for the relationship between two friends and brothers. He did not sit by idly and let the conflict get worse.
 - He **treated Philemon as someone he trusted**. He expected him to do the right thing - and even more than Paul asked – possibly implying that he would free Onesimus.

PAYING the DEBT for CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT:

- **What was Paul willing to give up in order to see Philemon and Onesimus reconciled?**
 - He sacrificed his **time and effort** to write this letter.
 - He gave up having Onesimus' help and presence in order for him to go back to Philemon. He **took a risk of losing Onesimus**. He was even willing to sacrifice his own comfort, the help and friendship Onesimus gave him, in order to see the relationship healed.
 - He was **ready to pay the debt himself!** Would pay for anything Onesimus might have stolen or any loss that Philemon may have experienced when Onesimus ran away from him.
 - But he is not manipulative. He is committed to his relationship with Philemon no matter how he handles the Onesimus situation. He is already planning another visit to Philemon.

SUMMARY:

- **How would you summarize the way Paul approached the conflict?**
 - **Love**. He loved both parties. He approached them with love. He appealed to them to love each other because Christ had loved them.

- **Humility.** *Treated both Philemon and Onesimus respectfully, as brothers in the Gospel.*
 - **Commitment.** *Was willing to help Philemon “pay the debt” of forgiving Philemon. Wonderful picture of what a third party should do to help brothers in conflict!*
- **Do you have people like Onesimus in your community? People who have offended others but are still around or are considered lower than others? How do you treat them? What should be the main principle in how you treat them?**
 - **Are you in conflict with someone right now? What have you learned from this story that might help you in dealing with this conflict?**

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some ways today that we see conflict handled destructively? In our communities? Our churches? Our families or marriages?**
 - **How can a deeper understanding of the gospel, what Christ has done for us, lead us to demonstrate true humility and deep repentance to lead to more constructive conflict?**
- **Can anyone give an example of someone handling a conflict in a constructive way like Paul did in this situation?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion)

- **Think of a conflict you are actually in or have recently been in with a church member, someone in your family, or another pastor.**
 - **How have you made this conflict destructive? What attitudes or actions do you need to repent of? What forgiveness do you need to offer?**
 - **What have you or the other person done that has helped to resolve the conflict?**
 - **What changes can you make now to enter into this conflict more constructively or helpfully?**

26. Jesus Teaches His Disciples to Pray and Ask for the Holy Spirit

Luke 11:1-13

(cf. Matthew 6:5-15, 7:7-11)

Key Theme: Holy Spirit

[Core Gospel Concepts: Holy Spirit, Identity in Christ]

THE STORY:

One day, Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’”

Then he said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’

“Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, though he will not get up and give you the bread because you are his friend, yet because of your boldness he will get up and give you as much as you need.

“So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Luke 11:13:** *“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- What is a great gift that you have received recently? What is a great gift that you have given lately?
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers?

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today we will look at an episode where Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. Notice how Jesus relates prayer to the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - What do you think Jesus is most concerned that believers ask, seek, and knock for?
 - What is Jesus teaching his disciples through his various illustrations in this story?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **LORD'S PRAYER:** What do we learn about prayer from key words Jesus used: Father, Name, Kingdom, Daily Bread, Forgiveness, and Temptation?
- **NEIGHBOR at MIDNIGHT:** What does the neighbor's persistence teach us about prayer?
- **ASK, SEEK, KNOCK:** Are these one-time actions or a continuous pattern? What are God's promises? What does this teach us about God? What is it not teaching?
- **A FATHER'S GIFTS:** What gift does our heavenly Father most want to give us more and more of? Why?
- **THE HOLY SPIRIT and the LORD'S PRAYER:** If this is the most important thing we can pray for - the Holy Spirit's presence and work in our lives - how do the words of the Lord's Prayer help us understand the work of the Holy Spirit?
- **THE SPIRIT of SONSHIP:** Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:4-7; Romans 8:16; Romans 8:26-27. How do these passages help us to understand the most important work of the Holy Spirit in our lives? Why is the work of the Holy Spirit to remind us that we are God's sons and daughters SO important to our daily lives?
- **THE FRUIT of the SPIRIT:** Galatians 5:22-26: How does the Spirit reminding us that we are God's sons and daughters help us to live practically for Jesus? What are some specific ways?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What struggles or issues make it difficult for us to believe or feel like each of us is truly a child of God? Give some examples. What did we learn about the Holy Spirit which can help us in this?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Share a situation or issue in your life where you deeply need the Holy Spirit. How can my prayer life change in such a way that I am continually pleading for the Holy Spirit and his help to live more fully like a child of God?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

- **What did one of the disciples ask Jesus to do for them? Why?**
 - *"Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."*
 - *Jesus had been praying and his disciples observed him.*

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

- **How did Jesus answer?**
 - *He told them a prayer to say: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”*
- **What do we learn from addressing God as “FATHER”?**
 - *That God loves us like a father, treats us with kindness and concern, provides us an inheritance, shares his kingdom with us. He cares about a relationship with us.*
- **What does “hallowed be your NAME” teach us?**
 - *We should deeply desire that God and his name be worshipped, admired, put first in everything and everyone, particularly in our own lives.*
- **What does “your KINGDOM come” teach us?**
 - *That God is ushering in a new kingdom, one that is different from the kingdoms of this world, one where he is the king and will rule with goodness, holiness, and power.*
 - *We long to see that kingdom come and pledge our partnership in seeing it consummated on earth.*
- **What are we to pray for when we ask for “DAILY BREAD”?**
 - *That God would provide our basic needs for us to flourish – food, clothing, shelter, as well as friendships, family, protection, guidance, etc.*
 - *That he would help us to trust him alone for all our needs, great and small.*
- **What does this prayer teach us about FORGIVENESS?**
 - *That God loves us and wants to forgive us, but that he does it as we ask. It is important that we admit our sin and our need for forgiveness.*
 - *We need his help in forgiving others as well.*
 - *We won't fully experience all the benefits of his forgiveness if we are not able to extend that forgiveness to others.*
- **What does “lead us not into TEMPTATION” teach us?**
 - *We cannot protect ourselves, even from sinning.*
 - *We need God's help at all times, especially to fight the plans of Satan and the indwelling sin of our sinful nature.*

NEIGHBOR at MIDNIGHT:

- **After teaching them what we know as the Lord's Prayer, what example did he give his disciples?**
 - *A friend coming at midnight begging for bread for a visitor.*

- **How does the friend obtain bread from the reluctant host? How much will he give him?**
 - *By persistent pleading and boldness, he will get all the bread he needs.*

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK:

- **What does Jesus say next about this sort of pleading? What promise does he give?**
 - *Ask, and it will be given; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened. This is for anyone.*
- **Is our asking, seeking, and knocking to be a one time request?**
 - *No, he's speaking of a continual, repeated pattern of seeking God and his gifts.*

A FATHER'S GIFTS:

- **What other example does he use?**
 - *He speaks of a loving father whose son asks for a fish and then for an egg. The father would never give his son something diametrically opposed to those good things like a snake or a scorpion.*
- **What is Jesus teaching his disciples and us through this example? What is he saying about God?**
 - *He compares God to this human father, who, although loving, is still sinful. Jesus is saying that surely God, who is perfect and righteous in every possible way, would be infinitely kinder than this father and would want to answer the needs and requests of his child.*
 - *He teaches that God is our heavenly Father, the one who loves us and is generous and kind, prodigiously lavishing us with the riches of his grace.*
- **What is the advantage of a fish or an egg for a needy child? What does this teach us about God?**
 - *They would provide nourishment and strength.*
 - *God cares about our wellbeing, our needs, and that which strengthens us.*
- **When Jesus teaches us to ask, to seek, and to knock, is he instructing us to expect him to give us every yearning of our flesh, mind, and heart then and there? Is this a promise of “name it and claim it”?**
 - **If not, what is Jesus saying is the MAIN THING we should be asking for?**
 - *The Holy Spirit and all that he does in and through us.*
 - *Matthew 6:33: “Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you as well.”*
- **What does this tell us about the Holy Spirit?**
 - *He is available to all who are God's children, and is most available to those who plead for him and his help.*

- *When we are seeking after God's help, what we most need is the Holy Spirit, the one who leads us into a deeper relationship with and dependence on the Father through the grace of the Son.*
- *The Holy Spirit is good and is the source of God's ongoing provision of all the good he has for us day by day.*
- *The power, presence, and indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the best gift that God our Father has given and will give to us as his children.*
- **Back to ask, seek, knock. The words in the original language for ask, seek, and knock are in the form of a CONTINUAL ongoing asking, seeking, and knocking (i.e. Jesus is instructing us to continue asking, to continue seeking, and to continue knocking). What does this teach us?**
 - *We must continually cry out for the Holy Spirit's presence and help in our lives.*
 - *What we need most from God is the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives every single day.*

THE HOLY SPIRIT and the LORD'S PRAYER:

Remember that this whole passage began with Jesus giving his disciples 1) a model of prayer that can be used to guide us in the specific parts of prayer today. But also remember that 2) the main thing we are to be asking for is the Holy Spirit. That means that all the things that Jesus teaches us to pray for in the Lord's prayer must be another way of describing all the ways that the Holy Spirit works in our lives to help us live as sons and daughters of the Father.

- **What are some specific concepts from the Lord's prayer that help you understand what the Spirit will be working to do in you as you plead for him? I.e. Walk through the Lord's Prayer again step by step in light of what we've been learning about the Holy Spirit to see how the Spirit can work in our lives.**
 - *You will always call God **FATHER** and know this fatherly love.*
 - *You will be deeply concerned that God's **NAME** is hallowed and honored in every way – in your own life and in the world.*
 - *You will long for God's **KINGDOM** to be coming more and more fully into your life and the world as he works through his people day by day.*
 - *You will be a person who more and more trusts in your Father to provide for all your **DAILY NEEDS** – mental, physical, financial, relational, and spiritual.*
 - *You will be one who **KNOWS** more and more that all **YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN.***
 - *You will therefore be one who **READILY FORGIVES OTHERS**, even those who have hurt you deeply.*
 - *You will rely on the Spirit to **HELP YOU BATTLE TEMPTATION** through repentance and faith.*

Let's look at some other New Testament verses that tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit. For each of these verses, we are asking, "What does this verse teach us about the Holy Spirit?"

SPIRIT of SONSHIP:

- **Romans 8:15: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"**
 - *This is the key role of the Holy Spirit for believers, to continually reinforce our sonship, to be the one through whom we are no longer enslaved to the fear of punishment for our sins, but the one through whom and with whose help we can cry out to God as our loving Father. He will always be available to hear our cries and answer us.*
- **Galatians 4:4-7: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."**
 - *When God redeemed us from our sin through his Son, Jesus, we were made his sons and daughters, heirs of all of God's riches. Since we are sons and daughters, he gave us the Spirit of his Son. The Holy Spirit helps us approach God as our kind and loving Father. He helps us not to relate to God in the fearful position of a hired servant or slave, but from the privileged position of a beloved son or daughter.*
- **Romans 8:16: "THE SPIRIT HIMSELF TESTIFIES with our spirit THAT WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN. Now if we are children, then we are heirs."** (emphasis mine)
 - *The Spirit's work is to work with our own spirit or heart to convince us and remind us over and over that we truly are God's children and heirs. God knows that this is a difficult reality for us to believe, especially in the midst of struggles. But he gives us the Holy Spirit to continually help us remember and to live more faithfully as a child.*
 - *The Holy Spirit helps us to live as heirs to God's kingdom and all his gifts and fruits. He helps us to obey God's commands and exhortations, like this one in Colossians 3:12-14: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."*

FRUIT of the HOLY SPIRIT:

- **Galatians 5:22-26: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its**

passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

- *By reminding us of our sonship, that is helping us to live as God’s sons and heirs, the Holy Spirit produces real fruit through us – all the wonderful things listed here!*
 - *By reminding us of our sonship, the Spirit helps us to truly love others, even those who are difficult to love.*
 - *By reminding us of our sonship, the Spirit helps us to battle against our sinful nature and all its temptations.*
 - *By reminding us of our sonship, the Spirit changes us from our arrogance, our envy, and our tendency to hurt other people.*
- **Romans 8:26-27: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”**
 - *The Spirit helps us to pray even as we pray for him to be with us. No matter how much we don’t understand what is happening or what God’s doing, no matter how deep our pain is, he takes our painful groans and turns them into prayers that are effective and answered according to God’s good and perfect will.*

THE SPIRIT of SONSHIP summary: The Holy Spirit’s work as the Spirit of Sonship has three aspects:

- He makes and keeps us conscious that we are God’s children by free grace through Jesus Christ (even when we need to battle against all that causes us to deny it).
- He moves us to look to God as a Father, with both the respectful boldness and unlimited trust of children who are secure in their father’s love, to make us want to spend time with our Father. This is his work of making us cry, “Abba, Father.”
- He motivates us to live in a way that shows that we are children of the King by
 - showing the family likeness (i.e. conforming to Christ),
 - promoting the family welfare (i.e. loving brothers and sisters), and
 - maintaining the family honor (i.e. seeking God’s glory).
- **ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO IN PRAYER IS TO THROW OURSELVES IN TRUST ONTO THE HOLY SPIRIT. WE ARE TO CONTINUALLY PLEAD (ASK, SEEK, KNOCK) FOR THE SPIRIT TO ENTER OUR LIVES AS THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT OF OUR FATHER.**
- **WE PLEAD WITH THE SPIRIT TO HELP US TRULY UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS FOR US TO LIVE AS SONS OR DAUGHTERS OF THE KING OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. HE HELPS US TO LIVE AS CHILDREN OF GOD EVEN AS HE BEARS THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES AND GUIDES US IN LIFE BY THE LORD’S PRAYER.**

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What struggles or issues make it difficult for us to believe or feel like each of us is truly a child of God? Give some examples.**
 - **Considering people's answers, what are some things in the New Testament verses listed above that can help you more deeply experience being a son or daughter of God?** (For example, the Spirit of sonship, or the Spirit of God's Son, or the fruit of the Spirit, or the groans of the Spirit on your behalf as you pray.)

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **Share a situation or issue in your life where you deeply need the Holy Spirit.**
 - **Pray together:**
 - that the Spirit would help you believe that you are God's child through Christ.
 - that the Spirit would help you see your sin and lead you to a deeper repentance
 - that the Spirit would give you the wisdom and strength to grow in the way that God is revealing to you.
 -
- **Consider the Lord's Prayer.**
 - **What part of the Lord's Prayer would you like for the Spirit to help you grow in today?**
 - (calling on the Father, seeking His name's glory or his kingdom's growth, seeking his will, trusting him for your daily provision, learning to forgive, resisting temptation?)

27. Ezekiel and the Valley of the Dry Bones

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Key Theme: The Holy Spirit's Role in Discipleship

[Core Gospel Concepts: Holy Spirit]

CONTEXT: After the nation of Israel was divided, the people in both kingdoms had for generations been guilty of idol worship, injustice, and other kinds of rebellion against the Lord. At the time of today's story, the northern kingdom of Israel had already long ago been destroyed and scattered by the nation of Assyria. And more recently, God punished the southern kingdom of Judah by allowing their enemies, the Babylonians, to take them into exile. Ezekiel spoke to the people during this time of exile in Babylon when they were cut off from their homeland. He declared God's holy judgment on all those people who were clinging to the false hope of idols. He also declared hope for those who would humbly receive God's discipline and turn back to God in faith. God told them in Ezekiel 36 that he would cleanse them from all their idolatry and other sins and change their hearts from the inside, restoring them as his people. He then illustrated this change with a powerful vision in Ezekiel 37.

THE STORY:

NEW HEART and SPIRIT:

In Ezekiel 36:26-28, God said to the Israelites, *"I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God."* Then he further explained this promise through a vision that Ezekiel described in this way . . .

THE VISION:

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the LORD to a valley filled with bones. He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were very dry. Then he asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?" "O Sovereign LORD," I replied, "You alone know the answer to that."

PROPHECY to the BONES:

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD! He says to these bones, "Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them."

PROPHECY to the WINDS:

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the winds, son of man. Say, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.’ So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army.

PROPHECY to the PEOPLE:

Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, ‘We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. We are cut off! Our nation is finished.’ Therefore, prophecy to the people of Israel and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the LORD. I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again. I will return you to your own land, to your home. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done what I said.’”

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Ezekiel 36:26-28** *"I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God."*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **When you find an old bone lying on the ground, what do you think of? What is missing to make it a whole living body?**

TEACHER'S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today's story will help us discuss the vital role of the Holy Spirit in becoming and in living as a child of God, i.e. in living “in line with the truth of the Gospel.” (Galatians 2:14)

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - Who / what does the Lord tell Ezekiel to prophesy to?
 - List everything the Spirit does in this story.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **CONTEXT:** What is the historical context for this story? What were Ezekiel's main messages?
- **THE VISION of the VALLEY:** Imagine what it was like. Can these bones live? - How can this question help you?

- **PROPHECY to the BONES:** What does he speak to the bones? What does the Spirit use?
- **PROPHECY to the WINDS:** What did they do? How is the Holy Spirit in our lives like the wind? How is it like John 3:3-7, the conversation with Nicodemus?
- **PROPHECY to the PEOPLE:** What was God doing in the lives of the Israelites in exile?
- **NEW HEART, NEW SPIRIT:** What did God promise the Israelites in Ezekiel 36:26-28? How was this pictured in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of bones?
- **THE HOLY SPIRIT's WORK:** What does this vision teach about the Spirit? Also, what do these verses teach us about the work of the Spirit?
 - John 16:8,13a
 - Ephesians 3:16-19
 - Romans 8:15, 16
 - Galatians 4:4-7
 - Romans 8:5, 6
 - Galatians 5:22-26
 - Romans 8:26-27
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What's the problem of trying to follow the Word without the Holy Spirit? How might believers today lose hope like the exiled Israelites? How can this story encourage us? How can we more fully rely on the Holy Spirit day by day?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What desperate situation are you in? Can these bones of your situation live? How can this lesson encourage you? How can you rely more fully on the Spirit?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

CONTEXT:

- **What were the nations of Israel and Judah like in the generations after Israel was divided? Why were they scattered and exiled? What was the mood among the people exiled in Babylon?**
 - Full of idol worship, injustice, rebellion against God. Punished through scattering, destruction, and exile.
 - Hopeless, discouraged.
- **What were Ezekiel's main messages to Israel?**
 - Judgment against rebellion and idol worship.
 - Hope for those who humbly repent
 - Promise of cleansing from sin, heart transformation, and restoration.

THE VISION of the VALLEY:

- **Imagine yourself in Ezekiel's place in the valley of dry bones. Describe what Ezekiel would have seen? What would he have felt?**
 - *Bones everywhere, completely dried out, dusty, picked clean by birds and scavengers, crunching underfoot, all jumbled together.*
 - *Discouraged, hopeless.*

- **Who is the primary actor in this vision? What does the Holy Spirit do? What does this teach us about the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives?**
 - *The Holy Spirit. He carried Ezekiel to the valley of dry bones.*
 - *The Spirit reveals the problem to Ezekiel - a place of dryness, death, disconnection, dirt, and defilement - a place of no hope and no life.*
 - *He revealed to the Israelites and to us where we need him.*
 - *He asked a question: "Can these bones live?"*
 - *The Spirit tests Ezekiel's faith. "Is there any hope?"*
 - *The obvious answer is, "No! They cannot live."*
 - *But he challenges us to believe.*
- **How do we see faith in Ezekiel's answer?**
 - *"Sovereign Lord" - He acknowledges that God is in control and can do whatever he wants.*
 - *"You alone know." - My only answer is to trust in you, God!*
 - *Ezekiel recognizes that without God he is helpless and hopeless. Only God could cleanse them.*

PROPHECY to the BONES:

- **How does the Spirit do his work upon the dead, dry bones? Does he tell the bones to do something? To repent or have faith?**
 - *No, the bones are completely dead, unable to act - even to repent or believe. Only something or someone outside the bones could possibly make a difference.*
- **What was his tool or instrument? How did he apply it? What was the first result?**
 - *God's Word. The Spirit spoke the Word directly to the bones.*
 - *The bones came together, attached to each other, were covered with muscle, flesh, and skin - became complete bodies, though still dead.*
- **What does this teach us about our own lives without the Word of God?**
 - *Will lead to spiritual dryness, death, and destruction. The pieces of our lives will be disconnected - make no sense, have no purpose.*
- **How does God's Word help us when we are spiritually dead or dry?**
 - *It tells us where to get life, who to turn to, the ways of God. Its statutes can guide us to putting together the broken pieces of our lives and to live with purpose.*
 - *But it cannot complete the job! It needs the power of the Spirit!*
- **What danger is there if we learn about God's Word and laws but don't have the breath of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives?**
 - *We can be like dead bodies. We may look like a believer, but not be fully alive. Instead we will be proud, spiritually dry, legalistic, judgmental, unproductive. Not unified with others.*

PROPHECY to the WINDS:

- ***Note:** The same Hebrew word means wind, breath, or spirit.
- **Can you see the wind? How do you know it is there? How is the idea of the four winds a good way to think about the Holy Spirit?**
 - *We cannot see the wind or where it comes from? But we know it is there from its effects, from what it causes.*

- *Like the winds from four directions swirling around, the Holy Spirit is full of mystery. We can't see when it comes and where it comes from. But we can see what the Spirit is doing.*
- **What does the Lord say to the winds? What is their purpose? What was the result?**
 - *Tells the winds to come from every direction, to breathe into the dead bodies, to cause the dead bodies to come alive.*
 - *The dead bodies did indeed come to life! And they were united into a great army.*
- **How does the Spirit work together with God's Word?**
 - *Together they bring new life and hope and power and change.*
- **How were the winds in the vision like the Holy Spirit in people's lives today?**
Consider John 6:63, John 3:3-7, and Ephesians 4:3,4.
 - *John 6:63 - The Holy Spirit gives life. He first makes us come alive. His ongoing presence breathes life more and more into our lives.*
 - *John 3:3-7 - When we are born again, it is only by the Holy Spirit, who takes us from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive. It is a work of the Holy Spirit, mysterious like the wind, but we see its effects. New hearts lead to changed lives!*
 - *Ephesians 4:3,4 - He forms us together with others who have been made alive by the Spirit so that we have the power to do great things like a great army!*

PROPHECY to the PEOPLE:

- **How did God explain this vision? How did this vision apply to the situation of the Israelites in Babylon? What was life like for them? How did they feel? What did they need?**
 - *They felt like bones - old, dry, disconnected. Hopeless.*
 - *Felt cut off, finished as a nation - had lost their identity as God's people of promise. They felt cursed because of the guilt of their sin.*
- **What is God saying to Israel in this prophecy? What is his purpose in doing all of this?**
 - *This is who I am! I am the LORD. I am sovereign, in control, and I am speaking to you!*
 - *You are not in control of your own lives. I am your king. Your mind is set on me, not on yourself!*
 - *You are still my people!*
 - *I will open your graves of exile. I.e. I will free you from your bondage. I will cause you to rise again!*
 - *I will bring you back to the land of Israel, your home.*
 - *I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again.*
 - *The purpose is that you may know 1) that I am the Lord, 2) that I have spoken, 3) that I've done what I said. You will depend on my Spirit.*
- **What does this show us is the only true source of life? How should that change the way we live?**
 - *The Holy Spirit at work through His Word gives true life!*
 - *Your life is to no longer be centered around yourself. Instead, God is to be the center and source of your life.*

NEW HEART and SPIRIT:

- **Think back to Ezekiel 36:26-28. What gift does God promise the Israelites? Describe the different parts of the promise.**
 - *New heart*
 - *remove old heart of stone*
 - *put in new heart of flesh*
 - *New spirit*
 - *put “my” spirit*
 - *cause to walk in his statutes & obey his rules*
 - *bring them back home - to live in land of promise*
 - *restore their identity: You will be my people, and I will be your God.*
- **How does Ezekiel's vision help the Israelites to understand these promises?**
 - *old bodies - hearts dead and gone - dried out, but God revives with new bodies and hearts*
 - *gathered together, ready to follow God as a powerful army, to be connected again with God, to be his people.*

The HOLY SPIRIT's WORK:

- **Let's summarize what we learn about the Holy Spirit from this story. What do we learn about the Holy Spirit and his work?**
 - *The Spirit is powerful!*
 - *The Spirit gives life. Takes mankind from death to life. By him we are born again.*
 - *The Spirit cleanses us so that we are no longer defiled by sin but forgiven and made new.*
 - *The Spirit uses God's Word to do his work!*
 - *Changes hard hearts into soft hearts so that we can receive the things of God, particularly from his Word. Changes us from the inside.*
 - *Reveals to us our great need for God's help. Shows us our spiritual dryness, the idols in our lives, the places where sin is defiling us.*
 - *Leads us to repentance, to turn back to God and trust in Him alone, to trust in the promised Savior.*
 - *Leads us to a new and growing obedience.*
 - *Gives us encouragement and hope in the face of despair.*
 - *Like the wind, the Spirit is mysterious, showing up in various times and ways. We can't see the Spirit but we can see the effects of his work.*
 - *The Spirit gives us a new identity. We are no longer “cut off” from God and his promises.*
 - *Brings unity among believers. Makes us into a great army for God's purposes!*
 - *Leads us back to our home in God*
 - *He reminds us, builds our faith that God is indeed the Lord!*

MORE about the HOLY SPIRIT's WORK in the LIFE of a CHRISTIAN:

- **Believers today, Christ's church, are the new Israel. (Galatians 3:29; Romans**

2:28,29) **How can God's promises to his people in exile in Babylon encourage us today as we seek to grow in our walk with the Lord?** Let's look at several New Testament passages that further explain what we see in Ezekiel's words. For each of these we are asking, **“What do these verses teach us about the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers?”**

CONVICTS US of SIN / GUIDES US to SALVATION:

- **John 16:8,13a - “When [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt . . . [and] guide you into all truth.**
 - *The Holy Spirit convicts us of our need for a Savior, and*
 - *Guides us using God's Word.*

STRENGTHENS OUR FAITH / CONVINCES US of OUR FATHER's LOVE:

- **Ephesians 3:16-19 - “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge —that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”**
 - *The Spirit strengthens us from the inside out to have a deeper experience of Christ's presence and love.*

REMINDS US WHO WE ARE / STRENGTHENS OUR IDENTITY in CHRIST:

- **Romans 8:15: “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”**
 - *This is the key role of the Holy Spirit for believers, to continually reinforce our sonship, to be the one through whom we are no longer enslaved to the fear of punishment for our sins, but the one through whom and with whose help we can cry out to God as our loving Father. He will always be available to hear our cries and answer us.*
- **Galatians 4:4-7: “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”**
 - *When God redeemed us from our sin through his Son, Jesus, we were made his sons and daughters, heirs of all of God’s riches. Since we are sons and daughters, he gave us the Spirit of his Son. The Holy Spirit helps us approach God as our kind and loving Father. He helps us not to relate to God in the fearful position of a hired servant or slave, but from the privileged position of a beloved son or daughter.*
 - *Sent his Son - to redeem, enable us to receive full rights of sons*
 - *Sent his Spirit - to help us remember our identity, to call out to God as our daddy.*

Reinforces who we are

- **Romans 8:16: “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs.”** (emphasis mine)
 - *The Spirit's work is to work with our own spirit or heart to convince us and remind us over and over that we truly are God's children and heirs. God knows that this is a difficult reality for us to believe, especially in the midst of struggles. But he gives us the Holy Spirit to continually help us remember and to live more faithfully as a child.*
 - *The Holy Spirit helps us to live as heirs to God's kingdom and all his gifts and fruits.*
 - *He helps us to obey God's commands and exhortations, like this one:*
 - **Colossians 3:12-14:** “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

CHANGES OUR MINDSETS, FOCUSES US ON GOD:

- **Romans 8: 5, 6:** “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”
 - *When we submit our lives to the Holy Spirit, he shows us what he desires and changes our desires and loves to be like his own. His loves become our loves.*
 - *It's your mindset; that is, **your reasoning power, your affection, your will, your whole you, your whole identity.***
 - *The Spirit helps us to remove ourselves from the center of our lives and put God at the center instead.*
 - *This leads to life and peace!*

SANCTIFIES US:

- **1 Corinthians 6:11 -** “And that [lost sinners] is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”
 - *The Spirit works in our ongoing sanctification.*
- **Romans 8:13b -** “. . . if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”
 - *The Spirit gives us power to put to death the sin in our lives.*

BEARS FRUIT in US:

- **Galatians 5:22-26:** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”
 - *By reminding us of our sonship, that is helping us to live as God’s sons and heirs, the Holy Spirit produces real fruit through us – all the wonderful things listed here!*
 - *By reminding us of our sonship, the Spirit helps us to truly love others, even those who are difficult to love.*
 - *By reminding us of our sonship, the Spirit helps us to battle against our sinful nature and all its temptations.*
 - *By reminding us of our sonship, the Spirit changes us from our arrogance, our envy, and our tendency to hurt other people.*
- **Romans 8:26-27:** “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”
 - *The Spirit helps us to pray even as we pray for him to be with us. No matter how much we don’t understand what is happening or what God’s doing, no matter how deep our pain is, he takes our painful groans and turns them into prayers that are effective and answered according to God’s good and perfect will.*

GIVES GIFTS for MINISTRY:

- **Romans 12:6-8; 1 Cor.12:4-11; Eph.4:11-13**
 - *We learn to minister using the various gifts of the Spirit.*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **Considering Ezekiel's vision, what happens to our lives when we walk according to the flesh instead of depending on the Spirit?**
 - *become lifeless, dry, disconnected, disunity, hopeless*
- **How might believers today lose hope like the Israelites in exile in Babylon? What kind of struggles or issues make it difficult for us to believe or feel like we are truly beloved children of God? Give some examples.**
- **Considering the things people mentioned, what are some things in the New Testament verses listed above that can help us more deeply experience being a son or daughter of God?**
 - (Ex. the Spirit of sonship, or the Spirit of God’s Son, or the fruit of the Spirit, or the groans of the Spirit on your behalf as you pray.)
- **How can we more fully rely on the Holy Spirit to grow in our faith?**

- Recognize how we rely on our own efforts to change and bear fruit in our lives.
- Become constantly conscious of our need for the Holy Spirit leading, wisdom, and power.
 - Times of intentional prayer, personal worship, Scripture reading
- Learn to listen to the Holy Spirit with openness to His work
 - as through Scripture he speaks to issues of identity, points out sin, and enlightens our minds.
- Develop a regular pattern of always asking and listening, with ongoing repentance and faith to allow the Holy Spirit to work and transform us.
- Plead daily with the Spirit to help us truly understand what it means for us to live as sons or daughters of the king of heaven and earth. He helps us to live as children of God even as he bears the fruits of the spirit in our lives and guides us in life by his Word.

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **The Holy Spirit helps us when we're in the midst of impossible, desperate situations - hardship, sin, destruction, chaos, conflict. God is asking you, "Can these bones live?" What difficult or discouraging situation do you need the Holy Spirit's help with today?**
-
- **Share a situation or issue in your life where you deeply need the Holy Spirit.**
 - **Pray together:**
 - that the Spirit would help you believe that you are God's child through Christ.
 - that the Spirit would help you see your sin and lead you to a deeper repentance
 - that the Spirit would give you the wisdom and strength to grow in the way that God is revealing to you.
- **How can you rely more fully on the Holy Spirit in your day-to-day life?**

EXTRA READING: The Holy Spirit: (Summary)

- The Spirit clarifies and confirms God's truth in Scripture so we are able to understand and be transformed by it.
- The Spirit personally and effectively applies in our lives what Jesus has already accomplished in his death and resurrection so that we are transformed.
- The Spirit engages in spiritual warfare on our behalf.
- The Spirit brings about in our lives the salvation that Jesus has accomplished . . .
 - by softening our hearts to convict us of sin,
 - by leading us to repentance and
 - by making us able to put our faith in Christ who died and rose for us.
- The Spirit indwells our hearts as believers, and seals us as God's own.
- Practically applies the redemption accomplished by Christ to our lives . . .

- by helping us to love God's Word and desire to change,
- by continuing to convict us of daily sin of thought, word, and deed, and
- by leading us to ongoing repentance as we repeatedly put our faith in Jesus
 - Galatians 2:20 - "The life I now live, I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."
- by reminding us who we have become because of Jesus:
 - beloved sons and daughters of our Father
 - brothers and sisters with Christ
 - heirs to God's kingdom
 - receivers of God's gifts
- transforms us, grows our intimacy with the Father by helping us bear the fruit of the Spirit
- reinforces, makes us feel and experience the benefits of our status, our identity as adopted children of God through Christ.

28. Jesus Reads Isaiah in the Synagogue

Luke 4:14-30 (Also Isaiah 61:1,2a; 58:6)

Key Theme: Kingdom

[Core Gospel Concepts: Kingdom]

Context: Jews of Jesus' day typically went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day for worship and teaching. After a time of thanksgiving and prayer, someone would stand and read from the Law and from the Prophets. Then he would sit down to preach and explain the passage.

THE STORY:

After his time of testing in the wilderness, Jesus went into Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.

And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke well of him and were amazed how well he spoke. But they were wondering how this could be true since he was just the son of their neighbor Joseph the carpenter.

When Jesus understood what was behind their questioning. He said, “I suppose you'll next say, ‘Do here in your hometown what we heard you did in other places.’ But I tell you that no prophet is welcomed in his own country.” He then reminded them how back in the time of Elijah it was a believing Gentile woman who cared for the prophet during the drought and not an Israelite and how God healed the Gentile Naaman when there were many Jewish lepers who were not healed. This offended his neighbor Jews so much that they almost killed him. But he was able to walk away from them. He left and never came back. From there he went out preaching with authority, casting out demons, and healing the sick.

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **John 8:34-36:** *“Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **If the kingdom of God has come to earth, what do you think that means?**

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Today we will look at an episode where Jesus declares Himself to be the promised Messiah and describes what he will do as the Messiah.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - Who are the people that the Messiah is concerned about?
 - What offended the people of Nazareth?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **CONTEXT:** What did Luke write about just before his appearance in the synagogue at Nazareth? What does this teach us?
- **JESUS in the SYNAGOGUE:** What can we learn from his habits? What happened in the synagogue that day? What was surprising?
- **JESUS the MESSIAH:** What was Jesus claiming? What would his mission be? Who would he be concerned about? What does this say about us as Christ’s followers?
- **THE PEOPLE of NAZARETH:** What happened between Jesus and his neighbors? Why were they upset? How did they reveal their unbelief?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** John 14:12a, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.” If Jesus’ mission as Messiah was to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for prisoners and sight for the blind, provide freedom for the oppressed, and declare that salvation has come in Him, what kinds of things are we to do as his servants and children? How does remembering the Gospel help us to do these things?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What particular way is God calling me to participate this week in his kingdom work?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

CONTEXT:

- **What happened before Jesus read from and explained the passage from Isaiah? What does this teach us about Jesus?**
 - He had been in the wilderness where was tested by Satan and resisted temptation by using the Word of God. He was empowered by the Spirit and was ministering in Galilee. .
 - Was teaching in synagogues. People were pleased by his teaching. Went to

Nazareth, his home town.

- He relied on God's Word and was empowered by the Holy Spirit to do ministry.

JESUS in the SYNAGOGUE:

- **What was Jesus doing on the day of this story? What does that show us about his habits and priorities that can help us?**
 - It was Sabbath. He was a Jew. He followed the customs of Jews, went to synagogue to meet with God's people for worship, prayer, and reading of Scripture. He honored God's Word.
 - This encourages us to not neglect going to church for all the same reasons. If these were important to the Son of God, they must be important to us as well!
- **What happened in the synagogue?**
 - **What did he do before he read? What does this show us?**
 - It was customary to stand to read the Scripture before sitting down to preach or explain the Scriptures. This shows a high regard for God's Word.
 - He was given the scroll of Isaiah to read from. Somehow God was in control of what he read.
 - **What did he read? In the Scripture he read, who was the speaker? Why do you think he chose this Scripture?**
 - He chose a Scripture about the Messiah from Isaiah 61:1,2 (also from 58:6). The Messiah is the speaker in Isaiah's prophecy.
 - Jesus was revealing himself was the Messiah.

JESUS THE MESSIAH:

- **What exactly did the words of the Messiah in Isaiah say? So what is the work of the Messiah? Who was he concerned about and acting for?**
 - Spirit of the Lord upon me. He has anointed me to . . .
 - i.e. I, the Messiah, am empowered by the Holy Spirit
 - The Poor - those who are destitute, unable to help themselves - and are aware of their poverty. The poor in spirit as well.
 - The Captives - those who are slaves to sin as well as people captured by all kinds of evil - addictions, enemies, idols. He came to give liberty. This also refers to Exiles, those who are dragged away from home into hardship, exiles in sin.
 - The Blind - not just physical sight, but especially spiritual sight, blind to their own sin, weakness, failures. He came to give sight or light to show the way.
 - The Oppressed - all those who are trodden down by the world and all its brokenness.
 - Outsiders - Gentiles - will see when speaks of Naaman and widow of Zarephath.
 - Those in need of salvation, the Lord's favor. From every kind of

brokenness and alienation.

- **What did he mean by the year of the Lord's favor? What would this have reminded the Jews of?**
 - It would have reminded them of the Year of Jubilee in the Old Testament, when all debts were to be canceled, people given back their land and return home. It was symbolic of the final great salvation that the Messiah would bring. When it was spoken through Isaiah, it was promising them of the Messianic Age that was coming.
- **After Jesus read, the people were expecting him to teach or preach. Everyone was focused on him, wondering what he would say. What do you think they were expecting him to talk about? What surprising thing did he say instead? Why did he do this? How do the first words of the Messiah in the Isaiah passage remind us of Jesus?**
 - They were likely expecting him to give further explanation of what they should expect when the Messiah finally arrives. They were not expecting him to claim to be Messiah himself!
 - “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”
 - In other words, the one talking in Isaiah is me! I am the Anointed One.”
 - **The Spirit of the Lord was to be on the Messiah** - reminding us of how the Spirit descended like a dove on Jesus as God declared him his Son.
 - Jesus knew where to read. Knew who he was and what the Scriptures were about. Knew the plan of God and his central role in all that God had been doing throughout history. Was ready to announce himself and his purposes
- **What does all of this teach us about Jesus?**
 - He is the long awaited Messiah! The age of the Messiah has begun.
 - Jesus is saying, “**I am here to provide salvation. My job** is to free those **enslaved** & by sin and all its effects in the world, to open people's eyes to God's truth, particularly their own captivity, to point to salvation, the Lord's favor.
 - True salvation is only found through trusting in Jesus. True freedom from constant fear, from obligation to obey all rules of man, from the guilt of sin, from Satan.
- **READ these verses. How do they confirm what Jesus was teaching about setting slaves free?**
 - **John 8:36** - “**If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!**”
 - This is the freedom of sonship!
 - **Galatians 4:6,7** - Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba*, Father.” **So you are no longer a slave, but a son;** and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.
 - No longer a slave to sin or to rules or to guilt or shame.
- **What is this teaching us about ourselves as followers of Jesus? About our role?**
 - **These are also my plan for those who follow me**, to take part in the redeeming

of the world. This is what my kingdom is like! ”

- **Here in my kingdom, my children will also be about my business . . .**
 - preaching good news to those who are poor and know their neediness
 - proclaiming freedom to those in captivity to sin
 - shining light to those who have been blind to their own sin
 - helping the sick
 - seeking justice and freedom from all types of oppression
 - proclaiming the kingdom, that salvation is at work in the world
 - inviting all people to the salvation that is found only in Jesus Christ who died, buried, was raised again, and now is alive and at work!
- This is the work and fruit of the Kingdom of God from now until the final consummation when Christ returns.

THE PEOPLE of NAZARETH:

- **What happened next between Jesus and his neighbors? Was he just trying to make them angry or to reject them from the beginning? What was going on in their hearts that Jesus understood? Why were their hearts turned against him? What was he trying to teach them?**
 - At first, the people spoke well of him, and marvelled at gracious words.
 - But they could not really believe that boy from their neighborhood was the Messiah!
 - Jesus saw the doubts in their minds and hearts.
 - “What we HEARD you did,” instead of “What you DID,” indicates they did not really believe him unless they saw the miracles themselves. They wanted him to prove himself to them just like he did Caesarea. They wanted to test him (like Satan had done).
 - They were even more offended when Jesus suggested that they were unbelieving like the Israelites at the time of Elijah and that God would instead bless Gentiles like the widow at Zarephath.
 - Jesus had not come to bless proud Jews who were depending on their own nationality or customs to stand before God, but instead wanted them to trust in him as the Messiah, the kind of faith shown by the widow and eventually by Naaman as well.
- **What happened after this event through the rest of the Gospel of Luke?**
 - God protected him from his neighbors attempt to kill him.
 - He left them and never returned home to Nazareth.
 - Instead he went out, preached, healed, cast demons, responding to humble faith.
 - I.e. he began doing the very things that the promised Messiah was to do according to Isaiah

NOTE:

It has been said, **“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”**

This means that God’s authority and concern applies not only what we consider to be

“spiritual” things like the soul or church life, but to all areas of life, including work, politics, science, and art. Instead that every aspect of life is governed by God. That means that **God's people need to be concerned in and involved with every aspect of life** as we participate through Christ's salvation in the Kingdom of God.

Romans 8:21 tells us that in the salvation found in Christ “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” So Christ's followers are to be involved in all kinds of work that involve in healing all kinds of brokenness throughout creation.

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **In John 14:12a, Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.” If Jesus is the Messiah, and the Messiah's mission was to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for prisoners and sight for the blind, provide freedom for the oppressed, and declare that salvation has come in Him, what kinds of things are we to do as his servants and children?**
 - **List a variety of ways we can participate in God's kingdom or do the works of our Savior and King!**
 - **Who are some of the people or concerns that Christians today tend to not think about but that the Messiah is concerned about?**
 - politics, medicine, agriculture, government, business, development
 - caring for the poor, refugees, elderly, foreigners
 - teaching the uneducated
 - **How does remembering the Gospel, what Jesus has done for us, help us to more fully share in his kingdom work?**
 - When we remember that Jesus gave his life to save us, and that we are his precious children looking forward to an eternal kingdom, we are motivated by gratitude to bring glory to him by joining in his kingdom work, by looking for ways to love others and bring healing to the world.

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **How do you think God may be calling you to take part in his kingdom work this week? Think of one particular service to a particular person or group that seems more “spiritual” (Ex. evangelism, discipleship, etc.) and one other that is not usually thought of as spiritual.**

29. The Parable of Ten Minas

Luke 19:11-27

Key Themes: Submitting to Christ the King's Rule, Stewarding His Gifts, and Waiting for His Return - all through Faith in the Gospel
[Core Gospel Concepts: Kingdom of God]

CONTEXT: *(Teacher, just summarize this once for the class before telling the story the first time.)*

- Jesus' listeners knew that the Romans would allow territories to have their own king under the rule of the Emperor (Ceasar). Herod the Great was the "king" in Israel. His three sons took over after his death. One of these was hated by his citizens. So the people of the time could have easily related the following story to some of their own experiences.
- The phrases *kingdom of God* and *kingdom of heaven* appear sixty-one separate times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- A *mina* is the equivalent of 3 months wages.

THE STORY:

One day Jesus told this parable because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.' "But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

"He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. "The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.' "Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. "Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities." "The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.' "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

"Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.' "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'

"Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.' "Sir," they said, 'he already has ten!' "He

replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.’”

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Matthew 6:9-10** - “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- What is one gift that God has given you specifically for use in advancing His kingdom?

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- We live in the time and place described as the **ALREADY BUT NOT YET KINGDOM**. Through his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, Christ has already conquered sin and death and initiated his kingdom, but the total restoration of God’s kingdom has not yet been established here on earth.
- In today’s story we want to learn more about what this kingdom should look like, even in this “already but not yet” state we have now.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - Why did Jesus tell this parable?
 - Who were the different characters in this parable?

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **JESUS’ LISTENERS:** Why did Jesus tell this parable?
- **THE SERVANTS:** What did Jesus command them to do? How did the three servants respond when he returned? How did the king respond to them? What does this teach us about us and God?
- **THE CITIZENS:** How did they treat the king when he was away? How did he respond to them? What does this teach us about God and about how we should respond to his kingship?
- **YOU and ME (SERVANTS of CHRIST the KING):** How are we to use God’s gifts to see his kingdom come? What attitude or belief must be our foundation? How can faith in the Gospel change the way we think of God’s kingdom?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are some of the minas that we have in the Gospel? For what purpose has God in his grace given us these minas? List ways that God’s kingdom can be realized more fully and practically on earth in our own lifetimes?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What gift from God in my life do I need to use for his kingdom with a deeper faith in the Gospel?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

JESUS' LISTENERS:

- **What were the people with Jesus thinking was going to appear immediately? What kind of kingdom do you think they were expecting?**
 - *The Kingdom of God.*
 - *Expecting an earthly, political/military kingdom reigning over Israel's enemies, defeating the Romans.*
- **So what do you think was the purpose of Jesus telling this parable at this time?**
 - *To disrupt any wrong expectations they had about when the kingdom was to come and what it would look like.*
 - *To help them (and us) better understand how we are to live (act and believe and think) in this "now and not yet" kingdom.*
- **Who were three main characters or groups in this story? Who do you think these groups represent?**
 - *Nobleman / King – Jesus*
 - *Servants – Jesus' "followers - including*
 - *True believers*
 - *False believers also (who falsely considered themselves his followers)*
 - *Citizens – unbelievers, God's open enemies*

Let's look more closely at some of these characters:

THE SERVANTS:

- **Whom did the nobleman call to himself before traveling? What did he give them and what did he tell them to do? If Jesus is our master and king, what would such a call mean for us as his followers?**
 - *Called ten servants, gave each one mina, and told them to **put the money to work.***
 - *Doing business with the minas meant living a life that would honor the nobleman while he's away.*
- **What happened when the Nobleman returned after receiving his kingdom? What did he ask his servants? What does this teach us about God?**
 - *He ordered the ten servants to come to him to learn what they had gained from doing business while he was gone.*
 - *God also demands an accounting from his servants regarding how they have used the gifts he gives them for his service.*
- **What did the first servant say? How did he describe the gift the king had given him? How about the second servant? What does this tell us about their attitude toward the money and the king?**
 - *"Lord, **YOUR mina has made ten minas more.**"*

- o Did not see the gifts as their own but as gifts entrusted to them by their king.*
 - o They gave all credit to the king. Neither of them even bragged or gave himself credit by saying, “I have earned more,” but instead credited the king by saying, “Your gift has earned more.”*
 - o Their attitudes are ones of humility, obedience, and gratitude for the king’s gifts. They trusted in his goodness and power.*
- **How did the king respond to them?**
 - o He said to the first, “Well done, good servant. Because you have been faithful with little, you shall have authority over ten cities.”*
 - o Likewise he rewarded the second by putting him in charge of five cities.*
- **What does this teach us about God? What might be an example of a *mina* in our lives?**
 - o He acts increasingly graciously to those who receive his grace by faith, i.e. those who use his gracious gifts by faith. As they trust him by taking risks in using his gifts to grow his kingdom, he entrusts them with more gifts to use.*
 - o Our mina may be a spiritual gift, an opportunity, or just simply the message of the good news..*
- **What did the third servant say to the king? What does this show us about him?**
 - o “Lord, here is your mina, which I laid in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.”*
 - o He was false and disobedient.*
 - o He **hid his gift rather than trusting** the king enough to take the risk that was asked of him.*
 - o He claimed to know the king and thought of him as a harsh man, one who would take what does not belong to him. Not a very positive view of the king. Doesn’t seem to really know the king closely.*
 - o He did not really know him or have a relationship with him. When put under pressure, he essentially betrays the king and regards him as unfair or a thief. He was afraid, but used his fear as an excuse for not simply obeying what he was commanded.*
- **What type of “follower” of Christ would be like this servant? What was his heart and motivation like? When might we be like this third servant?**
 - o One who seems to be a part of the fellowship but is false. Does not really know Christ and his heart of grace. Perhaps someone who tries to be part of Christ’s church for impure motives such as to have a good reputation or be close to someone important.*
 - o One who has no desire to please his master. Motivated by self-protection. Acts out of fear instead of trust and love.*
- **What was the king’s response to this servant’s answer?**
 - o Very angry. Angry at his fearful disobedience, his unwillingness to take a risk to*

follow orders, his refusal to trust his commands. Probably angry at his bad attitude toward the king, accusing him of harshness and stealing. Judged him by his own words. "If you knew this then why didn't you put my money on deposit so that when I came back, I could have at least collected it with interest?"

o He took his mina from him and gave it to the first servant with ten cities.

- **How do we act sometimes as the unfaithful servant?**

- o We act in indifference to what God has given us. We can have impure motives as to why we are Christians or why we are at church and serve the church.*

- o We allow our fear and unbelief to lead us to fail to obey our master; to fail to take the risk of using a gift he has given us to seek his glory.*

- **What did the people say when the one with the most was given more? Why? How did the king respond to their outcry? What do you think Jesus is teaching by this response?**

- o "He already has ten!" They don't think it's fair.*

- o "To everyone who has, even more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away."*

- o Trying to appear "fair" is not Jesus' goal. Grace is never fair! None of the servants deserved even one mina to begin with. It was the king's grace that gave them one and grace that continues to give more. Jesus is the good King who likes to give his children more and more, and for them to gladly receive it and trust him enough to put it to use as he commands us. Outrageous grace that responds to growing faith.*

THE CITIZENS

- **After the nobleman left for the far country to receive a kingdom, what did the citizens do?**

- o Sent a delegation after him and said we do not want this man to rule us.*

- **How are the citizens like people who are unbelievers?**

- o They reject Jesus as king and stand in opposition to Him. They especially don't want to be accountable to Him. They don't want to submit to His kingdom rule. They are his enemies.*

- **What does the king do about them when he returns? What is Jesus saying to his listeners in this?**

- o He punishes them with death. "Bring the enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them-bring them here and kill them in front of me."*

- o The consequences of choosing to reject Jesus as king of your life is destruction. "Every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord." (Phil 2)*

- **How is Jesus like the nobleman when he goes away to a far country to be crowned king?**

- o Christ is there now at the right hand of the father on his throne and will come*

again some day to claim his own.

- **So, in summary, what happens to each group of people in the story?**
 - ***The King's Followers:*** *Grace added to grace! For the faithful, those who are blessed are be blessed even more. Given rewards for the new kingdom when Christ returns: Galatians 6:7-10, 2 Peter 1:10,11. There is blessing in acting in a way that shows faith in the king!*
 - ***The King's False Followers:*** *They are stripped of everything and shut out of the kingdom. Refusal to act in faith diminishes our participation in Christ's kingdom. Need to repent to be part of the kingdom again.*
 - ***The King's Foes:*** *Christ said they would be cut down. Every knee will bow to the true King when he comes to establish his Kingdom.*

YOU and ME (SERVANTS of CHRIST the KING):

- **If the nobleman represents Jesus and the servants represent Jesus' followers, what do you think his instructions could teach us as Jesus' servants?**
 - *God entrusts his gifts for service with us in order for us to put them to use with diligence and faith, not laziness, fear, and self-protection. He wants us to truly know Him in His right character, not as one who is hard and mean and grasping, but as one who by grace allows us to be his servants and by grace gives us the privilege of utilizing his gifts to grow his kingdom.*
- **Read Matthew 6:9-10 - "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**
 - **What does this verse teach us about the right attitude we should have toward God's kingdom? How is this different than the attitude of the citizens in the story?**
 - *We welcome and long for his kingdom to come fully, for us to more fully experience his kingship.*
 - *We seek and pray for the kingdom to keep coming, to be more fully realized on earth here and now.*
 - *It will come as we see his **kingdom values** more and more **lived out** on earth through God's children.*
-
- **Why does it take faith in the Gospel to really use God's gifts to us in a way that honors him?**
 - *As we root ourselves in faith in the Gospel of Christ, our gratitude to God will grow and we will more and more long for and pray, "Thy kingdom come; they will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We will plead for the Holy Spirit's help to help us play our part in God's redemption of all creation.*
 - *The gospel moves us to lay down our lives for those who do not know the grace of Jesus, and to enter into the brokenness of the world in order to push back the*

effects of the Fall as we engage in acts of mercy, reconciliation, education, medicine, justice, etc. (See Core Gospel Concept XIV).

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What does this story teach us about our living in the “now and not yet” Kingdom of God while awaiting Christ’s return?**
 - *Living in Christ’s kingdom means treating him as king. We must “abide” in Him, i.e. spend time getting to know Him and his thoughts, loves, and words and then let these things rule our lives. We must submit to his rule in our lives.*
- **What are some of the minas that we have in the Gospel? For what purpose has God in his grace given us these minas? List ways that God's kingdom can be realized more fully and practically on earth in our own lifetimes?**
 - *We have been given the opportunity as believers to be good stewards with the spiritual opportunities we are given. We all have been given “Minas” as believers. We need to recognize God’s gifts and utilize it in faith.*
 - *Christ makes it clear as he tells his disciples that they are responsible to work towards God’s goals and purposes. To honor and worship God in a way that produces fruit. To contribute to the expansion of his kingdom to other people and nations. To see his kingdom infiltrating every broken place or situation in our world - spiritual or physical or societal or personal.*
 - *Christians need to be addressing issues of evangelism, discipleship, poverty, injustice, sickness, etc. in the name of Christ.*
 - *Living in Christ's kingdom means ABIDING in Christ, KNOWING the King who is coming soon to establish his kingdom.*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What is one of the minas God has given you? What way do you feel God would want you to use this mina to honor Him and to advance his kingdom in a way that causes good for other people? What one step can you take this week to use your mina for his kingdom purposes?**
- **In what way can you more fully ACCEPT Christ as your king and reject yourself as king or ruler of your life? What fear blocks you from submitting to him as king? How can you display trust and hope in your life?**
- **What can you do this week to KNOW the king and his heart more fully?**

30. The Parable of The Mustard Seed & the Leaven

Matthew 13:31-33 (cf. Mark 4:30-33; Luke 13:19)

Key Theme: Kingdom of God, Faith Expressing Itself in Love

[Core Gospel Concepts: The Kingdom, Love)

THE STORY:

One day Jesus was teaching a big crowd many things using parables including these two short parables.

Mustard Seed

He said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

Leaven

He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- Matthew 6:10a - “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- What do you think Jesus means in the Lord's Prayer when he tells us to pray, “Your kingdom come”?

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- This story has two very short parables, but they go together and teach us important things about God's kingdom and our part in it.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER: (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory:
 - Note all the details about the mustard seed and then the leaven or yeast.

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **CONTEXT:** What were the Jews expecting regarding God's kingdom?
- **KINGDOM as MUSTARD SEED (External Growth):** What do we learn about kingdom from it's words. 1) the kingdom, 2) of heaven, 3) grain of mustard seed, 4) a man took and sowed in his field, 5) smallest of all but when it has grown, 6) is larger than all, 7) becomes a tree so birds come and make nests
- **KINGDOM as LEAVEN (Internal Growth):** How does yeast or leaven work on dough? So what does this tell us about the Gospel and the kingdom of God?

- **THE KINGDOM of GOD - REVERSING the CURSE:** Consider Romans 8:20-21, Genesis 3:17-19, and Genesis 3:15 - the promise of the Savior. How has the the curse on mankind affected the world? What effect does the kingdom of God have on all of creation?
- **LIVING in the “NOW and NOT YET” KINGDOM:** What does this mean? How does the Gospel at work in our lives affect how we live in this time between Jesus’ time on earth and the end times when he comes again in glory? Consider Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 5:14a,17-20, Jeremiah 29:4-7)
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** What are examples of situations and activities where believers should be part of God's kingdom pushing into the neediness of the world? Spiritual? Physical? Social?
- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** What situation or problem in the world around you do you think God may be calling you to enter into as Christ's ambassador?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

CONTEXT:

- When the Jews of Jesus’ time thought of the coming of God's kingdom, what were they often expecting?
 - *They were expecting a larger and more immediate appearance of a military leader / Savior who would defeat their oppressors, the Romans, and usher in a political or earthly kingdom.*
 - *Probably expecting something 1) big, 2) immediate, and 3) external*

THINGS that GROW or EXPAND

- ***Mustard Seed and Leaven (Yeast) - Both are pictures of growth or expansion. How are they different in how they expand?***
 - *The mustard seed expands externally, outwardly*
 - *Leaven or yeast expands and causes the flour around it to expand as dough*

MUSTARD SEED -

- **“The kingdom” - When we hear the word kingdom, what does it mean?**
 - *There is a king who rules.*
 - *There are people who are ruled, who serve the king, who are accountable to him, who submit to his laws, who promote his purposes, who honor him.*
 - *There is a place where the king rules.*
 - *It includes people, other creatures, a land, structures, systems, organizations.*
 - *It is distinct from other kingdoms, even defends itself against others*
 - *It seeks to expand or increase its influence or reign.*
- **“Of heaven” - What does this mean?**
 - *It is God's kingdom. (It is also called the kingdom of God. Ex. Matthew 19:23,24)*
 - *It extends beyond our own physical world. Is spiritual also.*
 - *God is the one who rules. He is king. The rest of the kingdom submits to him and experiences him and all his goodness.*
- **“Is like a grain of mustard seed” - Remembering the parable of the Sower, earlier in the chapter (vv. 3-9), what does “grain of mustard seed” tell us about the kingdom of God?**
 - *A grain, especially of mustard seed, is very small, seems insignificant, weak, appears to*

be without potential. Likewise God's kingdom influence may seem insignificant in our eyes or the world's eyes.

- *A seed is the fruit of a plant. It is the beginning of the reproduction of that plant. It first goes to work by being planted.*
- *Needs good soil to grow. Likewise, the seed of God's Word is fruitful when planted in good spiritual (Holy Spirit fertilized!) soil - humble, trusting, ready to be led, being constantly fed and watered by encouragement and fellowship*
- *Seeds reproduce according to their kind. John 3:6 - "Spirit gives birth to spirit." So things of God's kingdom expand and produce more kingdom fruit.*
- *Can be stunted or killed by bad soil - path/birds - Satan snatches, stony - shallow, no root, fails in trials, thorns - worries of life, riches distract*
- *Must be buried first to come to life and produce fruit*
- ***"That a man took and sowed in his field." - What does this tell us about how a seed becomes useful? How does that relate to the kingdom of God?***
 - *Is brought from outside by someone and is sowed intentionally.*
 - *God purposely sows his Word, the Gospel through the power of His Holy Spirit, where He wills. It starts almost invisibly in people's hearts to grow from there.*
 - *God's kingdom through the Gospel is brought into a place or a situation (a field). It comes from the life which is Christ. (John 14:6, 1:4, 11:25; Colossians 3:4, 1 John 5:11,12)*
 - *This is His plan for transforming our world and expanding His kingdom.*
- ***"It is the smallest of all seeds but when it has grown" - What do seeds do? How about God's kingdom?***
 - *They are spread out. They are very small and alone.*
 - *But they do grow! Reproduce.*
 - *The Gospel, even if it seems small and weak at first, when it is sowed in fertile soil, will grow, expand, and produce fruit.*
- ***"It is larger than all the garden plants, and . . ."***
 - *Expands beyond other types of seeds.*
 - *The kingdom's spread and influence will reach much farther than any other "kingdom" or influence of this world.*
 - *It expands in ways that go beyond our understanding.*
- ***"Becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." How is a tree helpful to birds?***
 - *A tree grows strong, becomes rigid, capable of supporting others (birds) in need,*
 - *becomes a place of refuge.*
 - *Shelter from the storm*
 - *Shade from the sun*
 - *Protection or distance from other animals*
 - *Rest from weariness*
 - *Home, lodging from wandering*
 - *Sometimes even provides food*
- ***How is God's kingdom, the gospel, like such a tree?***
 - *Christ's children, the co-regents of King Jesus' kingdom, grow in maturity and grow in number. As his children more and more live lives of ongoing repentance and remember the Gospel and who they are in Christ, then Christ's body gets bigger, taller, more expansive, stronger, more durable. And it provides . . .*
 - *Spiritual, emotional, and sometimes physical shelter for those in the midst of life's storms - sickness, conflict, poverty, ignorance.*
 - *Shade from the constant heat of life's temptations and trials.*
 - *Protection from the evil one and all his tricks*

- *Rest from spiritual, physical, relational, emotional weariness (Matthew 11:28-30)*
- *A home in Christ's family and in heaven after wandering homeless spiritually*
- *God's Word - wisdom, guidance, encouragement, rebuke, sharpening*

LEAVEN -

- ***He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” - What does this teach about the kingdom? How is it a bit different than the idea of the mustard seed?***
 - *The kingdom is hidden at first - by the Holy Spirit - eternal life planted in the hearts of the citizens of the kingdom.*
 - *The kingdom / the Gospel - begins within our hearts, changes us from the inside.*
 - *It grows within each believer - sanctifying his whole life, piece by piece, leading him to love and care about others more fully and act to help redeem some of the brokenness of the world.*
 - *It also grows from one believer to another - sanctifying us as Christ's body and giving us power and wisdom to make a difference in many different areas and issues.*
 - *Three measures was a lot of flour - perhaps 20 liters! Once yeast is put into dough, it works its way throughout the whole batch until it is all risen.*
 - *So the Gospel has a leavening or expanding effect on all good things it is impacting - leading to multiplication and growth.*
 - *As people live by faith in the Gospel, Christ's kingdom must influence every sphere of life and bring service, honor, and glory to him who is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16).*
 - *Some day, when Christ comes again His kingdom will be completely fulfilled, “for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9b).*
- ***How might these two parables have been an encouragement to Christ's early followers? To what is Jesus urging people?***
 - *The group of his early loyal followers was so small and weak, they must have despaired sometimes.*
 - *The powerful culture around - whether Jewish tradition or Roman power - would have sometimes led them toward despair.*
 - *Perhaps they were impatient, expecting a more quick and powerful kingdom to come, even to come and militarily free them from the rule of the Romans.*
 - *These parables would have encouraged them to have patience, to exercise faith, to keep on praying, and to keep on working. God's program cannot fail.*
- ***Read the following verses: Zechariah 4:10, Luke 12:32, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29***
 - ***What do these verses teach us about “small things” in the hands of the Lord?***

The KINGDOM of GOD: REVERSING the CURSE! Consider the following verses to understand more of what it means for God's kingdom to come.

- **Romans 8:20-21 (NLT)** *...All creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.*
 - **How will the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom be more than just people being saved from their sin?**
 - *God's kingdom renewal (and expansion) extends to every part of creation, which is now struggling under the effects of the fall of man into sin.*
- **Genesis 3:15** - *I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and he will strike your heel.*
 - **If you remember the promise of a Savior in the Garden of Eden and how it was worked out throughout the Old Testament and was fulfilled in Jesus Christ (cf. C.B.S. curriculum), how do you see this mustard seed principle or yeast principle working itself out?**
 - *Beginning at mankind's lowest point, his betrayal of God and attempt to put himself on the throne of his own life, we see the mustard seed of a promise grow and grow as people learn about repentance and faith and as they await the fulfillment of the promised Savior in Jesus and then see the church expanding throughout Acts.*
 - *It extends all the way into my own life where Christ saved me!*
- **Genesis 3:17-19** - *And to the man he said, "Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to get food from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its plants. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return."*
 - **If these curses were the result of the Serpent's influence on mankind, what influence will the Savior promised in Genesis 3:15 have on these curses? What are some ways we saw Jesus having the power and the plan to reverse these curses? What does this say about his kingdom and the work of his followers?**
 - *He would be the Curse Reverser! He would break the great curse of separation from God and all the other curses. And in the New Testament we see that Christ, that promised Saviour, has power and authority to defeat all of those curses - separation from God over sin, sickness, daily provision, enmity between people (ex. Jews and Samaritans), even death itself.*
 - *So if King Jesus is defeating all the problems that Satan brought into the world, then his servants and children whom he saved will be pursuing the expansion of his kingdom reign in all areas of human existence - physical pain and sickness, relational brokenness, struggle to get food and other provisions, struggle against spiritual death and physical death.*
 - *When God's people are submitting to Christ as king of their lives and of all creation, they will be more and more involved in preaching or sharing the Gospel*

through His Word, in helping people medically as they battle pain and sickness, or helping them to overcome obstacles like drought and weeds to provide food or shelter for their families or education for their children. They will be involved in business, government, art, and science.

LIVING in the “NOW and NOT YET” kingdom -

The "now and not yet" kingdom means that God's kingdom rule has already begun through Jesus Christ, but it has not yet arrived in its complete, perfect power. Christians live in the active tension between what Jesus accomplished on the cross and what he will finish when he returns to earth.

The "Now" (Already Present)

- **Began with Jesus:** Christ announced that God's rule entered human history during his first time on earth.
 - Mark 1:15 - *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*
- **Active through the Spirit:** God changes human hearts and works through believers in the Gospel right now.
- **Spiritual victory:** Sin and death are defeated, and people can experience forgiveness and new life today.

The "Not Yet" (Future Fulfillment)

- **Awaiting Christ's Return:** The final, physical renewal of the world will only happen when Jesus comes back.
- **Suffering remains:** Pain, injustice, sickness, and death still exist in the world today.
- **Complete perfection:** The ultimate kingdom will wipe away all brokenness, establishing visible peace on earth.

Let's examine several Scripture passages to see what they teach us about living as believers or kingdom servants in this “now and not yet” time.

- **Matthew 6:31-33** - *“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*
 - **What does this teach us about the right priorities for those who are saved by the Gospel and brought into Christ's kingdom?**
 - *Issues of daily maintenance are not the emphasis of God's kingdom. **The fulfillment of His kingdom should be our goal** and is much bigger than just food and clothing. When we seek it, we can trust God to provide what we need.*
- **2 Corinthians 5:14a,17-20** - *For Christ's love compels us . . . Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors.*

- According to these verses, what is the basis for the ministry of reconciliation that we are called to? Why are we Christ's ambassadors?
 - *The motive or compulsion for mission, for seeking reconciliation for the world and in the world is the love of Christ which has made us into new creations, born again, ready to work in the world as we move toward a new heavens and new earth!*
- **Jeremiah 29:4-7 - “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷ But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”**
 - The Jews living in exile in Babylon were living in a sort of now and not yet situation - having the promises of restoration to Jerusalem but still living for a time in exile. How can what God told them about how to live encourage us as believers while we live in this “now and not yet” time in history?
 - *We need to live normal lives in a way that glorifies God and blesses those around us. We need to take joy in life and be a blessing to people and place in which God has put us, living as ambassadors for Christ in all we do.*

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **What does this story teach us about our living in the “now and not yet” Kingdom of God while awaiting Christ’s return?**
 - *Living in Christ’s kingdom means treating him as king. We must “abide” in Him, i.e. spend time getting to know Him and his thoughts, loves, and words and then let these things rule our lives. We must submit to his rule in our lives.*
- **Matthew 6:10a - “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”**
 - **After considering this story and these scripture passages, how would you describe what it could mean for God's kingdom to be coming daily here on earth as we await the final return of Christ?**
 - *We seek and pray for the kingdom to keep coming, to be more fully realized on earth here and now.*
 - *It will come as we see his kingdom values more and more lived out on earth through God's children.*
 - *We will see God's children, his kingdom servants, serving in all areas of need and brokenness in this world, seeking change that honors God and blesses people.*
- **What are some examples of places, situations, and activities even beyond the preaching and teaching of God's Word that Christians should be involved with to see God's kingdom come more and more in this world?**
 - *Because of the Gospel - because we are new creations in Christ, we as believers should be involved in all types of activities that bring redemption and restoration to our broken world. These could include the following:*
 - *Helping people out of types of slavery*

- *Seeking fairness and human rights for all races, tribes, sexes, ages.*
- *Caring for refugees*
- *Helping the hungry to feed themselves*
- *Educating the ignorant.*
- *Using arts to glorify God and promote Christian values.*
- *Encourage honesty and integrity in business and government.*
- *Doing all of this in connection with the making of disciples of Christ throughout the world*

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What situation or problem in the world around you do you think God may be calling you to enter into as Christ's ambassador? To try to find solutions? or bring relief to the people who are suffering? or to share Christ's words?**
 - **What large problem in your community or in the world do you feel God is calling you to devote to Him in regular prayer?**
-

FURTHER READING: (Paraphrased from Serge's Sonship course):

- When the Holy Spirit delivers to our hearts with power how great God's love is for sinners, that knowledge convicts us and challenges our tendency to live for ourselves. Because he first loves us, that love from Him stirs up in our hearts an answering love for him. Then that love moves us out in love for others whom he loves. It is our ongoing amazement with the gospel at work in our hearts that drives us to be messengers of it to others. The joy that comes from continually experiencing forgiveness for our sins; the honor and security we find in experiencing again and again our adoption as God's kids; the wonder at possessing a righteousness that is not our own -- these truths move us in love toward others
- As we wrestle with the brokenness or sin in our own hearts (the battles with lust, the fears that grip us, the anger that controls us), we become more aware of the brokenness in others as fellow sinners, and in the world around us. Gospel transformation in our own lives not only makes us more sympathetic toward the brokenness of the world, it makes us more able to enter into it to bring hope. We can engage our broken world with great expectation for Jesus to work, because the same Christ who has redeemed our broken hearts is powerful enough to redeem our world.
- A big part of what prevents us from moving into other peoples' lives is not a lack of tools or knowledge, but rather our own selfish agendas, fears, desires, and unbelief. Our fears of being perceived a certain way by our unbelieving friends, the lack of control we feel when we're put into situations we don't know how to handle, and our addiction to our own comfort and preservation are a few of the idols that block us from moving outward toward others.
- Renewal and mission lead to rejoicing in God's work. The joy we experience when we taste the gospel again and again for ourselves is closely connected to our joy in gospel work happening in the world. We not only have the privilege of being drawn closer to Him personally, we also get to be involved in what he's doing to draw others to Himself.
- Part of the vision we have for growth in grace is that God is working in us to restore us to human life as God meant it to be. That means that as we are living in dependence on our Father--no longer orphans--we are given productive work to do, alongside him. Repentance and faith

re-aligns us with our Father's heart for his creation. As the first human beings were given work to do to cultivate God's garden, so now in this era redeemed men and women are engaged in God's broader redemptive activity to restore what he has made. There are different expressions of mission for different people in different times and places, but the missional heart is always the same. Mission flows from the gospel, and the essential core of the gospel is the heartbeat of all mission.

In Summary: The Kingdom - Movement through Renewal and Mission

- When the gospel is properly understood and embraced, the natural result will be a focus on the **larger Kingdom of God**. The gospel connects us to Jesus and to his broader mission, which is to bring redemption to all of creation. Therefore, the gospel moves us to lay down our lives for those who do not know the grace of Jesus, and to enter into the brokenness of the world in order to push back the effects of the Fall (mercy, reconciliation, education, justice, etc.).
- God calls us as his children to participate in his big story of redemption and mission. Our spiritual renewal sends us out into mission. Mission and its challenges for our hearts send us back to Jesus in need of renewal. And renewal sends us back out in mission and so on. This is the right and healthy pattern of the Gospel working in the lives of Christ's disciples. **Renewal and mission in a continuous growing cycle.**

Extra Story:

31. The Parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

Key Theme: The Upside Down Kingdom

[Core Gospel Concepts: Kingdom, Love]

Context:

- Before telling this parable, Jesus meets with a rich young leader who ends up not following Jesus because his love for his possessions was too great (19:16–22). The disciples were shocked because in their culture wealth and position were connected with righteousness and blessing. How could someone who seemed so righteous and had received so much blessing not enter the kingdom of heaven? In his shock, Peter asked Jesus, “We’ve given up everything to follow you. What blessing will there be for us?” Jesus then assured them that there is great reward in giving up the world to follow Him (19:23–30). He even promised that the disciples will sit on twelve thrones and rule with Him. And “many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”
- Ironically, after hearing this parable, we see the disciples are still thinking about those thrones in heaven when James and John ask to be the ones to sit to the right and left of Jesus (20:20–28). They are still slow to figure out what Jesus is teaching!

THE STORY:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

“About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went.

“He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

“ ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

“The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they

began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

MEMORY VERSE (optional):

- **Matthew 20:16:** “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

INTRODUCTION QUESTION: (discuss with neighbor):

- **What is the difference in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world?**

TEACHER’S TRANSITION STATEMENT:

- Jesus often uses word pictures and stories like our story today to help describe what the kingdom of God will be like as it comes to pass more and more. This helps us know better how to live as followers of the King.

LEARN STORY TOGETHER:(Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory:
 - Note all the words and actions of the landowner.
 - Note who is most concerned about things being fair!

BASIC OUTLINE of DISCUSSION: (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **THE LANDLORD:** What was he seeking? How did he treat his workers? How did he explain his choices?
- **THE EARLY WORKERS:** What was their complaint? What did they forget? What was Jesus trying to teach about God’s kingdom?
- **THE CONTEXT:** What happened before and after Jesus told the parable? How can this help us understand the parable itself?
- **OUR HEARTS - THE GOSPEL - THE KINGDOM:** What does this parable reveal about our hearts? How can the Gospel help us battle our sin and seek his kingdom?
- **GENERAL APPLICATION:** When we see how God gives out his mercy, love, and blessings to different people, how can we sometimes act like the people who have worked

all day in this story? If we're angry or jealous, what does this tell us about what we expect God's kingdom to be like?

- **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** In what way lately have I been like the complaining early workers? How do my expectations about God's kingdom need to change?
- **SHARING:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (with some possible responses):

- **What does Jesus mean by “the kingdom of God”?**
 - *the time and place when God is king, when He rules and is in control.*

THE LANDLORD:

- **What was the landowner seeking? Why do you think Jesus used a vineyard in this parable? How does this relate to God and His Kingdom? I.e. Why is a vineyard a good picture of God's kingdom?**
 - *Workers are there to work in his vineyard, to accomplish his purposes.*
 - *A vineyard is a place of growth, hard work, pruning, fruitfulness*
 - *God is looking for servants to join him in his purposes, to bear fruit for Him, to partner in growth and blessing of His world and those in it.*
- **What agreement did the landowner make with his workers? Did he fulfill his agreement?**
- **How often and at what times did he take on more laborers? What did he promise them?**

THE EARLY WORKERS:

- **Why did the early workers start to complain? How would you have felt in their situation?**
 - *When they saw the late workers being rewarded equally to themselves after they worked all day. Did not feel fair.*
- **What had they seemed to forget? How did the landowner respond to their complaint?**
 - *They forgot that it was all grace. The landowner did not need to hire any of them, and could have left them without any work to earn a living. Also he did fulfill his promises to them. He had the right to share his wealth just as he wished.*
- **Compare the people who worked all day long with the older son in the story of the two lost sons. What are some ways that they are alike?**
- **What was Jesus trying to teach his disciples?**

- *The kingdom of God is different from the kingdom of this world. It is dependent on God's grace and kindness and requires its citizens to trust their king even when they don't fully understand why he does certain things.*

THE CONTEXT:

- **What had happened just before and just after Jesus told this parable?**
 - *Before:*
 - *Rich young ruler could not be saved depending on wealth & status.*
 - *Jesus promises great reward, even thrones in His kingdom, for those sacrificing themselves to follow Him.*
 - *Promise about the kingdom of God: the last will be first and the first will be last*
 - *Jesus told them of his upcoming death and resurrection. Connected it to his kingdom - though they did not understand.*
 - *After:*
 - *The disciples argue about their own importance.*
- **How does this context help us better understand what the parable is teaching about the kingdom of God?**
 - *Jesus made the promise about the kingdom of God, that the last will be first and the first will be last, just as **the one considered to be first on earth (the rich young ruler) will be last while the ones considered last on earth (those who give up to everything on earth to follow Jesus) will be exalted in heaven.** This parable continues to show how in God's kingdom, things work oppositely from in the world.*
 - *This could have made the disciples feel a bit proud - to know that they had made a better choice than the young ruler and would be rewarded.*
 - *The disciples were wrongly concerned about what position they would deserve in the kingdom because of their commitment to Jesus. It shows how in our flesh we naturally compare ourselves to others to think who is most deserving of blessing. Certain disciples could have thought that they deserved a higher place in heaven because of their commitment or closeness to Jesus.*
 - *In the parable, the people who came last were paid first, and those who came first were paid last. The people who were first, who had worked longer, were not privileged because of their goodness or their hard work.*
 - *The blessing granted was determined by the landowner. He had the right to show or withhold grace as he pleased.*
 - *It is only because of what Jesus came to do on the cross that there is grace available to all, the first and the last.*
 - *The fact that the disciples were still arguing about their own importance even after hearing this parable shows us how deeply our love of self is ingrained in our hearts. Only the work of the Spirit in our hearts can change us as we continue to repent and put our hope in the Gospel.*

OUR HEARTS - THE GOSPEL - THE KINGDOM:

- **What are the tendencies of our heart that this parable reveals? What is Jesus teaching us that helps us defeat these tendencies? How does the Gospel help us?**
 - *Our hearts are full of self pride and envy.*
 - *He reminds us that all we have is from God, that all our blessings are from God's generosity, not our own doing. The disciples are no better than the rich man.*
 - *Jesus knows we are prone to envy. He challenges His disciples and us not to look to what others have and become bitter and jealous. Such envy destroys our souls and forgets that all of life is a gift from God.*
 - *This parable gives us a vision for **God's generous grace toward us and toward others**. Life is found when we fix our eyes not horizontally on what others have but vertically on the generosity of the whole-earth landowner, King Jesus, who calls us friends and who gives wisely and generously.*

- **What is the Gospel, according to 1 Corinthians 15:3-5a?**
 - *"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to . . ."*
 - **According to these verses, what happened to Jesus on earth (and what it accomplishes for us) is the Gospel.**
 - **So what did Jesus tell his disciples after he told them this parable of the laborers in the vineyard? How does this help them and us understand his teaching about the kingdom of God?**
 - He reminds them of what was coming, i.e. his suffering, death, and resurrection.
 - This is what is most important in the kingdom of God - putting our trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus - and deepening our relationship with him - NOT seeking after or clinging to wealth and status like the rich young ruler nor arguing about what is fair in how the king shares his gifts.
 - The kingdom of God is always centered around the Gospel of God's grace to us sinners in Jesus Christ!

- **READ Acts 20:24,25,27** - ²⁴ *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of **testifying to the gospel** of God's grace.* ²⁵ *"Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about **preaching the kingdom** will ever see me again. . . ."* ²⁷ *For I have not hesitated to **proclaim to you the whole will of God**.*
 - **Paul describes his one big task in three ways. What are they?**
 - testifying to the gospel of God's grace
 - preaching the kingdom
 - proclaiming the whole will of God.
 - **What does this tell you about the relationship between these three things: the gospel of God's grace, the kingdom, and the whole will of God?**
 - They are all the same thing.

- the gospel of God's grace sums up the whole message of the kingdom of God!

GENERAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (discuss with whole group)

- **When we see how God gives out his mercy, love, and blessings to different people, how do we sometimes act like the people who have worked all day in this story? If we're angry or jealous, what does this tell us about what we expect God's kingdom to be like? How are we not understanding God's kingdom? How does this hurt others?**
 - We may think deep in our hearts, "The kingdom of God should be more fair to people like me! People like me should be paid more! Yes, God is merciful. But I deserve his mercy more than other people do!"
 - We ourselves only show love or mercy to people like ourselves, who seem more deserving. We fail to reach out to all those God wants us to reach.
 -
- **Jesus told us to pray, "(May) Your kingdom come." How should this parable make us think about His kingdom and who He wants to reach and help? What should our part be in seeing His kingdom come?**
 - His kingdom and all its blessings are for all types of people. Nobody deserves to be part of His kingdom but God mercifully offers His kingdom to all people.
 - We should be working to extend His kingdom to all people.
- **If the Lord's prayer helps us understand what Christ's kingdom is like, what type of things should be happening as His kingdom comes more and more fully into the world? In other words, what changes in our world should we be working toward as we believe the Gospel and follow Jesus?**
 - *A place where God's name is honored.*
 - *A place where God's reign is growing more and more.*
 - *A place where God's will and law are honored and obeyed more and more.*
 - *A place where people's needs (daily bread) are supplied, where the poor, sick, and oppressed are cared for, where justice and compassion are practiced.*
 - *A place where forgiveness and mercy are displayed between people as we receive God's mercy.*
 - *A place where we are able to battle and be delivered from temptation to sin and evil.*
- **How are we like the people who came to work at 5:00? When have we received blessings that we did not deserve?**
 - *The truth is we think we are the people who worked hard all day, but in reality we are the people who showed up at 5:00 pm. We pretend we deserve more than others, but in reality we are sinful and lazy and don't deserve any of God's mercy. The more we think we are deserving, the more we cancel out the grace of God toward ourselves and others.*
 - *This is why the early church was slow to reach out to the Gentiles. They thought people had to be like Jews in order to receive God's*

mercy. "They are not like us. Don't have our history as God's people. Have not obeyed the law enough." What are some things that hinder us from reaching out to others?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS: (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **How are you like the people who worked all day long? Can you think of a recent time when you thought like them?**
- **How are you like the people who came to work at 5:00? When have you recently received blessing that you know you did not deserve?**
- **What is something that hinders you personally from reaching out to others? How is God calling you to help grow his kingdom showing His love and mercy to others?**

EXTRA READING:

From Living in Light of the Kingdom:

"God's love and mercy can be unpredictable and shocking. Many people end up receiving far more than they expected. For example in the parable of the two lost sons, the rebellious son received far more than he could have imagined when he returned to his father. In this parable about the kingdom, some workers receive more than they deserved. In both stories, other people became angry and jealous. So God's mercy can bring out both the best and the worst in us! **The grace of God is so overwhelming and extravagant that it cannot fail to confuse and amaze us and turn our world upside down.** It reveals what we really think about ourselves and other people. In the story of the unforgiving servant we cannot begin to understand the greatness of the debt (10,000 talents!) which we owe God and the greatness of God's mercy toward us. But when we are honest with ourselves we begin to see that we are just like the unforgiving servant, withholding mercy toward other people even though God did not withhold mercy from us. That's what happened in today's story."

In Summary:

- We are part of something far greater than just our own individual transformation. Our own growth is an important part of God's kingdom expansion, but it is much more.
- The characteristics of the kingdom are contrary to the way we normally think.
 - The first are last – winners are losers – the rich are poor - God opposes the proud yet is kind to the humble - those who think they have everything in the world have nothing at all.
- To live in light of the kingdom is to be a part of God's plan for this world. It is to be involved in something much greater than our own lives.
- Encouraging believers to be involved in God's work of restoration of all broken things
 - consider affinities, abilities, and opportunities
- Keeping the Gospel fresh for myself is vital to joining God in His kingdom purposes