

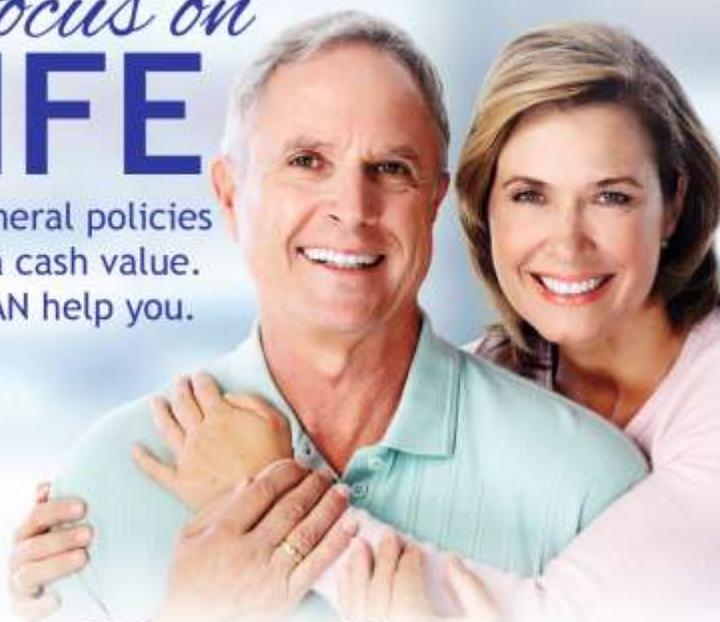
Daily Devotional

Booklet



we focus on
LIFE

ALL funeral policies
have a cash value.
We CAN help you.



East Rand

Funeral Directors

Prompt, efficient, yet homely!

Your **COMMUNITY** Funeral Director

Office: 011 425 0276 | All Hours: 083 266 1926
No.2, 14th Ave, Northmead, Benoni | www.eastrandfunerals.co.za

This booklet can be used as a stand-alone daily devotional. Or, if you would like to follow the sermons, they can be downloaded from our website at www.northfield.co.za or a cd-set of the sermon series is available for sale in our bookshop, and can be used as an accompaniment for this booklet. If you are using the devotions together with the sermon series at Northfield Methodist Church, then the readings start the day AFTER the sermon is preached, and the start date for each reading is:

FAMOUS OLD TESTAMENT STORIES

NOAH	Page 01	18 October 2020
DAVID AND GOLIATH	Page 08	25 October 2020
DANIEL AND THE LION'S DEN	Page 15	01 November 2020
JOSEPH AND THE DREAMCOAT	Page 22	08 November 2020
SAMSON AND DELILAH	Page 29	15 November 2020
ESTHER	Page 36	22 November 2020
MOSES AND THE RED SEA	Page 43	29 November 2020

These devotions are written by a team of writers and ministers from Northfield Methodist Church. An electronic version of this booklet that is formatted for easy reading on your tablet or phone, can be downloaded from our website, or you can request to be added to the email list.

These daily devotions booklets are free of charge. They go to our congregation, and they are used for personal devotions and by Bible study and cell groups. Our visitations teams also take them to people who are in hospitals and who are home-bound, and to aged-care facilities and prisons. To keep these booklets free, and to be able to print as many as possible to spread them far and wide, we really need your help! To make any contribution towards our costs, please use the banking details:

Northfield Methodist Church

Standard Bank Account Number: 02 105 9446

Branch Code: 013 042

Please use DEVOTIONS as the reference. Email proof of payment to Jackie: jackie@nfmc.org.za

Thank you for your support of this ministry! For more information, contact Jackie at 010 140 0210, or email at jackie@nfmc.org.za.

©Northfield Methodist Church.

RIGHTEOUSNESS: DAY ONE

Read Gen 7:1

Note the contrast that is being drawn between Noah and his family and others. Noah and family are living righteously when others aren't.

Righteous living, defined biblically, refers to a loyalty to live as God made and intended us to live. This involves living in a mutual relationship with God and with others, where God blesses, multiplies and sustains the human beings He made to enjoy life with Him and to be the recipients of His Fatherly care. Ours is the task simply to remain in this reality thereby living righteously. The unrighteous chose not to remain in this reality. We live unrighteously when we don't live in mutual relationship with God and others.

Righteousness requires obedience – choosing and doing what God says even when in your mind, it doesn't make better sense than other options available. If there is any disagreement between the ways of the world and the ways of God, righteousness opts for the ways of God, no matter how enticing or beneficial other options seem to be.

Righteousness is love and love is righteousness and as God is righteous in extending his love to all people – showing no partiality; the righteous too extend love and care to all irrespective of ethnic, national, cultural, social, sexual or religious distinctions.

Hear the challenge to live righteously in this generation. Noah lived as a person of hope to others in entering into righteous living. He was hope in his righteousness and not in any other state. We offer hope when we remain in the life God intends for us, not outside of it. We offer hope in being obedient, even when we don't understand God's way. We offer hope in loving others – even when it hurts.

Prayer: Father, lead me into your righteousness. Amen

OFFERING HOPE: DAY TWO

Read: Gen 8:15-17

As Noah entered the ark so that he could bring life out of the ark and cause life to multiply and be fruitful, we become people of hope when our presence brings out life.

Do you cause life to multiply – does your presence in another’s life cause them to live expansively or is your presence in the lives of others restrictive? Are people’s lives fuller and deeper and more whole in your presence?

This is the life we are called, through Noah, to live. This is the life that offers hope. This is the life that we can enter into through Jesus, the righteous One. Listen to the writer of I Peter speaking about how we become righteous in Christ:

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits - ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand - with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him (3:18-21).

Jesus makes us righteous and offers abundant and full life to all. Don’t miss out on this life of hope. Our generation needs people of hope.

***Prayer: Jesus make me righteous so that I may be a source of hope.
Amen***

A SECOND ARK: DAY THREE

Read: Exodus 2:1-9

Note how integral a part the faith of Moses' mother was in God's act of deliverance.

She saw in her son something good (v2). She believed her son to be created by God and thus purposed by God and no matter how slim the chance given for her son's survival, she would take that slim chance and use it in the best way she could. And so she conceals him for three months. When this plan runs out, she again displays her faith by placing her son in a basket on the Nile (v3). The word for basket is the same word used for ark in Gen 6. Like the ark, the basket just floats without any human control/influence – it is at the mercy of the elements. Moses' mother has done everything humanly possible to keep her son alive and now leaves him at the mercy of God. She has acted in faith.

In the most despairing situation, God will use simple acts of faith to make himself known as the Deliverer. God takes those little acts of faith, those very possible acts of faith and uses them and adds to them to bring about great and presumed impossible realities into being. Who would have thought that a mother who calls on the God who delivered Noah in the ark to once again deliver her son whom she places in a basket would be the mother of him who was to lead the Hebrew people out of the land of Egypt?

God the Deliverer can work in all things. God can work through the schemes of evil and the possibility of deliverance from the most trying circumstances. If there is a circumstance you need God to deliver you from, know that he is looking for a simple and possible act of faith in the midst of trying circumstances that He can use and add to, to make himself known as God the Deliverer.

Prayer: I praise you as my Deliverer from all evil, sin, suffering and death. Amen

EARLY IDEAS ABOUT GOD: DAY FOUR

Read: Gen 6

The flood account is a really old portion of literature and there are many ideas that are mentioned here and nowhere else – mention of the Nephilim (v4) is one such idea. It is a raw, unrefined and undeveloped piece of literature. As such, it offers an understanding of God that will need to be shaped and sharpened by later Scriptures which do a far better job in defining God and his covenant love.

And so Gen 6 offers a picture of God that is inconsistent and not supported by the gradual unfolding of who God is revealed to be in the rest of Scripture; an unfolding that culminates in the revelation of God through the person of Jesus, who says, “If you know me, you know the Father.” In the account, God is presented as regretting creating (v6-8) and being a little impulsive by causing a flood (v17) - which again, He later regrets (see 9:12). God’s love is presented as a very conditional and deserved love. It is a love that is still exclusive and determined by the worthiness of the receiver rather than by the abundance of the Giver. It is going to take other Scriptures to get to the point where God’s love is self-determined, instead of being determined by human behaviour.

A biblical scholar by the name of Richard Rohr says, “The flood account is a good example of Scripture being a text in travail: struggling toward its conclusions, and only getting the point step by step, and frequently stepping backward. The important thing is to stay in the process, stay with the unfolding text and allow it to lead you forward. The genius of the biblical text is that this capacity for course correction, for self-critique, is actually contained in the book itself! In time, Scripture will correct its own inconsistencies and inaccuracies.”

***Prayer: Lord, keep me reading Your Word in the light of Your Son Jesus.
Amen***

COVENANT REFOCUS: DAY FIVE

Read Jer 31:27-34

The days are coming when I will make a new covenant (v31)... not to make the old obsolete. The content of the old covenant remains – it is not bad, it is good; it is from God. This new covenant is the content of the old covenant offered in a different location. In v 33, we are told that the placement of the Law changes from stone and parchment to within people. The law of God will be placed within people. God says His law will be an inside matter, not an outside matter which will change people from the inside out. In v29-30, we are told that in the new covenant each person is held responsible for the sins they commit. The suffering and destructiveness of sin is upon the sinners life and in the new covenant, something is offered to contain that sin from spilling over and having its way with those exposed to the wake of the sin of another. In the new covenant something is offered that allows those who would normally suffer from the consequence of the sin of another to live a life free from such suffering. That does not mean that the new covenant stops the sin of other people impacting our lives. We will still be rocked by the sins others commit, but the new covenant offers me something that frees me from living under the suffering of the sin of another that impacts my life. The power of sin is not a trivial matter. But the power offered in the new covenant is greater than the power of any sin!!A further characteristic of the covenant is given in v34. In the old covenant there were representatives on behalf of the people. But all of these people were fallible and as such limited God's grace and favour reaching all people. And so Jeremiah knows that there would come a time when God would cause His truth to shine through directly into the world of every person more fully than ever before; that all God's people would be have access to God through the new covenant. That makes the new covenant is personal and relational, and every person is given the opportunity to directly participate in a living relationship with God through the new covenant.

Prayer: Father lead me into this new covenant. Amen

COVENANT LOVE IN JESUS: DAY SIX

Read Mark 14:22-26

Jesus and his disciples are observing the Passover meal – an observation that makes them remember a covenant they took with God while still in bondage in Egypt. But Jesus takes this Passover meal and adds to it; He takes something that already is – covenant relationship with God and adds to the gift; He introduces a new covenant – a new deal between God and the people of God. New because:

- something would happen through Jesus' life on earth that would result in a new way of experiencing a covenant relationship with God.
- the quality or nature or basis of the relationship is to change. No longer will the deal be on the basis of obedience to the law, but it will now be a function of the blood that Jesus shed – a sacrificial love i.e. Jesus says I will do what I will do to show you how much you are loved by God. Relationship to God is now on the basis of living within the love of God rather than living under the law of God; relating to God as a Father rather than as Judge – making us not criminals but children of God – even if it be disobedient children.
- it will be based on the power of a life giving Spirit received internally rather than received externally written on stone.

In 2 Cor 2:17-3:11, Paul's contrasts the covenants offered in the O.T. and the new covenant offered in Christ. He speaks of the glory of the new covenant being because it produces pardon and offers life rather than condemnation and death. It promises inward holiness, individual knowledge and full forgiveness. It is an offer to live from today onwards with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a new way. It is the offer that we need if we want to be spiritually awake, Scripturally informed, personally growing and always servant minded.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the pardon and life offered in Your new covenant with me.

GROUP NOTES

FAMOUS OLD TESTAMENT STORIES - NOAH

The Noah accounts recorded in Genesis 6-9 capture wonderful moments of God's covenant love, His rich grace and a call to live our lives within these parameters.

Welcome:

Share either a personal or a second hand account of either:

- God's covenant love
- God's rich grace
- God's call to bring life into the parameters of His kingdom

Worship:

Read II Cor 2:17-3:11. Offer praise and thanksgiving for the glory of the pardon, new life, holiness, personal growth and forgiveness for God's love found in His new covenant through Christ.

Word:

Read: Gen 7:1 and 8:15-17

1. In what ways are you and your family live righteously in this generation?
2. Does the church in any way live unrighteously in this generation? How?
3. How does your living cause others to live a fuller, deeper, more expansive life?
4. Is there any quality in your life that smothers and restricts other people's lives?
5. What is your understanding of the covenant God makes with people?

Work:

What one act will draw your life closer to God or cause your life to be lived within the parameters of God's mercy, love and direction?

LISTENING FOR THE VOICE OF PEACE: DAY ONE

Read 1 Samuel 17:1-11

Reading this passage for today, I find the preparation that the Israelites had they were ready for war, while they are standing in lines and waiting for the command to charge both nations wait. Soon comes out a champion of the philistine camp, standing tall 3 meters tall and he starts with this amazing armour and weapons. Insulting the nation of Israel and thinking less of them even goes far to mock our God.

Filled with fear the Israelites don't know what to do, I could imagine the fear that just disorientate the army and King Saul. The moment the fear kicks in they forget the past. The glorious past days that God has been good to them. They lose faith and are filled with fear.

We sometimes hear the bad news delivered to us or family members and get disorientated with life, difficult times at workplaces or even the challenges (The Goliaths) we face in a day can just disorientate our days and so lose our 'preparation'. We then face our days with sombre faces and sometimes forget about the goodness that God has blessed us with during that exact day. We forget what our own champion, the Lord is capable of doing, what he did yesterday and what he will do tomorrow.

What voice are you listening to? The voice that fills us with fear or the voice that leads us to freedom?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me focus on your goodness and hear your voice that guides me.

GOD THINKS MORE OF US, THAN WHAT WE THINK : DAY TWO

Read 1 Samuel 17:26-28

There are times when one's ability to do something is underestimated, could be because of age, gender or even background. David was a shepherd while his brothers were in the army. Must have been hard for him to prove that he is able and capable to do what his brothers can't do especially at his age. While talking to men in the battlefield and questioning them about the giant that has come out to defy Israel, questioning them about the reward once this challenge of Israel, the giant is killed. Eliab, David's oldest brother rudely reminds him of what he is supposed to be doing, reminding him that he is no soldier but just a shepherd V28 "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those sheep in the dessert?"

We are capable and worth more of what we think of ourselves. When we know who God is, we know that we can do all things through Him who gives us strength (Philippians 4:13). God is ready to use us out of our comfort zones so that we are not defined by what we think or by what people think we are. Let us also not find ourselves in a place where we are like the brother of David underestimating people and thinking less of them, but rather love the people like we love ourselves regardless of their age, gender or the background.

Are you ready to be used by God?

Are you ready to be able to grow your territory and discover what God thinks of you and what He can make you do?

Prayer: Dear Lord, use me to grow in love and knowledge of what you

NOT CONFORMING BUT BEING DIFFERENT: DAY THREE

Read 1 Samuel 17:38-40

David embraces who he is. The 'little' boy is dressed in a tunic, given a sword, helmet and full armour, but when he tries walking, he is uncomfortable and takes it off. What is beautiful for me about this passage is that he goes without protective gear, he chooses the way of simplicity. He then picks up five smooth stones from a stream, puts them in his pouch and walks towards this giant with his staff in his hand, not a sword but a staff.

His simplicity was mocked, but at the same time his simplicity didn't hold him back. I am reminded here, of what Apostle Paul wrote about in Romans 12:2, he says that we should not conform to the patterns of this world. That was the pattern of being a soldier and certain uniform to wear, but David breaks that culture. He goes without any protection, embracing what he is capable of and steps out in faith. He embraces the fact that he is a shepherd but not any shepherd, a shepherd that has protected and fought off lions from the sheep.

We need to embrace who we are and not allow people to define us. The things we allow to define us can be so overwhelming, they can slow us down and even drag us down. We need to be confident and not conform to the patterns of the world. We need to trust in God and embrace who we are meant to be.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me embrace who I am and be defined by you. Amen

WEAPON FOR FAITH: DAY FOUR

Read 1 Samuel 17:41-51

A boy faces the giant and actually saves a nation, a whole nation. A nation that was filled with fear, didn't have hope at all and this boy from Bethlehem steps in and saves the day. Because of faith, courage and knowing who God is, David is able to feat goliath by relying on God.

Matthew 17:20 states that if we have faith small as a mustard seed, we will be able to tell a mountain to move from there to here. Jesus ends off this story with saying that nothing will be impossible for you. And we experience exactly that with David, because of his great faith, because of his courage and trust in God, it is not impossible for him to defeat the giant that is before him. Nothing is impossible for him because he has faith.

How is your faith today? Is your faith great enough to encourage you and help you move the giant that you face today?

Sometimes it seems like we are way too small for our problems (giants) but surely, we are not, because our God the Lord is Almighty and in his name we should trust. We should approach our giants in the name of the Lord

Prayer: Dear Lord help me grow my faith in you so that it is not easily shaken. Amen

FREEDOM TO REIGN: DAY FIVE

Read 1 Samuel 17:52-54

Day one of this week we looked at how the Israelites were prepared and how after they saw Goliath they were disorientated and filled with fear. The so-called champion, Goliath, caused this change in attitude. Today we know that the story ends by them attacking the Philistines after David killed the giant.

There is a sense that they have been reminded of who God is, what he is capable of and a young boy who is a shepherd delivers that message. The men have been set free to go do what they were initially called to do, which is protect Israel, the nation of God. The freedom that they receive when that giant is brought down gives them purpose.

When we are free, we are able to do and explore more than we ever thought possible. Paul writes in Galatians 5:1 that it is for freedom that Jesus Christ has set us free, so we should stand firm and not let ourselves be burdened by the yoke of slavery.

We have been set free from the fear of the giants, the freedom that Jesus Christ offers allows us and gives us power to pray against that fear. We should stand firm and prepare ourselves today to experience the peace of the Lord and the freedom he offers during hard situations.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to stand firm, unshaken in your word. Amen

WHOSE CHILDREN WE ARE: DAY SIX

Read 1 Samuel 17:55-58

I am struck by the question that King Saul asked. Whose son is that young man? David answers and gives the details of his father. David is now known as the son of Jesse. Now in the African community when you do something good you are asked if people don't know who are your parents? Or whose child are you and they then remember you by your parent's name. The child of X and the reason why they ask for your parents name is that so that they can share and speak of you goodness, but they at the same time they are honouring your parents because they have raised a child that does good. The Son of Jesse has defeated Goliath. Jesse was just a servant, but he is remembered for what his son has accomplished.

In John 13:34-35 Jesus gives a new command which is love one another in the same way he has loved us, after this Jesus says that people will know that we are his disciples by our love.

People will know that we belong to Jesus when we love, show kindness to one another, take care for one another. We are indeed the children of God and as his Children we need to keep on asking Him to use us accordingly, so that we can impact those around us and they can know Him.

***Prayer: Dear Lord, may I be reminded of who I am, a child of God.
Amen***

GROUP NOTES

FAMOUS OLD TESTAMENT STORIES – DAVID AND GOLIATH

Welcome: This week spend some time remembering what God has done in your life, what he is doing right now and what he is still going to do.

Worship: Spend some time listening to Nothing is impossible by the Planetshakers

Word: Read **1 Samuel 17, Matthew 17:20, John 13:34-35, Galatians 5:1**

God is always with us, wherever we are, what he do he never leaves nor forsakes us. We need to remember that we have received freedom through Jesus Christ. We also need some faith, little faith and we become greater than our giants.

- Is your faith great enough to encourage you and help you move the giant that you face?

Work: This week spend some time looking at what challenges brings you down or challenges that disorientate your days and bring this challenges (giants) before the Lord.

A GODLY MAN: DAY ONE

Read Daniel 6. “At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.” (v. 4, NIV)

Daniel was a godly man who was in right standing with God. He was not corrupt. He was not negligent – neither in his relationship with God nor with man.

Even after reading through the whole of the story of Daniel and the Lions in Daniel 6, we never see him set a foot wrong. Even after being saved from the lions and being restored to his position and prospering, he never glorifies himself. He never blows his own trumpet. He does everything for the glory of God.

He placed his relationship with God above everything else and although he prospered greatly, he did it all for God’s glory. The fact that he was willing to risk his life in the lions’ den in order to pray to God led to the entire nation serving God. God uses Daniel’s story to His glory. He saves Daniel’s life and he allows him to flourish, but the Kingdom of God is exalted above all through Daniel’s relationship with God and God’s relationship with man.

We may all make mistakes and we may all fall short of Daniel’s godly ways, but we can learn a lot from him and his story.

Let us not live in order to seek glory for ourselves, but to glorify God in all that we do.

Lord, help me, like Daniel, to glorify you. Amen.

THE LAW OF MAN AND THE LAW OF GOD: DAY TWO

Read Daniel 6. "Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." (v. 10, NIV)

The Law that was made by the King through the satraps went against everything that Daniel believed in. It forbade him from praying to God – the foundation of his life. The law of man tried to supersede the law of God; but Daniel did not let that stop him.

Daniel placed his relationship with God above his relationship with man. He knowingly went against the King's orders and continued to pray to his Father in heaven. Although outlawed where he lived, Daniel did not let the laws of man interfere with his personal relationship with God.

Jesus reminds us of this in the New Testament too: *"Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."* (Mark 12:17). Even though we are to follow the rules set out for us by the rulers appointed in our land, those laws will never supersede our relationship with God.

I hope, personally, that I have the conviction to stand up for my beliefs in God if they are ever outlawed by man. I pray that I will have courage and strength through the Spirit not to let anything stand in the way of my relationship with God. I pray that God will make me brave enough to stand up against evil in this world in order to glorify His name. I pray to always give to God what is God's.

Lord, give me the strength to stand up for you. Amen.

RESCUE: DAY THREE

Read Daniel 6. “Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.”” (v. 21-22, NIV)

Daniel must have been petrified when he found himself sealed in with lions. He must have been scared out of his mind. But, he never let go of faith in God. He knew that whether the lions ate him or not, he would be okay through his relationship with God. He always had hope. He didn't let the fear brought on by man change his faith in God. He clung onto the godly relationship with all he had.

Even when we don't think that we can take what life is throwing at us anymore, even if it seems like there is no way out of a situation, God rescues us from ourselves and the world. No matter how dire our circumstances, God is willing to shut the mouths of the dangers facing us. God clings on to us when we are in the mouth of the lion. He scarred himself through His Son's death, so that we can be rescued. There is always hope. And in Jesus Christ, we have eternal hope.

Life's troubles may weigh us down, but we have the hope of permanent rescue from death. We have the hope of life eternal with our God who longs to rescue us through His Son.

Lord, thank you for rescuing me through your Son. Amen.

BEING BOLD FOR AND THROUGH GOD: DAY FOUR

Read 2 Corinthians 3:11-12. "So if the old way, which has been replaced, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new, which remains forever! Since this new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold." (NLT)

Daniel is such an example of being bold for God. But more than being bold for God, He is bold through God. It is God's strength that makes Daniel bold. And it is God's strength that can make us bold.

Boldness is defined as being courageous and daring; not hesitating; being willing to break the accepted laws (dictionary.com).

Daniel was bold in going against the King's decree and praying to God anyway. Daniel was bold in being unafraid when being thrown into the lions' den. Daniel was bold in being courageous enough to believe in God and stand firm in his faith. Daniel believed in God more than he believed in himself. God made him bold. May we learn from Daniel and be bold enough to believe in God and stand firm in our faith. May we be bold enough to stand up for our faith and our beliefs. May we ask God to embolden us through His strength so that we can face whatever situation we find ourselves in. May we be strong and courageous through and for God.

"So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you." (Deuteronomy 31:6, NIV)

Lord, help me to be bold. Amen.

PROPHECY: DAY FIVE

Read Daniel 6. "Very early the next morning, the king got up and hurried out to the lions' den." (v. 19, NLT)

The King running out to see whether Daniel was alive finds an echo in the New Testament, when Mary and Mary Magdalene run to Jesus' grave (Matthew 28:1). The story of Daniel coming out from the lions' den alive prophesied Jesus coming out of the tomb in the Resurrection story: the very Resurrection story that rescues us and emboldens us today.

Just as God rescued Daniel from the den of lions, Jesus made a way for us to eternal life in God's Kingdom. Jesus rescued us through dying for our sins. He rescues us today through being in relationship with Him and He promises us rescue of the eternal kind when we live with Him forever after this life.

Just as Daniel was lifted up out of the lions' den without a scratch, Jesus came out of the grave. Daniel came out of the den for God's glory. Jesus came out of the grave for God's glory and to stand in the gap so that we can have a close, personal relationship with God.

"For he is the living God, and he will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end. He rescues and saves his people; he performs miraculous signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions." (Daniel 6: 26-27, NLT)

Lord, thank you rescuing me. Amen.

HOLY BOLDNESS: DAY SIX

Read Daniel 6.

Give me a holy boldness,

A boldness to step out in faith

No matter the risk.

A boldness to share you with

All those that I encounter.

A boldness to say what you want me to say

Without fear about what may or may not happen.

A boldness to be your representative

No matter where I go

A boldness to go where you tell me to

No matter how hard or impossible it may seem.

A boldness to sing, dance, and laugh

Without fear of being judged and be the person you made me to be.

A boldness to love the unlovable

And to care for those that no one else cares about.

A boldness to listen when everyone else would speak

And let people be heard who otherwise wouldn't be heard.

A boldness to shine your light in the darkest of places

Because those are the places that need it the most.

A boldness to admit that I am not perfect

That I am as broken as everyone else.

A boldness to accept that you love me,

That I don't have to earn it,

That I need you more than anything else

And without you, I am nothing

I can do nothing

And that you will never leave me nor forsake me. (Writing Reese)

Lord, make me a Daniel in today's world. Amen.

DANIEL AND THE LIONS' DEN

Group Notes

Welcome: Discuss as a group what you remember about the story of Daniel and the Lions' Den. When last did you read it?

Worship: Listen to "You Make Me Brave" by Amanda Lindsey Cook. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Hi-VMxT6fc>) Ask God to make you brave.

Word: **Read *Daniel 6; Mark 12:17; 2 Corinthians 3:11-12; Deuteronomy 31:6.***

God rescued Daniel from the lions and his enemies at the time and He rescues us now.

- After rereading the story of Daniel and the lions, what stands out for you?
- How can we have a relationship with God like Daniel had with God?
- How can the story of Daniel and God influence our relationships with others?
- What other Scriptures show us how God makes us brave?

Work: This week, ask God to make you bold.

THE POWER TO FORGIVE: DAY ONE

Reading: Genesis 37:19-24

“19 “Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. 20 “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.” 21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. 22 “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing- 24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.”

This week, we turn our attention to Joseph – a very familiar character of the Bible. Many of us are familiar with the story through Andrew Lloyd Weber’s musical, “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat”. The story of Joseph spans fourteen chapters in the Book of Genesis – taking up nearly one third of the whole book!

We all have had tough experiences in life. We all have had to learn how to forgive and acknowledge how difficult it can be to forgive. Forgiveness is a difficult and delicate thing, but what the story of Joseph teaches us, is that forgiveness is not impossible, and when it is given, it becomes one of the greatest heroic acts you can possibly imagine. That’s the story of Joseph!

As we reflect on Joseph and the power to forgive, can you think of forgiveness in your own life? Have you received or had to offer forgiveness?

Prayer: Jesus Christ, today I pray for the courage to offer and receive forgiveness. Amen

SIBLING RIVALRY GONE BAD: DAY TWO

Reading: Genesis 37, 2-4

“2 This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented [a] robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.”

The author of Genesis wants us to know that Joseph and his brothers were not very tight. In fact, we read that the brothers “hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.” Hold on to that phrase for a while! Sibling rivalry is a real old story. And as bad as sibling rivalry may be, in the story of Joseph it goes from bad to worse. There is no debate required....Joseph is clearly the winner when it comes to the contest of favourites. This is the way that John Ortberg describes it: “Joseph was the favorite. When the other boys would walk in the room, Jacob would ask them about the flocks or whether their chores were done. When Joseph walked into the room, their dad’s eyes would light up. His face would beam. Joseph was the one that Dad would brag about. Jacob knew how Joseph was doing in school, who his teachers were, and what his friends’ names were. Jacob was a little fuzzy about the details of the other boys’ lives. In a hundred ways – in ways that most parents are not even aware of but that kids can smell a mile away – Jacob’s favoritism for Joseph leaked out of him.”

Joseph is no longer recognized as a brother but as dreamer, his identity is in jeopardy. The hatred grows and is soon to become uncontainable.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus that our identity is found in you and not in those around us. Amen.

HERE COMES THE DREAMER: DAY FOUR

Reading: Genesis 37:19-24

“19 “Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. 20 “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.” 21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. 22 “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing- 24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.”

So, one day while the brothers are out in the fields to graze their father’s flock, Jacob sends Joseph out to them to see how they are doing. “Go check on them,” Jacob says. Joseph goes and we read “...they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.” Hatred has now turned into a conspiracy for murder. I often wonder, how did they recognize that it was Joseph? How could they actually see him in the distance and know it was him? It must have been that “richly ornamented robe.” Just the sight of the dreamer with his dream coat pushes them over the edge.

They were so filled with anger that they don’t even acknowledge Joseph by his name or as brother, he is now the Dreamer. So often in life when we are disappointed, angry or jealous of someone, we don’t even like to think of them as a person. You don’t even like to think of them having a name. And this was the case with Joseph’s brothers. Here comes the favorite. Here comes this arrogant, would-be-ruler. We’ll teach this dreamer a thing or two. Or better yet, might as well just kill him.

Prayer: Father God, as I reflect on Joseph and his relationship with his brothers. Forgive me when I harbour ill feelings against another. Amen

FORGIVEN BY JESUS TO FORGIVE: DAY FIVE

Reading: Colossians 3:13

“13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

You and I have received forgiveness and have been offered some kind words a couple of times in our lives. As followers of Jesus we know, that there was once another young dreamer that came into the world, and He too was stripped of his robe, and He too was betrayed and deserted by His brothers, and He is the One who ultimately said, “Your sins are forgiven. You are healed.” Can you remember Him? He laid down his life, so that ours could be lifted up. And it wasn’t easy.

The path to forgiveness was a difficult path that led up to Calvary Hill where some of the kindest and heroic words were spoken. It was there, on that hill, that forgiveness was made possible for us. Forgiveness that can be received – and – forgiveness that can be given.

Who do you and I need to be a Joseph to? Who has hurt you or done you so much wrong that it has been difficult to forgive? Don’t you think it’s time for God to work in your life, to have His extraordinary grace fill you so that you can offer the heroic gesture of forgiveness to someone who really needs it? I know it seems difficult, and I know it seems impossible at times, but if Joseph can forgive his brothers and Jesus can forgive us, I certainly think that we can offer forgiveness to others.

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you....

Prayer: Holy Spirit of God. Today I want to be a Joseph to someone close to me. Will you guide and lead me. Amen

A POEM FOR JOSEPH & HIS BROTHERS: DAY SIX

Reading: Reflect on Genesis 37

“It wasn’t the colourful coat or even Joseph’s dreams that tipped the balance. Maybe it was the day—too hot, or maybe just the fact that there was a pit. If the traders hadn’t happened by they would have all had supper together, Reuben’s voice as eldest would have decided the outcome.

But instead the cup of resentment, filled drop by drop for years, is drained in one sudden act of violence.

The deal is done, the money changes hands and Joseph is on his way to Egypt.

The coat is the cover-up they need. They find their story in the mind of their father, anxious about his young son’s solitary journey.

They didn’t even technically lie, only asking, “Is this your son’s coat?”

The one thing the brothers hadn’t counted on was their father’s grief; it’s expansiveness, its power to grow in their lives, like a seedling in the crack of a rock.

In Egypt we find that Judah is a changed man.

It wasn’t being thrown in jail that did it, or the misfortune of the mysterious stolen cup. It’s not the trips back and forth, carrying money and grain. The seed of remorse was rooted in him, watered by years of Jacob’s tears, and it blossoms suddenly as he bargains for his brother’s life, as he tries to give his own to save his father, who cannot survive another season of grief.

When the Egyptian ruler speaks their language with the shocking words, ‘My brothers...’ they see him morph from bejeweled foreigner into Joseph, their own flesh and blood. Risen from the grave of Egypt, his presence haunts them with forgiveness. Even at their father’s death the brothers still fear Joseph. Their long-done deed aches like an old wound in the deep heart’s core, untouched by Joseph’s healing words, the tears he weeps.” (Leading worship)

Prayer: Father God, your grace, mercy and unconditional love is enough for me. Amen.

Old Testament Stories – Joseph and the Dreamcoat

Group Notes

Welcome:

Share your childhood memories of the old testament story “Joseph and his Technicolor Dreamcoat”

Worship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdMybN-XAp8>
“Come to the cross” – Michael W Smith

Prayer:

Pray for those who are struggling with forgiveness, jealousy and facing personal challenges. Pray that God speaks to them and us and that we will be open to notice the Josephs around us!

Word: Genesis 37 MSG

Questions:

1. What do you think the point is behind both of the dreams that Joseph receives from God? Do you believe that Joseph was being prideful or arrogant by sharing his dreams?
2. One of the sub themes of the Joseph story is all the humility that comes into his life through suffering. He will be betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused and forgotten by people he helped. Why is pride or arrogance so dangerous to someone like Joseph and why would God want to humble someone like Joseph before putting him into a place of leaders?
3. What happens when people have power but not humility?

Work: Spend this week considering where you need to be a Joseph. Do you need to ask for forgiveness or be open to accept forgiveness.

THE SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH: DAY ONE

Read: Judges 14:6; Judges 15:14; Isaiah 41:10

Samson is known for having immense strength and ability. We see scenes of this strength all throughout his story.... He once killed a lion with his bare hands! Another time he defeated 1000 philistines using just the jawbone of a donkey! Samson was strong! Each time he operates in this miraculous strength we see the same verse precede the miracle., "The Spirit of the Lord fell powerfully upon Samson...". The Spirit of the Lord was the source of his strength. The Spirit of the Lord enabled Samson to do what he could never do before and be who he could never be before. Here is the Good news, that very Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is available for us today! Samson's story reveals that when God is with you, nothing that is placed on you or around you or in front of you, will defeat you. God is the source of our strength! When we feel weak, when we feel fragile, when the weight of the world is too much for us to carry, we have access to a supernatural source of strength! The God who calls himself our father wants nothing more than to give us the strength we need to run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint! The prophet Isaiah makes Gods intentions clear, "So do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you..."

So often we wear ourselves thin trying to get through life carrying things we were never meant to carry, trying to be the hero of our own stories! We are left tired, weary and weak. May we realise today that we no longer need do this alone! He is our strength.

Prayer: Father God, grant us the courage to surrender all our 'doings' and 'strivings' and receive Your strength..

DON'T GIVE AWAY YOUR STRENGTH: DAY TWO

Read: Judges 16:1-17, 2 Timothy:22-24

It is impossible to read the story of Samson without coming across lots of controversy! He would constantly compromise his strength, integrity, character and relationship with God by pursuing places and things he was not created to pursue. His relationship with Delilah is one such an example.

From the very beginning Delilah had an agenda: to find out how he can be overpowered and captured. She did not even do a great job of hiding her plot! As you read their story you will notice that she blatantly asks him 3 times, "how can you be tied up securely?". Each time he tricks her and each time she confronts him.

Samson's desire for Delilah seems to completely overpower his logic! On the surface anyone can see this relationship was bound to end in disaster. It would have been wise to walk away, but Samson remained and allowed himself to be tempted. In Judges 16:16- 17 we read, "She tormented him with nagging day after day until he was tick to death of it. Finally, Samson shared his secret with her." Samson lost his strength, was captured and forced to work as a slave.

Rather than end his relationship with Delilah, he allowed it to end him! Temptation is inevitable, it is a consequence of existing in the world! We cannot choose if we will be tempted but we do get to choose if we will stay tempted! Choosing to stay tempted is choosing to give away our strength. Perhaps that is why the scripture instructs us to run from temptation. Our father loves us deeply and knows that like Samson, giving in to temptation leads to pain! He doesn't convict us to make us miserable, He convicts us to give us the courage we need to walk away from the things that will make us miserable.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to walk away from the things in my life that cause me to compromise my relationship with you.

WALKING IN WEAKNESS: DAY THREE

Read: Judges 16:21, Ezekiel 37

Perhaps one of the saddest verses in this story is found in Judges 16:19, "...and his strength left him"

Samson was weak. He had collapsed under the pressure of an unstable life. After being tricked by Delilah, he found himself blind and captive, living in the dark, forced into a life of slavery, grinding grain in prison. He was working and striving and wearing himself out in a life he was never intended to live, a life he was not purposed for.

Maybe you can relate? Perhaps you know what it is like to have come to the end of yourself. Tired and weary. Without hope. When our strength leaves us, we, like Samson, feel like slaves; labouring in vain, bound and blinded by life's pressure, lifeless and without purpose. Scripture provides us with a wonderful example of what God can do in lifeless situations. In Ezekiel chapter 37 we encounter a valley of dry bones. God instructs Ezekiel to speak over the bones and tell them that He will make His breath enter them! Verse 10 says, "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". What I love so much about this image is that God didn't just give up on those bones! He is the God who turns mourning into dancing! Sorrow into joy! He is able to take what is broken and fragmented and weave it back together! He didn't just give up and walk away from a dead situation and create a new army, He went to a dead army and revived it back to life.

May we know today that no matter how lifeless and hopeless we may be feeling, God has not given up on us! We serve the God of revival.

Father God, today we offer you the parts of us in need of reviving. Come holy spirit and breath your life-giving breath into our souls.

A STORY OF GRACE: DAY FOUR

Read: Judges 16:22, Luke 15:11-23, Hebrews 11:32-35

Samson did not find himself in this situation because of other people's wrongdoing- He actively participated in every decision that lead him to this place of pain.

He was empowered with supernatural strength from God, yet chose to pursue other things, run to other sources for comfort! He is the reason he finds himself bound, blind and Weak.

It reminds me of the story of the prodigal son. The son had everything, a loving home, food and constant communion with his father. But it wasn't enough! So, like Samson, he walked away from his father in pursuit of other sources of strength. It wasn't long before he found himself in trouble! Hungry, alone, with no place to call home. When the son returned home, he was not met with anger or disgrace. Rather, with an embrace from his father who restored his position as son. I love this story because it reveals God's grace so vividly. The story of Samson and Delilah is no different. After all the mistakes, after all the sin, after constantly walking down the wrong paths, after falling completely and losing everything, scripture reveals: "But the hair on his head began to grow back". The writer to the Hebrews even lists Samson among the heroes of our faith and goes on to say that their weakness was turned to strength. By God's grace, Samson is not remembered as a strong man who became weak, rather a weak man who became strong.

Our God is a God of forgiveness and second chances! Our God is a God who removes the stain of our sin as far as the east is from the west! No matter how far we have fallen or how many bad decisions we have made, our father waits for us with open arms to love us back to life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, forgive us for all that is past. May we feel the weight of sin leave us as we receive your forgiveness.

STRENGTHEN YOURSELF IN THE LORD: DAY FIVE

Read: Judges 16; 1 Samuel 30:6; John 15:5

When Delilah cut off samsons hair he was stripped of his strength. Similarly, when we allow our connection with God to be severed, we begin to feel weak.

Our source of strength is the Holy spirit. If we wish to remain strong, we must ensure that we stay close to Him. Jesus reminds us of the value of protecting our connection with Him as he instructs us in John 15, “to remain in me”. He goes on to say that apart from Him we can do nothing! Apart from the presence of God we lose our strength and our ability to function as we were created to function!

The word “remain” comes from the Greek root word that means embrace!

David provides us with a brilliant example of this kind of devotion! Amid great distress and war all around him, David chose to strengthen himself! 1 Samuel 30:6, “And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him...But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.”

Times of trial and discomfort will do one of two things, they will either separate us from God or they will bring us closer to God. We can actively participate in the outcome. David chose connection. David was called a man after Gods own heart! Constantly praying and worshipping. He didn’t even waver in the presence of a giant because his awareness of the presence of God was so great.

We strengthen ourselves in the Lord when we choose to feast on the scriptures and allow His words to shape our worlds. We strengthen ourselves in the Lord when we choose prayer over worry and worship over negativity. We strengthen ourselves in the Lord when we choose daily connection over distractions.

Prayer: Lord God, Grant as the courage today and every day to follow the paths that lead to your presence so that we may be strengthened.

GOD USES EVERYTHING FOR GOOD: DAY SIX

Read: Judges 16:28-30; Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20

God is able to take the weakest, most broken places of our stories and use them for good.

We see this so beautifully in the story of Joseph.

Joseph knew hardship! His brothers, driven by jealousy, leave him to die in a well and then decide that it would be more profitable to sell him into slavery! Years later, when standing face to face with his brothers for the first time since they betrayed him, he offers a beautiful statement, “what you have weaved for evil, God has re-woven for Good.” Paul echoes this sentiment as he proclaims that, “God is able to use all things for good.” The cross reveals this truth! God used the very instrument intended for death as an instrument to ensure eternal life! This story is no different! Samsons story is full of brokenness, wrongdoing and bad decisions, though God never caused the painful situation Samson found himself in, God was able to use it! While Samson was at his weakest, having lost his strength and bound as a prisoner he prays a daring prayer, “remember me again... Strengthen me one more time” and the Lord hears his cry! Samson is strengthened and pulls down the pillars of the enemy’s temple and in his death, he kills more of the enemy than he ever did throughout his life! God took a painful moment and used it to bring victory!

God is able to re-weave the darkest parts of our history and use them to bring forth His kingdom! He is a God who takes the messy and the painful and uses it to make something beautiful. As we face trials and tribulations may we be strengthened by the fact that God will use every obstacle we face for something good.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being present with us in our pain! Thank you for the strength to endure that comes from the knowledge that you are always at work.

Famous Old Testament stories

Reflection on SAMSON AND DELILAH:

Welcome: Share a moment when you experience the Holy Spirit giving you strength to endure and overcome.

Worship: Graves into Gardens by elevation worship.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwX1f2gYKZ4>

Word: Judges 16; Isaiah 41:10, John 15:5

- What do you think is significant about Samsons hair growing back?
- Why do you think people fall into the trap of trying to function in their own strength when we have access to Gods supernatural strength?
- Why is there wisdom in running from temptation? What does this practically look like in your personal context.
- What are some things you can do in your daily life to strengthen yourself in the Lord?

Work: Take 10 minutes each day this week to pursue Gods presence

GOD IS IN CONTROL: DAY ONE

Read: Est 1:1 - 9 "These events happened in the days of King Xerxes, who reigned over 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia." v1

The first chapter of the book of Esther draws a picture of the most powerful person in the world at that time. This Persian King Xerxes is worldly to the extreme. He wields an unbelievable military machine which he uses to make himself even more powerful. Even though his empire is the greatest the world had ever seen at that time, he is not content. King Xerxes wants even more power.

The background to this account is as follows: King Xerxes was holding a banquet to showcase his wealth and power. He had just put down a rebellion in Egypt. The King was extremely proud and regarded himself as a god. He believed no person or nation was greater than him.

King Xerxes believed that he was in control. He didn't know God and certainly never gave God any credit for everything he owned or achieved.

Daniel wrote about God: ***He controls the course of world events; He removes Kings and sets up other Kings.*** (Dan 2:21).

Daniel knew who is really in control of powerful rulers who don't even acknowledge God.

Prayer: Father God, when powerful people are unjust and rule selfishly, help me to remember that You only are in full control. Amen

GOD IS AT WORK IN BELIEVER'S LIVES: DAY TWO

Read: Est 2:5 - 7 "This man had a very beautiful and lovely young cousin, Hadassah, who was also called Esther. When her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her into his family and raised her as his own daughter." v7

If we look at the circumstances surrounding Esther, it would seem that Esther's life was difficult. She had lost both her father and mother. Losing one parent is bad enough.

With her life starting out so badly it could seem that she was on a path of struggle. In the ancient world, losing both parents could have put her on the street with a disastrous future. Esther's uncle took her under his wing and adopted her. We know from verse 7 that she was not bitter because she is described as a "lovely" person. This implies that she was a person whom people liked to be around.

As an orphaned person belonging to a small nation that was dominated by powerful empires, Esther seemed to have a dim or ordinary future ahead of her. In the ancient world, the most that she could hope for was to be married to a man who would look after her. However, God was at work in her life. She was going to become one of the famous people in Jewish history.

Paul the Apostle reminds us that God is able to use any circumstances to a believer's advantage.

Rom 8:28 ***And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.***

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to trust that because You are in my life, good will come out of whatever life throws at me. Amen

ALL BELIEVER'S HAVE A PART TO PLAY IN GOD'S KINGDOM: DAY THREE

Read Esther 4:1 - 17 "If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?" v 14

As mentioned before, Esther's life started badly. At this point in Esther's story we find that her life has turned out much better. She is a queen and living in the lap of luxury.

Suddenly she must make a decision that could destroy her life. As a Jewish woman she knew the accounts of God's hand upon the nation. The struggle to trust God would have been immense.

To a far lesser extent, as we journey with God, a time comes when we know that God is inviting us to take a risk and trust Him. Usually it means growing in Christ by stepping out of our comfort zone. These challenges are nothing less than God inviting us to take part in "The Kingdom of God" where we are.

For Esther at this time, the call to step out of her comfort zone had life-threatening consequences. She could have decided to ignore the plight of her people. After all, Esther would risk everything by going to the King without an invitation.

Esther's character and trust in God would be tested to the full. This orphaned young woman had a huge part to play in God's plans for the people of Israel.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, help me to recognise when God calls me to play my part in "The Kingdom of God". May I have the courage to step out in faith, when stepping out in faith challenges my comfort zone. Amen

GOD IS FAITHFUL: DAY FOUR

Read Esther 5:1 - 8 "When he saw Queen Esther standing there in the inner court, he welcomed her and held out the gold scepter to her. So Esther approached and touched the end of the scepter."v2

Esther likely experienced a huge sigh of relief when the King held out his scepter. I wonder if she slept the night before. Her decision to trust God and step out in faith could have turned out so differently.

God started to show how faithful He is by disturbing the King's sleep. The King could have done many other things to occupy himself because he couldn't sleep. (Esther 6:1). It seems that he was led to ask an attendant to read the book of records to him. The records revealed to the King how Mordecai had warned about the plans to assassinate him.

When we clearly discover that God is leading us to take a step of faith and we take that step, we will discover the faithfulness of God. David writes the following in Psa 17:7a: ***"Show me Your unflinching love in wonderful ways"***. There is no better way of discovering just how much God is in control of the world, than by stepping out in faith. Many Christ-followers have discovered that God weaves His plans for the world even in the lives of those who refuse to believe in him. We can see this happening in the King's life.

There is no greater way to get excited about the reality of God than by stepping out in faith. Of course, a call to step out must be tested and prayed about.

Prayer: Lord, thank you that Your faithfulness is revealed over and over in the Word. Amen

GOD IS AT WORK IN THE WORLD: DAY FIVE

Read Esther 6:6 - 13 "So Haman took the robes and put them on Mordecai, placed him on the King's own horse, and led him through the city square, shouting, "This is what the King does for someone he wishes to honor!" v 11

God's plan to save the Jewish nation was put into place when Mordecai warned the King of a possible assassination attempt. God weaved His plans in people and events. Mordecai most likely had given up receiving any credit for exposing the plans to assassinate the King. At that time there was no threat to the Jews. God is all-knowing and would have known that the plot was going to be hatched by Haman.

Haman was unaware that God in the Old Testament had chosen the Jewish nation to be His people. (Deu 7:6). Haman put himself against God's plans for all mankind as the Messiah was to be sent to the Jewish nation to save the world. (Isa 6:7)

When one looks at the book of Esther it becomes very apparent that there are many "co-incidences" which work against Haman's opposition to God's plans for the Jewish nation. For example, when the King couldn't sleep, why did this reveal that Mordecai had not yet been rewarded. Why was the timing so against Haman? There are many other "God-instances" in the book of Esther that demonstrate that God is in control of the world.

It should be a great comfort to believers to know that God is in control. Whatever evil is going on in the world, it isn't in control.

Prayer: Mighty El-Shaddai our Father, it is a great relief to realize that only You are in control of the World. Amen

GOD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE: DAY SIX

Read Esther 9:25 - 32 "These days would be remembered and kept from generation to generation and celebrated by every family throughout the provinces and cities of the empire. This Festival of Purim would never cease to be celebrated among the Jews, nor would the memory of what happened ever die out among their descendants". v 3

The account of what happened to the enemies of the Jews is less important than the message that God can achieve that which seems impossible to humans.

Esther is an account of a very small minority group being saved from very powerful enemies. The story of Esther gives hope to those believers who are unjustly being harassed and bullied by powerful people.

The Jews were part of God's plan to save the world. It shows that as believers do their best to remain in the will of God for them, God will watch over them. David knew this when he wrote: "***He will cover you with His feathers. He will shelter you with His wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection.***" Psa 91:4.

The account of God's salvation of the Jews in the book of Esther is an encouragement to believers who are in desperate situations. Whatever your or my powerful enemy is up to, God is up to saving us from our enemy. Our part is to pray and trust that God is at work in our lives and in the world.

Prayer: Father, thank You for reminding us that Your arm is not too short. You are able to do much more in my life than I ever thought possible. Amen

GROUP NOTES

FAMOUS OLD TESTAMENT STORIES - ESTHER

God is at work in the world. Powerful people and events are not beyond God's ability to save us.

Welcome:

What have you been frustrated about or celebrated this week?

Worship: If the group would like to start with singing, use the hymn "Trust and obey", otherwise read Psalm 91. Open in prayer.

Word:

Read Esther 9:29 – 32 and Romans 4:21.

Rom 4:21 *He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever He promises. (Abraham)*

It is very important that we always see events or people that seem to overwhelm us through the eyes of faith. God will always keep His promises. He will watch over every believer and will be with them, no matter what is happening in the world.

Work:

- What stood out to you in the passage from Esther?
- Did this account challenge your faith? Share your faith struggle with the group if you feel comfortable to do so.
- In the end did you notice how God was glorified by the Jews? What do you need to thank God for saving you from?
- If you would like to, share with the group if you are facing a significant challenge.
- Break up into groups of two and pray for each other.

GOD SEES A BIGGER PICTURE: DAY ONE

Read Exodus 14:1-4

The story of the Israelites and the red sea is a beautiful display of God's care, provision, protection and power. This week as we explore the story of the parting of the red sea, may we be reminded of who God is, not only in the Bible, but in our lives as well.

When God told Moses to take the people to Pi Hahiroth, this doesn't make sense. Pi Hahiroth was a place near the red sea which was a valley between two large rocks, if the Egyptians found the Israelites there, there would be a slaughter with no way of escape. The Israelites were camping in the most vulnerable spot possible. In addition to this, they were opposite Baal-Zephon which according to the Rabbinical Literature was the only place in Egypt where an idol of Baal was not destroyed in the plagues. So when Moses leads the people to this place, it seems as though he doesn't know what he is doing. He asks the people to camp in a place where they would be easily trapped and caught by their enemies. In addition to this the untouched 'idol of Baal' would make them think that either this idol was stronger than God or that God's hand didn't reach this far. Either way they felt vulnerable spiritually and physically. No wonder they doubt Moses' leadership, and when Moses must have explained that it was God who directed him, they must have doubted God as well. The direction of God didn't make any logical sense. I wonder how many times in our own lives we think that God's directions don't make sense. In my pastoral ministry I've had the privilege of hearing so many stories where people were given a direction by God that didn't make sense, and yet when they followed through they were surprised. From a phone call or conversation that didn't make sense to a decision that seems crazy. In my own life this has been true. May we learn to trust the prompting of the Holy Spirit, even when it doesn't seem to make sense. God knows a bigger picture that we don't see.

Prayer: Father teach me to trust You, even when I doubt. Amen

WHEN WE FORGET: DAY TWO

Read: Exodus 14:5-12

Crazy how quickly everyone has forgotten what God did, just a few short days before this. Pharaoh seems to have forgotten how God brought him and his whole kingdom 'to their knees'. So he decides to change his mind and pursue the Israelites. Likewise the Israelites seem to have forgotten the miracles that God performed on their behalf in order to set them free. So when they see the Egyptians after them, their response is to accuse God and Moses of bringing them out to their death. Both parties forgot just how much the miracles of God had impacted them and so they doubted the power of God.

In my own life I know that there have been times when I have forgotten just how amazing God has been for me in the past. It is as though time has a way of 'dumbing down' the wonders of God's work in my life. Often in the moment I am astounded by God and the miracles that He performs, and then a short while later, the minute things get rough I think I am doomed, forgetting how good God has been to me in the past. I wonder if there isn't a part within us, a temptation, to diminish the work of God. Like our brains start to either explain it away or it simply becomes so much a part of our stories that we simply forget the amazing work that God has done.

Whenever we forget the past work of God, it makes it more difficult to trust God in the present. I wonder if for you this has been a reality? Spend some time reflecting on your past, was there a time when you were astounded or surprised by God? Are you still as amazed by this? Or has this become something that has been diminished over the years?

Perhaps we could spend some time today reflecting on the past and how God has met us in the past.

Prayer: Father please let us not forget the amazing works of grace that you have shown us in the past. Amen

BE STILL AND TRUST GOD: DAY THREE

Read: Exodus 14:13-14

Fear is such a powerful force, especially for us in South Africa today. Fear has the power to paralyze or even control us. According to Google the words “fear not” are found more than 365 times in the Bible. Fear has been a part of humanity from the beginning of time. No wonder God often speaks into this reality of our lives. I’ve been told that the opposite of faith is not doubt, but fear. Fear causes us to act in the opposite way of trust or faith. When I read the story of Moses and the red sea I see three ways of dealing with fear.

“Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. ***Stand firm*** and ***you will see*** the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; ***you need only to be still.***” (NIV)

- Stand firm – When life gets difficult, there is a temptation to act. There is the temptation to take the ‘easy way out’. Perhaps what we can learn from this, is when we are afraid and unclear of what to do we should stand firm. Choose to act slowly rather than impulsively in life.
- Look for the hand of God – Moses tells the people to look for the hand of God. Often fear in life, or the difficult situations that we face, keep us so captivated that we forget to look for the hand of God.
- Be still – Fear and stress often causes our thoughts to scream loudly. These loud thoughts can cause us great harm, especially when they cause a lack of sleep. Moses tells the people to be still. If we could learn to be still in the middle of chaos we would discover that God offers a peace that surpasses all our understanding.

Prayer: Father remind us of Your Presence always. Amen

MOVE IN THE LIGHT: DAY FOUR

Read: Exodus 14:15-20

Part of trusting God is knowing when to move and knowing when to wait. The temptation is that we move out of fear and desperation. In this story it becomes clear that God shows Moses when to stand firm and be still and when to move. It is as though God says to Moses don't react to fear, but act when guided. I remember years ago one of my mentors gave me advice in my ministry. He said to me "You will never be called from something, but you will always be called to something". I didn't understand that at first. But now after being in ministry for a few years I understand something of what he was saying. He was saying that there will be times when I want to leave a church or a community because of pain or fear. I will be tempted to 'run away' from what is troubling me. That is not from God. Rather there will be times when I feel called to a different church or community, a different ministry or project. Chances are that is from God. There is a difference between running from and moving to. In this story when the Israelites wanted to 'run from' God tells them to stand firm. Then when the time was right they were called to 'move to'. What they were called to move towards wasn't easy, it wasn't without its complications, it wasn't clearly defined – they were told to move towards the sea without any way of crossing it.

Yet, with every step they took they moved in the light and God made a way where they thought there was no way.

As we grow in our relationship with God may we constantly ask ourselves the question of am I running from the darkness or moving towards the light. The one will cause chaos, upheaval and confusion, the other, peace.

Prayer: Father help us to hear your voice. Teach us the difference between living in the light and being afraid of the darkness. Please show us your ways and teach us your voice so that we can listen to you and follow you. In Jesus name, amen.

GOD DOES THE WORK: DAY FIVE

Read Exodus 14:21-28

There are two main movements in this passage that I would like us to look at today. Firstly; Moses stretching out his arm. Secondly; the Lord parting the sea.

When we look at these two actions they seem almost unequal. It is not difficult to stretch out one's arm. It is an action that most of us would be able to do. It isn't complicated, it isn't strenuous, it isn't unusual. All Moses had to do was lift up his staff over the water. When we look at the action of God, the wind blows and the water dries up. It doesn't just dry up in one direction but over and over again in this passage it describes that there was a wall of water on the right and left side. This is miraculous, not just anybody can do this, in fact, nobody can do this. This is complicated, it is difficult, it is unusual.

I love the fact that God gives Moses a job to do. God could easily have parted the red sea without Moses lifting the stick. Yet, God includes Moses in the work. God asks Moses to work with Him. God gives Moses a job that he can do. Then God does the rest.

God is like this with us as well. God invites us to work with Him. He invites us to be part of the work of the Kingdom. What is amazing is that God gives us the easy part of the work and then God does the rest. He asks us to tell people about Jesus, then He does the rest. He asks us to pray, then He does the rest. He asks us to phone, or cook, or greet, or care and then God does the rest. He asks us to lift a stick and He will part the sea. Yet, how often do we look at the sea and think I can't do it. May we be faithful in the little, simplistic tasks God calls us to do, because behind them is a mighty, powerful God at work.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for asking us to work with you, it is such a privilege. In Jesus name, Amen

THE IMPORTANCE OF REMEMBERING: DAY SIX

Read Exodus 14: 29-31

The story ends by saying that, that day the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Moses. Yet, we know that within a few short chapters the people will once again grumble against Moses and distrust God. Amazing how quickly we forget. One of the things that is repeated throughout scripture is the command to remember.

The art of remembering is the very basis of our worship. Every festival in the Jewish faith is about remembering what God has done. For Christians every Holy Communion, Baptism, Easter, Christmas, Pentecost and ascension day is about remembering what God has done.

The art of remembering is the very thing that carries us through in our faith. God didn't part the sea for the Israelites every day, if God did, it would have become the expected norm. God did it once and then asked them to remember. The act of remembering is what helps with trusting in the future. In our own lives often God works miraculously, when we learn to remember these works; whether through story telling, festivals or other rituals, we will learn to trust God.

On day one I spoke about Pi Hahiroth the valley where they were trapped. The word Pi Hahiroth means the "mouth of freedom". It became a constant reminder for the Israelites that it was in this place of vulnerability that God offered them freedom. May we be reminded of the places and times when God has offered us freedom as well.

Prayer: Father thank you for your freedom. Thank you for all the wonderful works that you have done in our lives. May we always remember your goodness. In Jesus name, Amen.

GROUP NOTES

FAMOUS OLD TESTAMENT STORIES – MOSES AND THE RED SEA

The story of Moses and the Red sea is a wonderful reminder that God will make a way where there is no way.

Welcome:

Share a memory either your life or someone else's life where:

- God offered freedom.
- It must have been the work of God.
- You felt like God used you for good.

Worship:

Read Phil 4:13, spend time reflecting on what this means for you.

Word:

Read: Exodus 14

1. What stands out for you in the way that God works?
2. Why do you think Moses was asked to raise his staff over the water?
3. What did the Israelites learn from this moment?
4. In what ways does God ask us to work with God?
5. The Israelites witnessed amazing miracles, yet after that they were still filled with fear and doubt. Do you think the same happens with us? If so what could we do differently?

Work:

How can you remember something God has done in the past this week?

-  Cnr Aerodrome Drive and Webb Street, Airfield, Benoni
-  Tel: (010) 140 0210 Fax: (011) 425 5518
-  admin@nfmcc.org.za
-  www.northfield.co.za
-  #Northfield Methodist Church
-  @NorthfieldVoice
-  Service Times

Chapel: 7am & 5:30pm

Sanctuary: 8am, 10am & 6pm

Wesley Hall: 6pm (Youth)

Children's Church: 8am, 10am & 6pm



A group of people gathers regularly to take turns answering a single question. In 18th century English, Wesley asked, "How does your soul prosper?" or "How is it with your soul?" Today we might say, "How's your spiritual life?"

Take the message from the Sunday sermon into deeper learning by joining or forming a small group. If you do not belong to a group yet, you are welcome to sign up by contacting Nick (082 808 1452) or Ria (063 020 4639).