

# How Miracles Follow Obedience

## The Relationship Between Obedience & Miracles

There is an unmistakable correlation between the miracles the Lord has performed in history and the unusual commands He gave those who obeyed him. Over and over, He asked believers to do things that might have seemed ridiculous at the time – perhaps to themselves as well as the others around them. This course examines several examples where obedience resulted in the release of His miraculous power.



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **The First Cruise Ship**

**The Reading:** Genesis 6:1 – 7:24

**The Problem:**

In the account of Noah, we read that God looked down upon the earth and saw that the wickedness of man was great. And in Genesis 6:6, we read that God “regretted” that He had made man. God’s regret stemmed from His holiness. God knew that man’s sin deserved to be punished, and that He would be required to pour out His wrath against that sin. But because He loves all of mankind, that broke His heart.

**The Turning Point:**

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. So God came to Noah and revealed His plan to destroy all flesh, with the exception of Noah and his three sons and their wives. He gave Noah precise instructions for building the ark, and promised to establish His covenant with Noah and his family. Noah didn’t take time to ask all his neighbors what they thought before going into action. He didn’t call for a family meeting, and talk it over with all the relatives. It was simple for him - God commanded, and he obeyed.

Now think about this. Noah and his generation had probably never seen rain before, yet God told Noah to build a large seagoing vessel nowhere near a body of water. Noah’s trust in God was such that he began without delay to prepare the colossal cruise ship. With every step of the construction, he faithfully followed the divine directions God had given him. To build so large a boat, such a one as he had never seen, and to stock it with food for all the living creatures who would come aboard, required a great deal of faith and persistence, hard labor, and personal expense.

The Bible does not specifically say exactly how long it took Noah to build the ark. When Noah is first mentioned in Genesis 5:32, he was 500 years old. When Noah entered the ark, he was 600 years old. The time it took to build the ark would depend on how much time passed between Genesis 6:14, when God commanded Noah to build the ark; and Genesis 7:1, when God commanded Noah to enter the ark. Some scholars teach that it took Noah 120 years to build the ark, based on Genesis 6:3. Others say that it took 100 years, based on Noah’s age in Genesis 5:23 and his age in Genesis 7:6.

Noah must have been preaching repentance to all those who came to mock him. And everyone must have been laughing at him. I imagine some people traveled several miles away from home, just to see the odd structure that Noah was

building. But in spite of all such objections and ridicule, Noah completed his God-given task. Having begun to build, he did not stop until he was finished. And, as my father was a carpenter, I am blown away at the thought of all the trees he had to cut down, and the amount of lumber he must have hauled, sawed, sanded, and hammered.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Finally, the day came when God told Noah it was time to gather his family together, load up the animals, and enter the ark. God brought the animals to him, and then shut them all in and sealed the door. Immediately the rain began, and at the same time the fountains of the deep burst forth (vs. 11). This indicates there was also massive volcanic and seismic activity. What Noah and his family experienced must have been far worse than the most powerful monsoon storm any of us have ever heard about on the news. The ark would not have just risen steadily, but rather was probably thrown around violently in the turbulent waters.

No doubt as the waters rose, Noah and his family heard the cries of people who were fighting to keep their heads above the water and save their lives. Many of these would have been friends and family with whom they had grown up, and with whom they had pleaded to repent and turn to God – but to no avail.

The rain continued for forty days and nights, until the highest mountain peaks were covered by water and all flesh that had once moved on the earth was dead, including all mankind with the exception of Noah and his family.

### **The Bottom Line:**

At the beginning of Genesis 7, God told Noah and his family it was time to enter the ark, and He called Noah and his family “righteous”. This is the first time in the Bible that anyone had been referred to as being “righteous”. That certainly didn’t imply that Noah was completely sinless, because since the fall of Adam no man has been free from sin except Jesus Christ. Surely, the incident of drunkenness reported in Genesis 9:20-27 wasn’t the only instance of impropriety in Noah’s life. Like all of us, Noah was born with a sin nature.

However, Noah was counted as righteous, just and blameless because of the way he lived by faith (Hebrews 11:7 and Galatians 3:6-9). Having been warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, Noah constructed the ark according to God’s blueprint. Because he was willing to walk by faith and not by sight, and because he acted in obedience by building the ark to God’s exact specifications, Noah became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. And because of this act of obedience, Noah and his family were saved from the flood.

**Questions:**

1. Why did God regret making man and want to destroy His creation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why was Noah chosen to build the ark? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Explain the specific instructions God gave to Noah for building the ark.
  - a) Type of wood: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) How to make it waterproof: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) The dimensions: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) How many stories: \_\_\_\_\_
4. What might have been a couple of excuses that Noah could have used to refuse to obey God and do nothing?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Describe the flood. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What might have been some challenges for Noah and his family, as they waited in the ark for the water to go back down?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
7. What was the act of obedience and the miracle that followed in this account?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. God didn't call Noah a "just" man because he was somehow able to bypass the fallen sin nature we all possess. But Noah's life shows us the eternal truth that we are saved by ... (Ephesians 2:8) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. From this account, we see God's patience concerning the coming judgment while ... (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5) \_\_\_\_\_
10. Noah's life serves as a reminder that judgment on sin will surely come. The Day of the Lord will come like ... (2 Peter 3:10) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Like Noah, we are Christ's ambassadors in these last days. God's judgment is coming, but He offers reconciliation through Jesus Christ. What is our God-given assignment in these final days? (Matthew 28:19-20) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. It is interesting to note that Noah was not successful in his preaching career (2 Peter 2:5). Everyone except his family drowned, although he must have been talking about the coming destruction of the earth and the need to repent to anyone who would listen, the entire time he was building the ark.
- a) You may not have always been successful either. If you share the Gospel message with someone, and they refuse to accept Jesus as their Savior, should you give up on that person? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- b) Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Has there been a situation in your life where you felt that you were standing alone for God, as Noah was in his time? How are you handling it? (Personal, answer optional.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Believing the Impossible**

**The Reading:** Genesis 12:1-5, 17:1-19, 18:1-15, 21:1-5

**The Problem:**

Sarai was a woman who had great wealth. She was also described as being exceptionally beautiful, even as she aged. As a matter of fact, because of her beauty, Abraham introduced her as his sister when they traveled, and let her pretend to be so to protect himself from being murdered. Sarah was also blessed to have a good husband, which is something most women even today want most in life.

However, Sarai was missing one thing. She wanted a child. Being childless for so many years, the aging woman had lost hope of ever becoming pregnant.

**The Turning Point:**

Abraham and Sarai lived in the land of the Chaldees, which is today Iraq. Their hometown was Ur, which was at the mouth of the Euphrates River on the Persian Gulf. It was a thriving port city and all of the trade and wealth from the Persian Sea came through there. It had a sophisticated pagan culture and worship, an efficient government and impressive buildings. According to one estimate, it was the largest city in the world and at the height of its power, wealth and influence when Sarai and Abraham lived there. Thus, they would have enjoyed all of the modern conveniences and comfort such a city afforded.

But then God called Abraham and Sarai to leave Ur for the land of Canaan (today's Israel), they left a comfortable urban life for one that was difficult and semi-nomadic as they wandered from place to place, searching for grazing land and water for their animals. Abraham must have had to convince Sarah to go because he was asking her to go to a culture not her own and a land that she has never seen and to leave her home, family and friends behind. Can you imagine how the conversation must have started? "Sweetie, I don't know how to tell you this, but God came to me and said we've got to pack up and leave. And God said that, if we will do this, I will become the father of a great nation - which means you will finally be a mother."

Scripture remarks repeatedly about how stunningly attractive Sarai was. Wherever she went, she instantly received favor and privilege because of her good looks, but in following Abraham obediently, she demonstrated her inner beauty. She placed her faith in God and His call upon her life to join Abraham in God's promises, despite the sacrifice, hardship and all of the unknowns.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Sarai spent years spent waiting on God to fulfill His promise of a child after a life of barrenness. One year passed and then another and another. Sarai had an amazing trust in God as she continued to cling to the promise that Abraham was going to become a father unto nations, which implied that she would be a mother unto nations.

But as time went by, Sarai began to doubt. When the three angels came and announced and re-affirmed for Abraham the promise for a child, Sarah overheard the promise and laughed. Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:12-14).

In spite of this stumble of faith, God didn't punish Sarah, pull away from her, or remove His promise. Instead, he re-affirmed His call on her life by giving her a new name - Sarah. And then she finally became pregnant at age 90 and gave birth to Isaac. I can only imagine what a weight was lifted from Sarah's heart — all those years of doubt melting away as she gazed at the tiny little hand wrapped around her forefinger. Finally, she could celebrate new life. Sarah experienced the love of God unlike anything she had ever known before.

### **The Bottom Line:**

This story magnifies the truth that nothing is impossible with God and served to constantly remind Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac that God is all-powerful and He is always faithful to keep His promises. Despite both Abraham and Sarah laughing at the prospect that such elderly people could have a child, God kept His promise and brought them both joy and Isaac.

From Sarah and Abraham's experience, we learn that when God calls us to a new assignment, He may call us to leave our comfortable existence to move out of our comfort zones and into new places and circumstances.

Another lesson we can learn this account is that God knows the desires of our hearts. God will grant them when they are in line with His Word, and when the timing is right. Just remember that our timing usually isn't God's timing. Wait on Him patiently, because He is faithful to keep His promises.

### **Questions:**

1. What did God ask Abraham to do at the age of 75? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



2. Describe their living conditions at the time God asked Abraham to pack up and go. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. List the seven great promises God made to Abraham if he would obey. (Genesis 12:1-3)
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) \_\_\_\_\_
  - e) \_\_\_\_\_
  - f) \_\_\_\_\_
  - g) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Why would it be difficult for them to leave their home? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How do the following passages of Scripture help us understand Sarai's views over time regarding her ability to have children?
  - a) Genesis 11:30: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Genesis 16:2: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Genesis 18:12: \_\_\_\_\_
6. In Genesis 17:15-16, why did God change Sarai's name? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. In Genesis 21:1-2, what are three ways in which we see God kept His promises?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_

- c) \_\_\_\_\_
8. In Genesis 21:3-4, we see two ways in which Abraham obeyed the command of the Lord regarding his son.
- a) \_\_\_\_\_ (Genesis 17:19)
- b) \_\_\_\_\_ (Genesis 17:10)
9. Check the statement that is true.
- \_\_\_\_\_ God told Abraham to leave his father's house at age 75, and God promised that, if he would do this, he would have many descendants.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Several years after he had left his father's house, God told Abraham he would have a child.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Both of the above statements are true.
10. How old was Abraham when his son Isaac was born? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
12. What was the miracle that followed the act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
13. Why is Sarah included in the Hall of Faith of Hebrews 11:11? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
14. What are three lessons that we can learn from this account?
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **A Journey of Sacrifice**

**The Reading:** Genesis 22:1-18

**The Problem:**

In the natural ties of family relationships, whomever we love – whether it's our mother, father or children – we must love God more (Matthew 10:37). This was the challenge to Abraham as he went to the mountain of Moriah, believing that God had told him to sacrifice his only son, the son of God's promise upon whom he had set his hopes for a great nation. But Abraham was obedient. He saddled his donkey, took two servants and his son, along with firewood, a knife, and fire, and headed towards the place that God had shown him.

The trip to Mount Moriah was about fifty miles – about a three-day journey. Can you imagine how heavy his heart was as they tramped along? Three days must have felt like an eternity, and yet not long enough, when embarking on such a trip to carry out such an unthinkable task.

The Bible doesn't tell us how old Isaac was at the time of this event. However, if he was strong enough to carry the wood for his father, he would have been strong enough to resist his aging father, if he had chosen to do so. But Abraham must have invested considerable time and effort in being a good father, because we see Isaac was obedient and trusting in his father and had a submissive heart.

From Isaac's question, we know he was old enough to understand the principle of sacrifice. From his willingness to become the sacrifice, we see that Isaac must have had a strong personal relationship with God – not just respect for the God of his parents.

**The Turning Point:**

What a horrible thing to be asked – to sacrifice your only son after so many years of waiting. And yet, Abraham trusted God and set out to do exactly what God had told him to do. What Abraham didn't know was that while he was walking up one side of the mountain, God was sending a ram up the other.

Just as Abraham had lifted up the knife and was about to obey God, the Lord stepped in and stopped him. God said, "... Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (Genesis 22:12) It wasn't that God didn't already know that Abraham was going to obey. This was God's way of showing Abraham that He knew Abraham was a man of faith, despite his failings. God knew Abraham was faithful and rewarded Abraham's faith with the assurance of His blessing.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Having obeyed God, Abraham experienced a miracle. “Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son” (Genesis 22:13).

### **The Bottom Line:**

The obedience of Abraham is what the Lord wanted from him - not the sacrifice of Isaac. It is through this abandonment of self and self-interests that we learn to become obedient. God is looking for those who will trust Him for every provision in every situation, no matter how desperate it appears on the surface. When steps are taken in the direction of obeying God’s specific instructions, we put ourselves in the right position for God’s miraculous power to move in us and through us.

The story of the proposed sacrifice of Isaac has many parallels with the actual sacrifice of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

- Genesis 22:8 and John 1:29: Just as God provided the lamb (which was Jesus) to sacrifice, He provided the lamb for Abraham to sacrifice.
- Genesis 22:6 and John 19:17: Just as Jesus carried the means for his sacrifice (His cross), Isaac carried the wood for the fire for his own sacrifice.
- Genesis 22:1-10 and Acts 8:26-34: Just as Jesus never opened His mouth, we have no indication that Isaac ever opened his mouth to argue with his father, or resisted his father when being bound and laid on the altar.
- Genesis 22:2 and John 3:16: Just as Jesus was God's only and beloved Son, Isaac, after Ishmael was banished, was then Abraham's only and beloved son.

### **Questions:**

1. What did God tell Abraham to do in verse 2? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How did Abraham respond to God’s command? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the significance of Abraham's statement in verse 5: "**We** will worship and then **we** will come back to you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How did Abraham expect God would solve the issue of the missing sacrifice about which Isaac asked? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Isaac didn't resist Abraham's attempt to bind him and place him on the woodpile. What does that say about the relationship between Abraham and Isaac? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac. What does that say about Abraham's relationship with the Lord? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What was the miracle that followed Abraham's act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Abraham appropriately named the mountain where he prepared to sacrifice Isaac \_\_\_\_\_, which means "The Lord Will Provide."
10. Genesis 22 provides the last recorded occurrence of God speaking to Abraham through the Angel of the Lord. What four blessings did He promise Abraham, because he trusted God and did not withhold his son? (vs. 17-18)
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_

d) \_\_\_\_\_

11. What parallels can we see between the proposed sacrifice of Isaac with the actual sacrifice of Jesus?

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

d) \_\_\_\_\_

12. What was the whole point of God's command to Abraham? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. What do the following Scriptures teach us about the testing of God?

a) 2 Chronicles 32:31: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Exodus 20:20: \_\_\_\_\_

c) Deuteronomy 8:2: \_\_\_\_\_

14. What does Hebrews 11:17-19 teach us about Abraham's perspective on

being tested by God? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

15. Can you share a time when you think God was testing you? How did you respond? What did it teach you about God or yourself? (Answer optional)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **In Times of Famine**

**The Reading:** Genesis 26:1-6, 12- 14

**The Problem:**

Abraham had recently died and Isaac inherited the bulk of his sizable estate, including the household, servants, and livestock, among other things. But there was a famine in the land. The famine was a threat to their lives and their wealth so Isaac, looking for greener pastures, decided to pack everything up and move to Egypt for the duration of the famine, because he knew the Nile River always flowed with water.

Throughout history, Egyptians have lived almost exclusively in the Nile River Valley and its expanded delta, which is probably where Isaac was headed. At that time, the Egyptian religion was a complex system of polytheistic beliefs and rituals that were an integral part of ancient Egyptian society. It centered on the Egyptians' interaction with many deities who were believed to be present in, and in control of, the forces of nature.

Previously Abraham had moved to Egypt for the duration of a famine (Genesis 12:10), and he got into a predicament because of his lying about Sarai being his sister instead of his wife (Genesis 12:16-19). He also ended up bringing home with him a woman named Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid of Sarai who gave her to Abraham to bear him a son (Genesis 16:1-16), and that decision caused even more problems.

**The Turning Point:**

Perhaps because of the struggles Abraham faced in Egypt (like father like son?), or maybe because of the pagan influence in Egypt (only God knows why), God appeared to Isaac and said, "Don't go to Egypt. Live in the land in which I tell you to live." Then God promised Isaac many blessings if he would obey and stay in Gerar instead of Egypt. Now Isaac knew not going to Egypt would be risky, because he was dependent upon the resources of the land for his continued prosperity, and those would surely be scarce during a famine.

But regardless of what he thought might be the best thing to do in view of the upcoming famine, and completely contrary to the wisdom he had gained from years of experience in handling crops and livestock, Isaac obeyed God's warning and stayed in Gerar. Now Gerar wasn't an easy land in which to live. This was a Philistine town located in what is today south central Israel. This was where Abimelech king of the Philistines lived, and the people were very harsh and strong idol worshippers.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Isaac may have received enough of an inheritance from his father that he wouldn't ever have to work another day in his life. But he worked hard anyway in Gerar, and prosperity came to Isaac as the blessing upon his hard work. Even though there was a famine going on, Isaac reaped a hundred-fold return on his crops. But that was not happening elsewhere in the land. As a matter of fact, the Lord miraculously blessed Isaac so much that the Philistines became jealous and told him to move out.

### **The Bottom Line:**

I believe this passage proves that the Lord is always with those who walk with Him, listen to His commands, and trust Him to keep His promises. But as we lean on the promise "He will never leave us nor forsake us" found in Deuteronomy 31:6 and Hebrews 13:5, we must also check our own hearts and habits to determine if we have forsaken the Lord.

Obedience brings showers of blessings! If you are faithfully walking with the Lord rather than walking in the ways of the world, God can bless you even in the middle of a famine, because God is the true source of all our blessings.

### **Questions:**

16. What was the big problem going on in the Promised Land? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

17. Where did Isaac plan to go to escape the effects of this? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Where did God tell Isaac to go instead? \_\_\_\_\_

19. What did God promise Isaac, if he would obey this command?

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

d) \_\_\_\_\_

e) \_\_\_\_\_

20. In theory, it was possible God's covenant with Abraham could have ended with Abraham's death, but God renewed the covenant in Genesis 26:3, when



He said He would perform the oath which He swore to Abraham his father.

What was that promise? (Genesis 17:7-8). \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

21. God said that He was going to continue the covenant with Isaac because ...

(Genesis 25:5). \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

22. Although we can't begin to know the mind of God, what might have been two reasons that God wanted Isaac to stay out of Egypt?

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

23. Why might Isaac have been tempted to disobey God, and follow his own intuition about the best way to survive the famine? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

24. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle in this account? \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

25. What was the miracle that was directly related to this act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

26. What was the Philistines' reaction when they saw how God was blessing Isaac? \_\_\_\_\_

27. What can we learn about God from this story that highlights not only Isaac's obedience, but also Abraham's? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **The Rescue**

**The Reading:** Exodus 14:1-31

**The Problem:**

After ten powerful plagues had come upon Egypt, Pharaoh finally decided to release the Israelites from slavery and allow them to go free. But his officials were concerned about Egypt's economy and afraid that now they would be forced to do all the work themselves. It was almost as if they were so lazy and unwilling to work that they would rather continue facing plagues than to put their own noses to the grindstone. They surely didn't want to lose this strong economic force. And so, after consulting with his officials, God hardened Pharaoh's heart to the point that he changed his mind and decided to bring his former slaves back by force.

Now Pharaoh had the best of military resources, and chariots were the ultimate fighting weapons of that time. Infantry stood little chance fighting against chariots. Although Israel had 600,000 men, keep in mind that these were not men of war. They had never fought, had never been trained to fight, didn't have weapons, and wouldn't have been organized. They also wouldn't have had horses or chariots. Tactically, they were unfamiliar with the ground and they were burdened with women and children to care for. If they were attacked, it wouldn't have been a battle at all, but a slaughter.

When Moses obeyed God and settled the Israelites down by the sea to camp for the night, it appeared that God had led Israel right into a trap. It made sense for the people to be afraid. They could see Pharaoh's armies on one side and the Red Sea on the other. It appeared they had no chance for escape.

At this point, Moses had no idea how God would help them in the situation. He could see they were in such a bad situation, there was no way out unless God intervened. But he also knew, without any doubt, that God *would* help them.

**The Turning Point:**

At this point, the Israelites did cry out to the Lord, which is to their credit. But right after they turned to the Lord, they started complaining to Moses and expecting to die. They didn't have that quiet confidence in the Lord.

This is the first of many times that they would complain to Moses and express their desire to return to Egypt. And yet, if they knew God's character, they would have realized God would never have performed all of those miracles to get them

released from slavery, only to allow them be annihilated by the Egyptian army a few days later.

In Moses' response, we see Moses' continued growth and maturity. When he was younger, Moses might have joined the chorus right along with the people questioning God. But now there was no hesitation. There was no fear. There was no doubt and no questioning. Moses was able to calmly reassure the people and tell them, "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Exodus 14:14)

And note that Moses reassured the people before even talking this new situation over with the Lord and hearing directly from Him about how He would save the people. But Moses could speak with confidence because he knew God's character. He knew who God was. He knew God would not allow them to die. He was sure that God would save them. He knew through experience. And he knew all this because He had an intimate relationship with God.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

God told Moses, "Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand, and he obeyed. Miraculously, God used the wind to not only part the waters, but also to dry the ground. The ground needed to be dry because otherwise there would have been thick mud, almost impossible for one person to walk through, much less 2 million people, plus many animals.

After the people had passed through, again obeying God's command, Moses lifted up his rod and stretched out his hand, and the waters came back together and the Egyptian army was completely destroyed. These were simple instructions from God, but connected to a mighty miracle. Likewise, the greatest miracle of salvation comes by following one simple instruction from God. Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross.

### **The Bottom Line:**

If there was ever an account written to encourage us in the trials or the seemingly impossible situations we face all too often, it is this one. The Israelites were standing in front of the Red Sea and couldn't go forward. Behind them were the armies of Egypt. They could move neither forward nor backward.

Have you ever been there? Perhaps you have experienced this as a parent or spouse, maybe in your job, in your finances, or in your health. You were standing helpless, in the middle, with no apparent choices. You may have decided to draw your sword and fight to the death. But there is another way ... a better way.

Whenever you feel penned in, between a rock and a hard place, remember that God is the God of the unexpected. Know that God always has a plan for your

rescue, and it may be just as creative as His plan was for the Israelites. Moses told the people, "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exodus 14:14). Turn your problem over to God, and be still. Wait on Him and see what He will do.

**Questions:**

1. Why did Pharaoh change his mind about releasing the Israelites from slavery?
  - a) vs. 4: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) vs. 5: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Pharaoh was well equipped with the best military resources. What did he send after the Israelites to bring them back? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Israel appeared to be in serious trouble with no way of escape, because the
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_ was on one side and the
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_ was on the other.
4. What were the Israelites words to Moses in verses 11-12 that showed a great lack of faith and loss of confidence in God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How did God protect the Israelites from the Egyptian armies, that night while they camped by the sea, and as they were crossing the Red Sea? (vs. 19-20)  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Describe the two acts of obedience performed by Moses, and the miracles that followed, that saved the Israelites and destroyed the Egyptian armies.
  - a) vs. 16 & 21: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) vs. 26-27: \_\_\_\_\_
7. In Exodus 14:14, Moses told the people, "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." And the same holds true for us today, although it is counter-

cultural. What will happen within our minds when we take the time to be “still” in His presence? (Psalm 46:10a) \_\_\_\_\_

8. We live in a busy world, and too many of us neglect to spend quiet time with the Lord and get still in His presence. But, if we want to enjoy an intimate relationship with the Lord like Moses had, we need to train ourselves to be still.

a) Jesus taught us by example how to be still in God’s presence. What did

He often do? (Luke 5:16) \_\_\_\_\_

b) How did Jesus encourage us to pray in Matthew 6:6? \_\_\_\_\_

c) Name others in the Bible who spent quiet time with the Lord in prayer.

i) Genesis 21:33: \_\_\_\_\_

ii) Genesis 24:63: \_\_\_\_\_

iii) Exodus 24:14-15: \_\_\_\_\_

iv) 1 Samuel 1:9-13: \_\_\_\_\_

v) Daniel 6:10: \_\_\_\_\_

vi) Mark 6:46: \_\_\_\_\_

vii) Acts 10:9: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Another thing we can do during our quiet time of stillness is to meditate on the Lord’s goodness and faithfulness. Meditation is focused thinking. It takes serious effort. If you know how to worry, you already know how to meditate. But meditation on the Lord turns the focus from ourselves and our personal problems, and redirects the focus to God’s nature, His abilities, His promises, and His past works on our behalf.

What kinds of things should we be thinking about when we get still and meditate? (Philippians 4:8)

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

- c) \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_
- e) \_\_\_\_\_
- f) \_\_\_\_\_
- g) \_\_\_\_\_
- h) \_\_\_\_\_

10. Like Jesus' mother who "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19), what is something else we can think about during our quiet time? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. When God squeezed His people into a corner where they were stuck between the Egyptians and the Red Sea, it appeared that God had led them right into a trap. Why does God sometimes lead us into situations where it seems there is no way out? (Thought question, answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. When we have learned to take our problems to God, instead of trying to solve them by ourselves, we will pray like the psalmist in Psalm 62:5: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. The Israelites were obviously walking by sight. They saw the Egyptians coming up fast behind them and lost courage. The battles of life are often lost when we walk by sight. How should we walk instead? (2 Corinthians 5:7)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 6

### If Any Man Thirsts

**The Reading:** Exodus 17:1-7

**The Problem:**

Have you ever found yourself complaining, grumbling, and eventually getting right up in someone's face? Have you ever moved past the kind suggestion, the constructive criticism, and gotten so fed up that you just exploded? If you've ever felt that way, you're in good company. The Israelites had left behind 400 years of brutal slavery in Egypt, but were continually grumbling and distrusting in God's provision.

When people complained about the bitter waters at Marah, Moses cried to the Lord, and the Lord provided a miracle (Exodus 15:22-24). Then again the people complained and grumbled at their leaders (Exodus 16:2) and at God about the shortage of food (Exodus 16:8), yet the Lord was merciful and provided bread in the wilderness (Exodus 16:4).

Now it was happening again. The people were effectively putting Moses on trial at a place where there was no water (Exodus 17:1), demanding that he give them something to drink. Moses' response was that they were also putting the Lord to the test (Exodus 17:2).

This newest complaint didn't occur in the 39th year of wandering, as you might expect. It was actually just a few months into their new life as a nation that they complained. Little did they know the Lord was also testing them (Psalm 81:7), and they were failing the test. As we look at their complaints, along with God's response, we can learn some things about ourselves and about our God.

1. When we complain, we forget God's past provision. We forget about all the times God has come through for us in the past. That was certainly the case with these Israelites. Less than six months before, they had witnessed God bring the ten plagues against Egypt and then part the Red Sea to deliver them from bondage, closing it back to destroy the Egyptian Army. God was even leading them by a cloud at day and a pillar of fire at night.
2. When we complain, we put God to the test. In the story, the people quarreled with Moses their leader, but he wisely discerned the true target of their wrath, God himself (vs. 2). When we complain, we are accusing God of not properly doing His job, as if we know best what is best for us. If we feel we must complain, we should be complaining to Him about our own sinfulness so that

He will forgive and cleanse us (1 John 1:9) and put within us a new heart, one that rejoices rather than complains.

3. When we complain, we minimize God's miraculous provision. Complaining, grumbling, murmuring - these are all the opposite of walking by faith, trusting in God to provide. It was God who had led them to this place, with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And as the saying goes, "Where God guides, God provides."

Max Lucado wrote, "God had resources they knew nothing about, solutions outside their reality, provisions outside their possibility. They saw the scorched earth; God saw heaven's breadbasket. They saw dry land; God saw a covey of quail behind every bush. They saw problems; God saw provision. Anxiety fades as our memory of God's goodness doesn't." (Max Lucado, *Every Day Deserves a Chance*)

### **The Turning Point:**

Finally Moses had had enough, and turned to the Lord with his own complaint. "What am I to do with this people? They seem determined to stone me" (Exodus 17:4)!

It is good when leaders at all times, but especially when the going gets tough, turn to the Lord. There is no point to getting into endless discussions (arguments) with disillusioned people. Leaders need to recharge their own spiritual batteries at the Source, and seek the answers to questions regarding difficult situations and tough decisions from the One from Whom they can be found.

The Lord answered Moses, and told him to go get the same staff that He had told him to use to part the Red Sea (Exodus 14:16), and which Moses had held out to engulf the Egyptians (Exodus 14:26-28). Then he was to gather witnesses, and strike the rock.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

In the path of obedience, the answer came. The Lord stood upon the rock, Moses struck the rock, and water gushed out (Exodus 17:6). God showed up to face His accusers, with the elders serving as witnesses.

### **The Bottom Line:**

In Exodus 17 and Numbers 20, the Old Testament speaks of Israel being sustained by water provided by God through the striking of a rock. In the Gospel of John, the New Testament speaks of Jesus as a Rock and as a source of living water. Thanks to Paul's blending of the two in 1 Corinthians 10:4, we may understand Jesus is the Rock, struck to provide living water leading to eternal life



for those who believe. Let us ever seek to drink living water from Christ the Lord, observing His commandments to the glory and honor of God the Father!

**Questions:**

1. Why were the people complaining again? How serious was their situation?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. In verse 2, Moses said they were not only quarreling with him, they were also testing \_\_\_\_\_.
3. List a few times God had already shown His provision for them, and include the scripture references.
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What are some things we can learn about ourselves when we complain?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
5. What was Moses' reaction? How did he describe their behavior? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What did God tell Moses to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What happened when Moses obeyed God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Why do you think God told Moses to take witnesses with him to the rock?  
(Thought question, answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. What did Moses call the place where he struck the rock? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. The water in this lesson came from Moses' striking a rock, an object not normally known for retaining water. What might be a reason that God chose to provide water for Israel through a rock? (Thought question, answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Moses would later strike another rock to provide water for Israel, although that time he was commanded merely to \_\_\_\_\_ to it. (Numbers 20:2-12)

12. There are several scriptural references to these events. Tell what each of the following verses says about it.

a) Deuteronomy 8:15: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Nehemiah 9:15: \_\_\_\_\_

c) Psalm 74:15: \_\_\_\_\_

d) Psalm 78:15: \_\_\_\_\_

e) Psalm 81:7: \_\_\_\_\_

f) Psalm 105:41: \_\_\_\_\_

g) Psalm 114:8: \_\_\_\_\_

h) Isaiah 47:21: \_\_\_\_\_

i) Isaiah 48:21: \_\_\_\_\_

13. In John 4:4-10, we are introduced to the concept of "living water." The Samaritan woman thought Jesus was saying she would no longer need to

drink water and carry it home from the well. But Jesus was not speaking of physical water.

Read Jeremiah 2:13, Jeremiah 17:13, John 7:37-39 and Revelation 7:17, and explain what Jesus meant by the term “living water” in John 4:10. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14. Who and/or where is the source of “the fountain of water springing up to everlasting life” in John 4:14? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Read John 7:37-38.

a) What did Jesus say we are to do if we thirst? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b) What will be the result if we believe on Him? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

16. In 1 Corinthians 10:4, the Apostle Paul said that they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Chapter 7**

### **A Strange Way to Be Healed**

**The Reading:** Numbers 21:4-9, John 3:14-18

**The Problem:**

I hate snakes. There's only one good type of snake in my world — a dead one! If I see a snake crawling on the ground, it immediately makes my skin crawl. But in this short passage in Numbers, snakes became a foreshadowing of the fulfillment of the ultimate covenant God would make with creation.

The nation of Israel was coming to the end of its 40-year journey, and it had not been a smooth trip. The journey had been filled with multiple rebellions and corresponding consequences. But the people were finally closing in on the place that God planned for them to call home, the Promised Land.

However, on the verge of receiving a major season of blessing, instead of being thankful, all the Israelites could do was complain. In verse 5, they complained about the water. They complained about the manna. They even complained about Moses. They showed contempt for God by questioning, and even opposing, what God was doing in their lives. And finally they said that they just wanted to go back to Egypt. This was a big problem. They were beginning to act with the same unbelief as those who had already died in the desert for their sinfulness, unbelief, and idolatry.

So, in verse 6, the Lord responded to their complaints by sending fiery serpents among the people. Commentators vary in their opinions about why the serpents were referred to as being fiery. Some think they were a red color, like the color of fire. Others believe their bite caused an intense burning sensation, so they were called fiery serpents.

Most of the victims who died were of the older generation of unbelief, and this was God's final way of fulfilling His promise that they would perish in the wilderness, and never enter into the Promised Land.

**The Turning Point:**

However, unlike the previous generation, this group had softer hearts and was quicker to repent. They asked Moses to pray for them, because they knew they could only be saved from the snakes by a saving act of God. Thankfully, they were not trusting in luck or medical expertise, but only in God.

**The Miracle That Followed:**

God answered and saved the Israelites, but not in a way we would ever expect. He told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole, and anyone who looked at the bronze snake would live. That doesn't sound like something God would do. Actually, it sounds a lot like idolatry, and in time, that snake on a pole would become an idol to the people, so much so that a king by the name of Hezekiah would have it destroyed (2 Kings 18:1-4).

So why did God tell Moses to put a snake on a pole? Perhaps God used the snake because snakes are a symbol of evil in the Bible. Remember, it was a snake in the Garden of Eden that tempted Adam and Eve to sin. Some commentators have suggested that putting a snake on a pole forced the people to face their own sinfulness.

But I think it was more. Believing what God told them to do and obeying Him, even if it seemed ridiculous, would be a profound turnaround from their previous way of thinking. If they would obediently look up at the bronze snake Moses had put up on the pole, they would be demonstrating their trust in God and His promise to heal them.

### **The Bottom Line:**

To treat snakebites, doctors use a cure that is called "antivenin." To create antivenin, the venom is milked from snakes and injected in very small quantities into a horse or some other animal. The injected animal will have an immune response to the venom, producing antibodies against the venom's active molecule, which can then be used to treat people bitten by snakes.

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is the antivenin for our fallen condition. In the same way the bronze snake was lifted up, Jesus was lifted up on the cross (John 3:14-15). And, just like seeing the bronze snake didn't cure the Israelites, knowing about Jesus on the cross doesn't cure us either.

The cure of the Israelites from having been bitten by the fiery snakes was dependent on their obedience in looking at the brass serpent set on a pole by Moses and believing in God's promise. In the same manner, no one can receive the miracle of salvation except obedience to God's command to look on the Cross and believe in the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Questions:**

1. What are some of the things about which the Israelites complained – just when they were about to leave the wilderness behind and enter into the Promised Land? (Numbers 21:5)
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) \_\_\_\_\_
2. How did God respond to their complaints? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. After the Israelites repented and came to Moses, what did the Lord instruct Moses to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What points of comparison can you see between the serpent who was lifted up in the wilderness and Christ who was lifted up on a cross (John 3:14-15)?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
5. When the Israelites looked up at that snake, they were looking up with a desperate faith that God would save them. Unable to cure themselves of their own condition, they had to believe that God had the power to heal.
  - a) The Bible tells us that, not only were they healed, but also the snakes stopped biting Israelites after they repented. (Numbers 21:4-9)  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
  - b) Likewise, if we've come to Christ and looked to the cross for our salvation, we won't have to live with the consequences of our sins in this world.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False

6. This was not the first or the only time the Israelites complained about their circumstances. And it was not the first or the only time the Lord responded to their complaint with consequences. What did they complain about in each of these verses?
- a) Exodus 14:11-12: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Exodus 15:22-24: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Exodus 16:1-4: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) Exodus 17:1-4: \_\_\_\_\_
  - e) Numbers 11:4-6: \_\_\_\_\_
  - f) Numbers 12:1: \_\_\_\_\_
  - g) Numbers 13:32-14:2: \_\_\_\_\_
  - h) Numbers 14:1-4: \_\_\_\_\_
  - i) Numbers 16:1-4: \_\_\_\_\_
7. What was God's response to the complaints in these verses?
- a) God's response to Miriam and Aaron's complaint in Numbers 12:1 was to ... (Numbers 12:10) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b) God's response to the complaint in Numbers 14:1-4 was a threat to ... (Numbers 14:12) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - c) God's response to the complaint in Numbers 16:1-4 was to ... (Numbers 16:30-32) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. We have to wonder, how could the Israelites keep rebelling against the Lord and complaining like that? An equally important question is "How can we?" It's tempting to criticize the ancient Israelites, to shake our heads in disbelief

as we read about the mistakes they made, time and again. But, in one way, we bear a striking resemblance to those desert wanderers. We are all sinners.

What does the Bible say about this?

a) 1 John 1:8: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Isaiah 53:6: \_\_\_\_\_

c) Romans 3:32: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Apparently, this tendency to complain carried over into the New Testament church. Paul was dealing with the attitude of rebellion and contentiousness present within some congregations in his day. What was his advice for them

in Philippians 2:14? \_\_\_\_\_

10. This lesson makes a powerful statement about how God feels when we complain. Instead of feeling stressed, criticizing and finding fault with everything and everyone, what are some things we should be doing when we are going through a difficult time?

a) 1 Thessalonians 5:18: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Psalm 55:22: \_\_\_\_\_

c) Romans 5:3-4: \_\_\_\_\_

d) Proverbs 3:5-6: \_\_\_\_\_

e) Colossians 3:2: \_\_\_\_\_



## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Step Into the Water**

**The Reading:** Joshua 3

**The Problem:**

Israel had been wandering around in circles for 40 years. Years before, their fathers had come up to the edge of the Promised Land, but failed to enter (Numbers 13). The window of opportunity was there, but they refused to move forward because of fear and a lack of faith and trust in God. Now a new generation, led by Joshua, had been given the same opportunity.

Up until this time, they had been nomads wandering around in the wilderness. Their only food supply was the manna that fell from heaven. A pillar of cloud had led them by day and a pillar of fire by night. For 40 years, they had been eating the same meal and following the same routine every day, day after day and night after night. But now they had come to a place in their lives when God said: "It's time for a change, and you are going to move on to your new home."

However, it was springtime, the time of the barley harvest, when the waters of Jordan River were at their peak. The snow was melting off the mountains into the river, and the spring rains were pouring down. The river was raging at its highest point. It was about a mile wide and impossible to cross. The Israelites must have looked at the tree logs and branches bobbing up and down in the rapids and said, "There is no way we can cross that. How are we going to enter Canaan Land, let alone conquer it?" God wanted them to thoroughly understand that they could not do it without Him. It was utterly impossible.

So first they camped by the river for three days before proceeding. No doubt, while some people thought crossing the Jordan would be impossible, others must have been impatient to keep moving forward. I wonder if they questioned Joshua about why God hadn't bring them to the edge of the Jordan a few months earlier or a few months later, when the waters wouldn't have been so high. But surely they remembered how the nation had been in a similar impossible situation at the edge of the Red Sea, but God had delivered them from the Egyptians. Their fathers had seen that happen firsthand, and had told the story many times.

**The Turning Point:**

Over those three days, the leaders went through the camp and gave the people three important directives. Obeying these instructions were crucial for the success of their mission.

1. **“Keep your eyes on the Ark of the Covenant and follow it, but stay back about ½ mile.”** The Ark was a simple wooden chest 45” long, 27” inches wide and 27” tall, overlaid with gold. On the lid was a golden Cherub on each end bowing toward the center, which was the Mercy Seat. The Mercy Seat was the place of God’s manifest presence. So this Ark represented the presence of God among His people, and the people were to keep their eyes on the movement of God’s presence and follow that.

In addition, it was extremely important that every eye stay focused on the Ark, because they hadn’t been this way before and that’s how they would know where to go. There were about three million people, so if they crowded too close to the Ark, only a few would be able to see it. The required distance made the Ark visible to everyone.

2. **Sanctify yourselves.** This is exactly what God is calling on all of His people to do around the world. 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

This verse has two sides to it. One side tells us what God will do, “... for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” The other side is what you must do to position yourself for what God is about to do, “Sanctify yourselves....” Will you be ready for what God is about to do?

The readiness is primarily about your spiritual condition. Separate yourself from evil and consecrate yourself to God. We do this by confessing our sins to God, resisting the devil, and drawing closer to the Lord. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:1, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

3. **Step into the water.** This directive was for the priests first. The waters were still at a dangerous level, the river was a mile wide, the rapids were rushing downstream – nothing had changed in the past three days. But the Lord wanted them to step boldly into the water while carrying the precious Ark of the Covenant.

The priests were the first to enter the danger zone and the last to leave it. As they stood there in the middle of Jordan, their faith was tested and exercised. But the people’s faith was also tested. They could see the huge wall of water, knowing in the natural that was completely impossible. To have the courage to step into the Jordan River, even though the land beneath their feet had dried up, they had to trust that God would continue to hold back the water.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

God stopped the flow of the water and it rose up in a heap. But water was still flowing over the priest's feet as they moved forward, although the depth was steadily diminishing. Eventually the ground beneath their feet was drying up as the priests made their way toward the middle of Jordan.

The priests stood their ground there in the middle of the Jordan River, while three million people crossed over on the dry land. Imagine how long that must have taken for all those people to cross. I wonder if the priests' shoulders ached from holding the Ark for such a long time.

### **The Bottom Line:**

All of the preparation in the world would not have gotten the Israelites across the river. It took stepping out in faith and walking across to get to the other side. And it still takes faith today to move into the unknown, especially when all you see is a flooded river. Faith means that you are not only willing to step into the waters believing God for a miracle, but you are able to persevere as well. You must be able to stand your ground until the task is fully done. You must never break rank.

The crossing of the Jordan remains a model of how to enter new territory as a child of God - just follow His lead. It is Jesus Christ who goes before us and it's as we follow Him that we begin to see. In fact, we are to follow the presence of God for precisely the same reason Israel was to follow the Ark of the Covenant — we have not been this way before and we do not know the way to go (3:4). Jesus said it this way: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

### **Questions:**

1. When did Joshua get up? (vs. 1) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name other leading people in the Bible who were early risers.
  - a) Genesis 22:3: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Genesis 28:18: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Exodus 24:4: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) 2 Chronicles 29:20: \_\_\_\_\_
  - e) Mark 1:35: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What did these leaders do when they got up so early in the morning? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Following their example, what should we be doing first when we get up? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Describe the overwhelming obstacle the Israelites had to overcome before they could enter the Promised Land. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What was the first directive given to the Israelites by the leaders? (vs. 3-4) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Why were they told to do it that way? (vs. 4) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. In what way is this similar to the way we follow the Lord today? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What was the second directive given to the Israelites by the leaders? (vs. 5) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. This is exactly what God is calling on all of His people to do around the world. 2 Chronicles 7:14 gives us more detail on how to obey this directive. What three things must God's people do to sanctify themselves?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
11. What three things will God do for us when we do this? (2 Chronicles 7:14)
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

12. What was the third directive given to the Israelites by the leaders? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. Joshua was a military leader, he was a political leader, but most of all he was a spiritual leader. What reason did Joshua give to explain why they were going to cross the Jordan under such dangerous conditions? (vs. 10) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14. What happened when the priests obeyed, even though it appeared to be impossible? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

15. Compare this miracle to the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

16. In this lesson, the Israelites were leaving behind the desert and eating manna every day to begin a new season in their lives. What did you learn that may help you overcome challenges or obstacles as you enter a new season of your life? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Bringing Down the Walls**

**The Reading:** Joshua 6

**The Problem:**

Jericho was known as the oldest city in the world, and it was a symbol of military might. It was the gateway to the entire region and, if defeated, all the other cities would be vulnerable. Also, if taken, that would split the region in half. The kingdoms to the North and South wouldn't be able to unite against their enemies. Being in such a strategic location, in Joshua's day Jericho was surrounded by a system of two massive stone walls. The outer wall was 6 feet thick and about 20 feet high. The inner wall was about 12 feet thick and was 30 feet high. Between the walls was a guarded walkway about 15 feet wide.

In addition, Jericho was a city whose inhabitants were violent and depraved. They were so corrupt that when God commissioned the city to be destroyed, Joshua 6:26 states that anyone who sought to rebuild the city would be cursed. God wanted this place wiped from the map. The only exception was to be Rahab the harlot and her family, because she believed in the one true God and had assisted the spies (Joshua 2).

In ancient warfare such cities were either taken by assault or surrounded and the people starved into submission. Its invaders might try to weaken the stone walls with fire or by tunneling, or they might simply heap up a mountain of earth to serve as a ramp. Each of these methods of assault took weeks or months, and the attacking force usually suffered heavy losses.

However, the strategy to conquer the city of Jericho was unique in two ways. First, God Himself laid out the strategy, and, second, the strategy was a seemingly foolish plan. God simply told Joshua to have the people to march silently around Jericho for six days, and then, after seven times around on the seventh day, to simply shout.

**The Turning Point:**

Israel marched around the city in obedience to the Lord. Can you imagine how absurd some of the Israelites must have thought the command was? And I wonder what the people in Jericho must have been thinking?

When they first saw the armies of Israel approaching their city, they probably thought that they were about to be invaded by the enemy. Then, just as Israel came near the city, they turned and began to march around the walls. I imagine

those inside Jericho ran to the windows to see where the Israelites would mount their attack. However, instead of attacking, the soldiers and the priests simply marched around the city one time. Not a voice was heard. All that could be heard was the bone-chilling sound of the ram's horn trumpets and the pounding of the soldier's feet upon the ground. And this was repeated for 6 days.

By the third or fourth day, the people in Jericho were probably mocking and jeering at the Israelites. But they continued on in obedience, in silence, day after day. Finally, according to God's instructions, on the seventh day they marched around the city seven times in a row.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

When they had finished that seventh lap, the priests gave a long blast on the trumpets and the people of Israel shouted with a great shout! It wasn't the shout of an attacking army, it wasn't a shout of fear, but it was a shout raised in praise to God Who had promised them the victory. And when the people shouted, the walls fell down flat, and the Israelites ran into the city and utterly destroyed it.

### **The Bottom Line:**

Jericho was the first city the Israelites had ever seen that was surrounded by huge walls. It must have looked like an absolute impossibility to many. However, although it seemed foolish, Joshua and the Israelites followed God's instructions to the letter. When the people did finally shout, the massive walls collapsed instantly, and Israel won an easy victory.

In fact, God had given the city of Jericho to them before they even began to march around its walls (Joshua 6:2, 16). It was when the people of God, by faith, followed the commands of God that the walls of Jericho fell down (Joshua 6:20).

This story assures us that God keeps His promises (Joshua 6:2, 20). The walls of Jericho fell because God said they would. God's promises to us today are just as certain. They are just as unswerving. They are exceedingly great and wonderfully precious (Hebrews 6:11–18; 10:36; Colossians 3:24).

### **Questions:**

1. What was the Israelites' challenge in this story? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why was Jericho so well fortified and protected in that day? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. The normal methods of conquest in Joshua's day were:
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_ Building dirt ramps up the walls or digging tunnels under the walls
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_ Pounding battering rams against the walls
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_ Going over the walls with ladders, grappling hooks, and ropes
  - d) \_\_\_\_\_ All of the above
4. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Israel used the same trumpets going into battle that they used for worship. What was significant about this? (Thought questions, answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Read the following verses and write down what you learn about the significance of "shouts" in these scriptures.
  - a) Psalm 100:1: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Isaiah 40:9: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Matthew 27:50-54: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) 1 Thessalonians 4:16: \_\_\_\_\_
7. What was the miracle that followed the act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Why did God command that all the people of Jericho be killed? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Only one family among the inhabitants of Jericho survived. Whose family was it, and why were they saved? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



10. Just as God gave the victory to the Israelites, He still gives us victory in our battles today. Use the following verses to explain the victories we can experience today through Christ.

a) John 16:33: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Ephesians 6:13: \_\_\_\_\_

c) 1 Corinthians 10:13: \_\_\_\_\_

d) 1 Corinthians 15:56-57: \_\_\_\_\_

e) 1 John 5:4: \_\_\_\_\_

11. This story assures us that God keeps His promises. Find an example in Scripture of another promise God has made and kept, and include the scripture reference. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. What represent the walls of Jericho in your life? Is it health issues, financial problems, difficulty in your marriage, rebellious children, or unsaved loved ones? Do you have a testimony of a time when God miraculously took down the walls of your Jericho? If yes, share your story here. (Answer optional.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **Always Check with the Lord First**

**The Reading:** 2 Samuel 5:17-25:

**The Problem:**

The Philistines are mentioned no less than 286 times in the Bible. The Philistines were an aggressive, warmongering people who occupied territory southwest of Israel between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. For nearly 200 years, the Philistines harassed and oppressed the Israelites, often invading Israel's territory.

The Old Testament indicates that the Philistines worshiped three gods: Ashtoreth, Dagon, and Baal-Zebub - each of which had shrines in various cities (Judges 16:23; 1 Samuel 31:10; 2 Kings 1:2). The Philistine soldiers carried images of their gods into battle (2 Samuel 5:21). But they were also a superstitious people who respected the power of Israel's ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 5:1-12).

David had been King of Judah for the past seven years. But the Philistines heard that David had recently been anointed King over all of Israel. And from this point on, the story almost seems like a giant chess game.

- The Philistines came up to face David and his army.
- King David positioned his army to confront them.
- The Philistines moved their army to the valley of Rephaim, in the direct route towards Jerusalem, and spread themselves out.
- So King David inquired of the Lord whether he should attack.
- The Lord gave David permission to proceed.
- The Philistines were defeated soundly and their idols were carried away.
- But Philistines regrouped and came back for more.
- David inquired of the Lord again whether he should attack or hold back.
- The Lord responded by giving King David a new strategy and battle plan.
- David followed the Lord's instructions precisely, and again successfully struck down the Philistines.

**The Turning Point:**

I think it is interesting that David didn't assume the obvious. Both sides had come out to fight, and God had given the Israelites a mighty army with which to fight against the Philistines. It would seem self-evident that this was God's plan all along, for them to fight every time the Philistines stepped foot on Israeli land. But

David didn't presume to know God's thoughts. Before he engaged in battle, each time he turned to God to inquire if His favor would be upon them in the campaign.

The Bible doesn't say how David knew that it was God Who answered him. We don't know if a priest or prophet gave him a word from the Lord, if he heard an audible voice, or if there was some other sign. But we do know that David knew for sure that he had heard from God. God not only told David to go, but He told him He would give the Israelites the victory.

The Israelite troops decimated the troops, carried away their idols, and gave God the credit for the victory. Afterwards David said, "As waters break out, so the Lord has broken out against my enemies before me." This gives me the image of a dam breaking, and the waters coming so suddenly, so powerfully, and with such deadly swiftness, there is no opportunity to escape.

But the Philistines wouldn't give up! They regrouped and came back for more. By now, you'd think David might assume he was supposed to fight again, since God had already told him once that He would give him the victory. But, David didn't assume anything, and he didn't rush into the battle with an overconfident attitude. He went back to the Lord again.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

This time the battle plan changed. God told David to go around the back by the mulberry trees. He was to crouch down and wait until he heard marching ABOVE them, in the tops of the poplar trees. David shared the Lord's strategy with his troops, and they all obeyed the Lord's instructions. They squatted down below the trees to wait on the Lord's signal.

What an awesome sound that must have been - to hear the army of God going out before them. Some commentaries have attributed this sound to just the rustling of some leaves, but it wasn't that. It was the army of the living God going out before them into battle, and the soldiers heard it. They must have been the most bold and optimistic army ever. They knew God would be with them because they had heard His army moving out ahead of them. And once again, they successfully routed the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

### **The Bottom Line:**

The decision making process is something that we engage in every day of our lives. Some decisions are small, but others are very important to our well-being and our future. As a matter of fact, most decisions have long-term effects. We would do well to follow David's example and check with the Lord first, before making any major decisions. Then, listen to the Lord carefully and obey, following whatever advice He gives you.

**Questions:**

1. For the past seven years, over what area of Israel had David been the king? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How did the Philistines react to the news that David had been recently anointed King over all of Israel? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Give a brief description of the Philistines. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Before David went into battle, what did he do each time? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Where did David first attack the Philistines? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Compare God's response to David's inquiry before each of the two battles.
  - a) 2 Samuel 5:19: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b) 2 Samuel 5:23: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle in the second encounter with the Philistines? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What was the miracle that followed the act of obedience in the second battle? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Many Bible heroes have been known to inquire of the Lord before making an important decision. In the following examples, name the person who asked, the question, and God's answer in each of these verses.

a) Genesis 25:22-23: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b) Judges 1:1-2: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c) 2 Samuel 2:1: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

d) Acts 1:24-26: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Joshua 9 tells of the Gibeonites who tried to deceive Israel into making a peace treaty with them, though Israel was forbidden to make peace with any of the tribes of Canaan (Exodus 23:23-24). Sadly, Joshua and the leaders of Israel accepted the deception of the Gibeonites. Why were they so completely

deceived? (Joshua 9:14) \_\_\_\_\_

11. In Luke 6:12-16, we get a glimpse of how Jesus handled making tough decisions. Out of the hundreds of people who were loyal to Him, he had to choose twelve people He could train to continue His mission in the world. Jesus did what we should all do before making a decision - He turned to His Father in prayer.

a) Where did Jesus go to find the privacy He needed to inquire of the Lord?

(vs. 12) \_\_\_\_\_

b) How long did Jesus pray before coming down from the mountain? (vs. 12)

\_\_\_\_\_

12. What is a sure test to know if you have heard from the Lord, or if you are listening to the wrong voice? (1 Thessalonians 5:21) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. God is the source of all wisdom. Only He views your life from an eternal and comprehensive perspective. Allow Him to become part of your decision-making process and guarantee yourself a lifetime of success. Here are five basic steps for receiving wisdom from God when making a decision.

a) **Acknowledge that God has the answer.** After all, who is the source of wisdom for all things? (Proverbs 2:6) \_\_\_\_\_

b) **Pray and ask for God's wisdom.** James 1:15 says, " \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_."

c) **Believe.** Faith is an important component to accepting God's wisdom. Believe that God will guide you in the right direction. Proverbs 37:23 says, " \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_."

d) **Check your decision against God's Word.** How can you tell if that the wisdom is from above, from God, or not? (James 3:15-17) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e) **Take action!** When you have heard from the Lord regarding a decision, obey. You'll miss the Lord's blessings for your lives if you refuse to take the first steps of obedience until you know for sure what's going to happen next. How did Abraham exemplify this? (Hebrews 11:8) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **When the Brook Dries Up**

**The Reading:** 1 Kings 17:1-8

**The Problem:**

Ahab had recently become the seventh King of Israel. From a secular point of view, Ahab was a successful king. He had further consolidated and expanded on his father's achievements and, during Ahab's reign, the country enjoyed a period of increasing power, prominence, and economic prosperity.

However, the Bible paints a different picture. All kings of Israel were evil, but Ahab was the most evil. According to scripture, "Ahab...did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him...he also married Jezebel...and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him." (1 Kings 16:30-33)

In this lesson, Elijah's mission was to awaken the Israelites to their idol worship and to call them back to loyalty to the one true God of Israel. Elijah was undoubtedly a great man of faith, as he courageously stood before the King and declared, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

**The Turning Point:**

After Elijah delivered the message from the Lord, God told him to retreat to the Kerith Ravine and hide. The Hebrew word "kerith" means "a cutting," a place cut by something. In this case, it was a cutting of the earth by many years of water flowing down from the hills of Jordan. There were likely many brooks like this one, but God sent Elijah to the brook called "A Cutting."

Elijah obeyed the Lord and left quickly to travel to the brook.

**The Miracle That Followed:**

Elijah had no idea how long he would remain in "God's Witness Protection Program" down by the brook, but by faith he went deep into the Kerith Ravine and existed there, one day at a time. Every morning and evening he watched the sky knowing that soon the Lord would provide him with food even while so many others were beginning to feel the hunger pangs of the famine.

Elijah's time beside the brook was God's way of preparing him for the ministry to follow. This was a time of testing and spiritual growth. Elijah didn't pack supplies to take along; he had to depend on God to provide for his physical needs. And as promised, God supernaturally provided water through a brook that should have dried up quickly during the long drought, and also provided bread and meat from ravens.

Like Elijah, as God's people we need quality time alone with Him. To be used of God, we need seclusion with God. We need to linger in His presence. We need to shut out the noise and spend time in praise, prayer, the Word, and communion with God. God tests and trains us in our hiding place, in our prayer closet, preparing us for His next assignment. But God always lets us know when it is time to get back out in the world. So eventually the brook dried up, and God gave Elijah his marching orders for the next assignment.

### **The Bottom Line:**

I have always believed that when God wants us to move along to a new region, He makes it uncomfortable for us where we are currently living - so we have no choice but to make a change. In other words, our brook dries up - just as it did for Elijah in this account. I personally experienced this one time, when I went for six months without a job. A close friend told me I had put God in a box - in effect, told Him the job had to be in Houston County in Texas. Now I had a really nice waterfront home on a lake, and I wanted to stay there and support my husband so he could retire.

But I released all that to the Lord, and totally surrendered my location to Him. Within two weeks, my husband and I both had jobs in St. Thomas, 2,300 miles away. I know now for sure that was God's plan, because St. Thomas is Bible-College friendly and we were able to legally establish Therapon University there.

Be sure your prayers are always totally open to God's leading. When our children ask us for advice about their future, one of our questions is always, "Has the brook dried up in your current situation?" They know what I mean after all these years.

If Elijah had remained so comfortable in his current situation that he wasn't willing to move on, the miracle in the next lesson would not have happened through him. Is your brook running dry? If it is, hold on. God has something great in store for you. Be sensitive to when the Lord is telling you that it's time to move on.



**Questions:**

1. Contrast King Ahab's success as a king, from the world's point of view as well as from God's point of view.

a) World's point of view: \_\_\_\_\_

b) God's point of view: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What was the message God sent to King Ahab through the prophet Elijah?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. How might a drought throughout the land potentially also affect Elijah? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Read James 5:17-18 and Luke 4:25.

a) How could Elijah be so confident that his prophecy would be fulfilled?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) How long did the drought last? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Why did God direct Elijah to go into hiding? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. In what way did Elijah's stay at the Kerith Ravine test his faith? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. I think there were two acts of obedience that triggered the miracle. First, it took great courage for Elijah to obey God and stand before the King to deliver the message God gave him. What was the other act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What was the miracle that followed the act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. No matter how illogical, Elijah did exactly what God said. What can we learn from Elijah in this regard? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Has there ever been a time in your life when the “brook dried up” and your finances were in a precarious position, but later you were able to see the hand of God and His plan for your life in the entire event? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, share that testimony here. (Answer optional) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 12

### Putting Faith to the Test

**The Reading:** 1 Kings 17:8-16

**The Problem:**

After the brook dried up, Elijah was told to leave his secluded paradise and head for the town of Zarephath of Sidon. Remember, Jezebel by this time, had already slaughtered many of the Lord's prophets, and I'm sure that she was searching diligently for Elijah. In her mind, not only had Elijah caused this famine in the land, but he had also greatly embarrassed her by making her god Baal seem powerless, because obviously he was unable to bring the much needed rain.

There's no doubt that Elijah was number one on her hit list, and as a result, he was the most wanted man in all of Israel. In fact, if they had post offices back then, I'm sure his picture would have been the biggest one on the wall, offering the highest reward.

When God told Elijah to go to Zarapheth, I wonder if the prophet, at least for a second, questioned the wisdom of obeying God and going to that particular place. Zarapheth was a Phoenician city on the Mediterranean coast between Sidon and Tyre. God was essentially sending the most wanted man in Israel to hide out in Jezebel's backyard! Remember, before she married king Ahab, this was her home. And she surely still had many friends and informants in that place. In fact, her father, Ethbaal, was still the reigning king of Sidon.

The truth is, sometimes God sends us places that we don't want to go - places where we are uncomfortable and maybe even feel we would be in serious danger. But, like the prophet Elijah, we need to go where the Lord sends us regardless of how unwise or illogical it may seem to us at the time. When God is seeking to give us a particular task, we need to say with Isaiah; "Here am I Lord, send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

So, Elijah got up and began his 80 to 90 mile journey from the Kerith Ravine to Zarapheth. I wonder how many starving people he might have encountered along the way, how many children begging on the street whose stomachs were distended from lack of food, or how many funeral processions he saw making their way down the dry dusty roads.

It was indeed a terrible time throughout the land, and there was no end in sight. Certainly, the prophet must have shed many tears as he made his journey, seeing first-hand the relentless misery that he himself had prophesied would come. But yet he faithfully continued on.

After a few days, Elijah finally reached the town and there, just outside the gate, he saw a poor widow woman walking around almost as if in a stupor, scrambling around picking up as many twigs and sticks as she could find. She was probably frail and weak from malnutrition. As any good mother would, she had probably given most of her share of their meager rations to her son. But the emptiness of her belly was nothing compared to the thoughts of having to see her only child slowly and painfully die from hunger.

### **The Turning Point:**

The Bible tells us in verse 10 that Elijah called to the woman and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” Even though the drought was at its peak, the woman turned to go and get this stranger a little water that she now had very little of. But Elijah’s request didn’t stop there for, as she was walking away he called to her and said, “... and bring me please a piece of bread as well.”

Notice this Phoenician woman’s reply; “As surely as the Lord (Yahweh) your God lives ...” By this statement it is evident that she recognized two things:

1. Yahweh is the “living God.”
2. Elijah was his servant. Perhaps she had heard his name and recognized him as the Lord’s prophet who first brought word of this famine.

What faith it must have required for this non-Israelite woman to trust so much in a God that she had never really known! To give her son’s and her own last meal to a seemingly well-fed man would most definitely be a very hard thing to do. We have to wonder why God didn’t allow the widow to bake the food for herself and her son first and then cook for the prophet. I believe it was for the same reason that the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant across the flooding Jordan River had to first “put their feet in the water” before the Lord opened the way. Faith and obedience are the key to opening miracles.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

In the end, it was the widow’s faith and obedience that saved her own life and her son’s. She believed the words of the Lord, the God of Israel that came to her through Elijah who said, “The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.” And it happened exactly as the prophet Elijah had foretold.

### **The Bottom Line:**

The widow was instructed to give something that had the potential to lead to her own death, but her willing obedience led to abundance. The widow gave food to

the man of God first, and God multiplied the supplies that remained so she and her son did not run out while the famine continued.

God asks us to do something similar that many believers today are not willing to do. But our simple obedience can lead to many blessings from God. In Malachi 3:10 we read, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Why can't we all have faith like the widow, and invest financially into God's Kingdom with the **first** fruits of our income? It's really God's money, and His rewards will certainly outweigh the cost of the offering. "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:6–8).

**Questions:**

1. Where did God send Elijah after the brook dried up? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How did Elijah pass his own test of faith, when he obeyed God by traveling to this town? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What two requests did Elijah make of the widow at Zarephath?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What promise did Elijah make if the widow would be obedient to God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What did the widow believe would be inevitable for herself and her son during the drought in Israel? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle that followed? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What did this act of obedience reveal about the internal spiritual condition of the widow? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What was the miracle that followed the act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What is similar about God's provision at both Kerith Ravine (in the preceding lesson) and Zerephath? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Why did God want the widow to feed His prophet first, before she fed her son and herself? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Why do some believers hesitate (or refuse) to tithe today? (Thought question)
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
12. What are blessings they may be missing because of this? (Malachi 3:10-12)
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
13. Is there a peculiar but sufficient way God met your needs one time? Feel free to share your personal testimony here. (Answer optional.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **Ditches in the Desert**

**The Reading:** 2 Kings 3:1-25

**The Problem:**

Joram (also known as Jehoram) ruled in the northern kingdom of Israel from 852 to 841 BC. His parents were King Ahab and Jezebel, who established the worship of the Phoenician gods, especially Baal-Melcarth, and had temples built to them. Under King Ahab and Jezebel's rule, idolatry spread throughout the kingdom of Israel, and Joram was raised to have no respect for Jehovah.

Consequences from King Ahab's choices spilled over into his son's reign. King Ahab had previously taken control of Moab and forced the people to pay tribute – 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams every year. But when Joram took the throne, Moab decided he was done. He rebelled and refused to pay the tribute any longer, forcing Joram into war (2 Kings 3:4–5).

First King Joram asked Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, for help in the battle. Now Jehoshaphat was a believer in the one true God, but he consented to the evil alliance because the war seemed just, and because Joram's sister, Athaliah, was married to Jehoshaphat's son. Unlike when King David went to war, the Bible doesn't speak of Jehoshaphat checking with God first, to see if this war was something in which he should engage. Also, note that he did not check with God first before choosing the route they should take to Moab.

King Joram also asked for support from the King of Edom, and the combined armies set out on a march through the wilderness toward Moab (2 Kings 3:8).

**The Turning Point:**

They traveled around the foot of the Dead Sea in the blazing hot desert. But after seven days, these three powerful armies were brought to a complete standstill because there was no water for the men and the cattle that followed them. They were in effect defeated without even lifting a sword because, without a miracle, most of them would die of thirst.

But Jehoshaphat checked around and found out that Elisha, a prophet of God and Elijah's successor, was nearby. So finally Jehoshaphat did what they should have done before starting out. He brought Elisha before the kings to inquire of the Lord about their situation (vs. 11). Elisha wanted to refuse because Joram had been blaming Jehovah for their downfall (vs. 10), and Elisha was very direct with King Joram. He let him know in no uncertain terms that if it weren't for King Jehoshaphat, he wouldn't even be there.

Elisha asked a harpist to play music to help calm him down, so he would be able to focus and hear from the Lord. And Elisha received very unusual instructions from the Lord. God wanted the men to dig ditches all over the valley and, even though they wouldn't see any rain, Elisha promised there would soon be plenty of water for both the men and animals. I love verse 18 where Elisha says that this would be an easy thing for the Lord to accomplish. In addition, Elisha said God told him that He would deliver Moab into their hands (vs. 15–18).

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

The men obeyed Elisha's directions, although I would have liked to have heard what they must have been saying among themselves. They probably thought all that work of digging trenches in the hot desert sun would come to nothing, a wasted effort. But the next morning, about the time for offering the sacrifice, there it was - water flowing from the direction of Edom! And the ditches were filled with so much water that both the men and the cattle had more than enough to drink.

In addition, God used the ditches of water to help defeat the enemy. From a distance, the sparkling water looked like pools of blood, and the Moabites assumed the three armies had been fighting among themselves and were weakened. They rushed out boldly, but when the Moabites arrived at the Israeli campground, the Israelites rose up and fought them until they fled. The second part of the prophecy was thereby fulfilled.

### **The Bottom Line:**

Here we have a great example of men depending on their own wisdom and their own strength to accomplish something important. Three mighty kings, with three mighty armies well trained in war, were gathered to subdue Moab, and they were brought to a complete stop by the lack of water. Jehoshaphat had selected the route right through the desert, but I think if he had remembered to check with the Lord first, God would have told him to direct the armies around a different way.

We also see in this account how men, in times of difficulty which they have brought upon themselves, will so quickly blame their problems on someone else (even God, as Joram did), rather than honestly admit that it was the result of their own foolish actions. Always check with the Lord first before taking action.

Finally, note that Elisha would not speak until he felt God had spoken to him. He didn't just say something, anything, to appear spiritual before the three kings. He listened to the music and waited until his mind was in a fit state to receive a word from God. Similarly, think about the disciples who tarried at Jerusalem until they had received power from on high (Acts 1:4). When you are waiting on a word from the Lord, don't get in a hurry. Be willing to wait on Him as long as it takes.



**Questions:**

1. Describe King Joram's background. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What was the problem that forced King Joram to engage in war? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Whom did King Joram ask to join him in the battle?  
a) \_\_\_\_\_ b) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Who selected the route they would take to reach Moab? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What mistake did he make? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What problem did they encounter along the way? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What prophet did they call upon for help? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Why did the prophet want to turn down their request for help? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Read 2 Kings 3:15.  
a) Did the prophet give them an immediate answer? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No  
b) Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What did the prophet tell kings to command their armies to do which, in that situation, must have sounded ridiculous to them? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. What were the two miracles that followed the armies' act of obedience?

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_

12. What are three lessons we can learn from this story?

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_

13. Jehoshaphat took the army along a dangerous route, because he failed to inquire of the Lord and then wait on Him for the response. What is promised to those who are willing wait on the Lord? (Isaiah 40:31)

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_

14. The advice to wait on the Lord is a recurring theme in the book of Psalms. What are some benefits of waiting on the Lord?

- a) Psalm 25:3a: \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Psalm 25:21: \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Psalm 27:14: 31:24: \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Psalm 33:20: \_\_\_\_\_
- e) Psalm 37:9, 34: \_\_\_\_\_
- f) Psalm 39:7: \_\_\_\_\_
- g) Psalm 40:1: \_\_\_\_\_
- h) Psalm 62:1: \_\_\_\_\_
- i) Psalm 104:27: \_\_\_\_\_
- j) Psalm 106:13: \_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 14

### Empty Vessels Filled

**The Reading:** 2 Kings 4:1-7

**The Problem:**

The widow in this scripture passage was caught in a very serious situation. She had lost her husband and now, because of the debt he owed, the creditor was coming to take her two sons. The creditor planned to use her boys as slaves to pay the debt. She was between a rock and a hard place. Without a husband, her two sons had become her only means of support and security.

In verse 1, we learn that her husband had been a God-fearing man, a spiritual son of the prophets, and he revered the Lord. "Sons of the prophets" were men who studied under the prophets, as junior prophets and future prophets. Today we would call them Bible College or seminary students preparing for ministry. They lived in small faith communities throughout the land. This was a God-honoring family living in a time when Baal worship was prevalent. But they had gotten in trouble by borrowing money - as many believers have today.

This urgent matter led the woman to cry out to the Lord for help. And she came to Elisha expecting to hear God's answer to her problem. She presented her need in a matter-of-fact way - without bitterness, complaining, or blaming. She didn't talk against her husband who had borrowed the money, and she didn't accuse the creditor of being unjust, as this was a common practice in those days.

Debt bondage, also known as debt slavery or bonded labor, is a practice that continues today in some countries. It consists of a person's pledge of labor or services as security for the repayment for a debt or other obligation, where there is no hope of actually repaying the debt. The services required to repay the debt may be undefined, and the services' duration may be undefined. Debt bondage can be passed on from generation to generation. Currently, debt bondage is the most common method of enslavement with an estimated 8.1 million people in the world bonded to slave labor this way (International Labor Organization, 2005).

Elisha saw how desperate the situation was and, recognizing the woman's faith, he was willing to help. So he asked her what there might be of value in the house. Note that when the prophet asked the widow, "What do you have?" she started her answer with "Nothing. I have nothing." Her focus was on what she did not have. We all have a tendency to focus on what we don't have and what we can't do. But God says, "Don't tell me what you don't have. Tell me what you do have," because whatever we have in the house is enough for God! So the woman amended her statement to, "Well, there *is* a little jar of oil in the house."

That “jar of oil” was a little flask of olive oil used for ceremonial anointing. In those days, oil could bring a high price, as it was an export product from Palestine. That flask of olive oil was the only valuable thing left by her husband.

### **The Turning Point:**

At this point, Elisha got a Word from the Lord about how to help the woman. We know the Word came from God because Elisha’s instructions to the widow led to a miracle. Elisha told the widow and her sons to go around and ask all their neighbors for as many empty jars as they could spare, not just a few. Then he told her go inside with her sons and shut the door. She was to pour oil into all the jars and, as each was filled, to put it to one side.

Now Elisha’s instructions didn’t make much sense, but the widow and her sons knew he was a prophet, trusted his words, and responded in obedience - believing God would help. They didn’t question Elisha, or ask how on earth that was going to fix the situation. They simply acted upon what they heard.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

If this woman and her sons had heard Elisha’s command but done nothing, their needs would not have been met. But they did exactly as they were told and saw the miracle of God in the privacy of their own home. God not only produced enough oil for the widow to pay off her debts, there was also enough to sustain herself and her two sons for years to come.

God always provides more than enough, and we’ve seen that truth many other times in the Word:

- He provided manna for His people in the wilderness, and it was an all-you-can-eat buffet, day after day. (Exodus 16)
- God fed 100 men with only 20 loaves of bread and a few apples (2 Kings 4:42-44).
- He fed 5000 men, plus women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fish and there were 12 baskets full of leftovers. (Matthew 14:15-21)
- He fed 4000 men, plus women and children, with seven loaves and a few fish, and there were 7 baskets full of leftovers. (Matthew 15:32-38)

God specializes in making something out of nothing. The apostle Paul would say God is One “... Who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...” (Ephesians 3:20)

### **The Bottom Line:**

Notice what Elisha didn't tell her. Elisha did not say, "Ok, you should just let go and let God." And Elisha did not say, "It's okay. God will provide." Instead, Elisha asked the widow and her sons to participate in a miracle of God.

The miracle came through the widow's and her sons' obedience. They went around the neighborhood and borrowed as many jars as they could. The widow, with her sons' help, poured oil into the jars. They obeyed because they believed the words spoken by the prophet Elisha. Obedience and trust are like Siamese twins. We obey because we trust Him. If we trust Him, we will obey Him.

### **Questions:**

1. What was the desperate situation in which the widow and her two sons found themselves? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Describe the company of prophets mentioned in verse 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why did the debtor have the right to enslave the widow's sons, even though the person who actually borrowed the money had died? (Leviticus 25:39-41) \_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. In spite of all her problems, the widow was still held firm in the grip of faith. She needed help, but she didn't turn to her family or her friends, and she didn't try to find someone else who would loan her more money. To Whom did she turn instead? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Why did Elisha ask the widow what she had in her house? Was there any significance to this question? (Thought question) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle in this account? \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What motivated their obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What was the miracle that followed their obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Where else in scripture has God taken a little and multiplied it into much?

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

10. Earthenware vessels were common in every home in the ancient world. They were not very durable (compared to metal), and they were useless if broken. They were thus cheap and of very little value. Often in the East, treasures were hidden in earthen vessels to protect them from the damp.

Paul said, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," meaning that treasure is contained within our bodies. What is the treasure in us? (2 Corinthians 4:7)

\_\_\_\_\_

11. In both Jeremiah 18:1-6 and Isaiah 64:8, the Lord shared another analogy about clay pots. In these verses, the Lord says He is the (a) \_\_\_\_\_ and we are the (b) \_\_\_\_\_.

12. This widow experienced God's power in a big way in the privacy of her home, but the outcome was very public in that she was able to pay off her debtors and live on the rest. Have you ever prayed a private prayer that God answered in a big public way? (Personal question, answer optional) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 15**

### **Pride vs. Leprosy**

**The Reading:** 2 Kings 5:1-17

**The Problem:**

Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

Aram and Israel were enemies but had a shaky peace treaty. During a skirmish between the two a young Israelite girl had been taken captive and became a servant of Naaman's wife.

Can you imagine how this young girl had to feel? She was in a foreign country forced to work for nothing but her food. Most folks would become bitter and maybe even felt some pleasure in the fact that her master was afflicted with a horrible disease. But this girl was different. Though she was treated as property with little value, she believed in the value of every person, even the ones who had taken her from her family. She said to her mistress, "If only my master could be near the prophet in Samaria, the prophet there could heal my master's disease."

The girl was speaking of Elisha. Elisha was God's superstar prophet who had done many miraculous things like the great prophet before him, Elijah. The young slave girl knew Elisha could help her master and she wanted to see him healed. For some reason Naaman listened and, based on the advice of a simple slave girl, he and his entourage headed to see Elisha.

Naaman showed up at Elisha's door with his horses and chariots, about 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothes. But Elisha didn't come to the door, or show his face to Naaman. Instead, he sent the following instructions through his servant. "Wash yourself in the Jordan River seven times. The waters will heal you, and your skin will be back to normal. You will be cleansed."

Naaman lost his temper as he rode away from Elisha's home. He had come to see him expecting something much different. He thought Elisha would probably step outside the door and call upon the name of the Lord. He might have thought Elisha would simply wave his hand over the sores, and his skin disease would be gone immediately. He really didn't want to step one foot into the waters of the Jordan River, because the Abanah and Pharpar Rivers in his own homeland were cleaner than all the other rivers of Israel. He asked himself, "If that's the way to be healed, why couldn't I just go bathe in one of those?"

Naaman was used to being catered to, as he was an important man and he felt humiliated. But this was exactly what Elisha intended. He knew Naaman needed more than healing from leprosy. He needed a lesson in humility as well.

### **The Turning Point:**

Naaman almost blew it, but some wise bodyguards traveling along with him changed his mind. As Naaman was getting ready to head out in a rage, they said, "If the prophet had told you to do some important thing, wouldn't you have done what he asked? Why is it so difficult for you to do what he asked, to bathe yourself in the Jordan River and be cleansed?"

So Naaman decided to return, swallowed his pride, walked down to the Jordan River, and washed himself seven times, just as the man of God had instructed.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

The miracle occurred right there in the Jordan River. Naaman's disease was healed. His skin appeared to be as new as an infant's, and his leprosy was completely gone. Then Naaman and all his entourage went back to the man of God, and Naaman told Elisha that he was completely convinced there is no God who exists in the entire world like the True God of Israel.

### **The Bottom Line:**

A pagan general from an enemy nation came to know the one true God because of the testimony of a young slave girl. Maybe the greatest thing we can do for the next generation who will come behind us, besides leading them to Christ, is to encourage them to become faithful witnesses for Christ wherever God may lead them in life.

What about this young slave girl made her successful as an evangelist?

1. **She was sensitive to her master's needs.** She didn't bury herself in her own suffering, as she might have being taken into captivity. She didn't take pleasure in the pain and discomfort of her mistress' husband.

This is what Jesus demonstrated by His example. He felt compassion for all he saw. He wanted to heal the leper, forgive the sinner, comfort the grieving and lead the lost to safety. This way of thinking needs to be learned, and believers must demonstrate this attitude to those around us in pain, even if they have offended us in the past. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus said that the ones whom he would call his followers in heaven would be the ones who took care of the "least of these", those who visited the sick and took care of those in need.



2. **The young girl had courage.** Think about it. What if it hadn't worked out? She may have been punished, even put to death, for being so outspoken and causing her master humiliation. She had the courage to evangelize, share information about the prophet of Samaria who had been known to heal many others. How many of us hesitate to share the gospel message, because it might not be well received.
3. **She had creditability because of her work ethic,** and Naaman trusted the girl because she was a good servant. Colossians 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters." This is what she did. She was honest and a person of integrity. She lived an authentic life, walking worthy of her calling (Ephesians 4:1), even though she was only a humble slave girl.

**Questions:**

1. What can we learn about Naaman from verse 1?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Leprosy would have been a serious problem for such an important man. What were specific instructions God had given the Israelites on how to deal with leprosy?
  - a) Leviticus 13:2-5: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Leviticus 13:45: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Leviticus 13:46: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) Numbers 5:2: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Whom did the Israelite maid say could heal Naaman? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Naaman held a very important position as captain of the Syrian army. What were some things he probably expected Elisha to do so he would be healed?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_

5. How did Elisha communicate with Naaman? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What did Elisha tell Naaman to do in order to be healed? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How did Naaman respond to Elisha's instructions? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle in this account? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Who motivated Naaman to follow Elisha's instructions, even though he found it humiliating and he believed the water was too dirty? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What was the miracle that followed his obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. How did Naaman's belief system change, after he experienced God's power in his own life? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What about this young slave girl made her successful as an evangelist?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
13. How does Naaman's story point to the Gospel? (Thought question, answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 16**

### **A Whale of an Experience**

**The Reading:** Jonah 1:1 – 3:2

**The Problem:**

Jonah, the son of Amittai, a prophet of Israel, came from Gath-hepher, located in the territory of Zebulun (Joshua 19:13). He exercised his ministry very early in the reign of Jeroboam II, and lived during one of the most prosperous times in Israel's history. Jonah was probably quite popular among the Israelites, because he prophesied of victory and the expansion of the ancient boundaries of the kingdom (2 Kings 14:25-27).

Jonah was in his comfort zone, fulfilling his ministry to his own people, when the Lord called him to leave home and go to the great heathen city of Ninevah and warn them to either repent or be judged by God. I can just hear Jonah saying, "Lord, I'd rather just stay here and try to minister to these stubborn Israelites. Even though they won't listen to me, at least they are friendlier and I understand them. There are simply too many problems right here to be packing up and moving on to Ninevah."

Nineveh was an evil city, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, and Israel's greatest enemy of that time. The city had 120,000 inhabitants and was approximately 48 miles across. Speaking of Nineveh, the Lord said in Nahum 3:1, "Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not." It wasn't called "that bloody city" just because of the wars it started, but also for its cruelty to its captives. For example, one of their kings, Ashurnasirpal, made a habit of cutting off the hands, feet, noses and the ears of his captives and also put out their eyes and raised mounds of human heads. It wasn't a safe place for a Jewish prophet to go, for the purpose of preaching a hard message.

And so, instead of going up to Ninevah as directed by the Lord, Jonah decided to travel 2200 miles west, in the opposite direction toward Tarshish in Spain. Jonah started his journey from a small seaport near Jerusalem called Joppa – which is known today as Jaffa. Interestingly, this was the same Joppa where St. Peter was staying about 900 years later, when the Lord called him to take the Gospel to the first Gentiles - the house of Cornelius (Acts 10, 5-48).

**The Turning Point:**

While out to sea, the ship that Jonah was on ran into a storm and it looked as if the ship would go down. The sailors were afraid, and each cried out to his own god. They hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them, but when that didn't work, the sailors drew lots to find out who was responsible

for their problems. The lot fell on Jonah, and Jonah realized that God's hand was in the situation. So he told the sailors that their only chance of survival was to just throw him overboard.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Now while Jonah was booking passage on that boat, God had chartered a great fish. So when the sailors finally threw him into the sea to calm the storm, the fish swallowed up Jonah.

Jonah repented. When you repent, you change from your direction back to God's direction. Jonah did an about face, and made a mid-course correction. He promised to get back on track, obey God, and head for Nineveh. And God rescued him by commanding the fish to vomit Jonah up on the beach.

### **The Bottom Line:**

God was determined to use Jonah for this mission. Even though Jonah's heart was out of sync with God's heart for this undertaking, no one else would do. In the same way, when God has a special assignment for you, no one else will do.

Jonah prayed after the fish had swallowed him whole. Isn't it sad that we sometimes wait until we're desperate before we talk to God about a situation? That's what Jonah did. But God was still willing to listen, even though it had been a while. God is like the father in the Prodigal Son story, patiently waiting for us to come to our senses and return to Him.

Jonah thought he was running from God, but God was with him all the time. If you ever feel the seaweed wrap around your face, and it seems that the floodwaters are starting to close in, look up! Even if it's your own fault you're at rock bottom, as it was with Jonah, reach out to God anyway. Fall at God's feet and confess your sins. Change your habits and begin to do things His way. When you come to that place of complete obedience, you will see miracles. In this case, the miracle of deliverance followed the promise to obey.

### **Questions:**

1. Where did God tell Jonah to go? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Describe this city. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What message did God want Jonah to bring to Nineveh? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Where did Jonah decide to go instead? \_\_\_\_\_
5. In verse 3, the Bible says Jonah was trying to get away from God's presence. Before he left, Jonah should have read Psalm 139:7-10.
- a) Is it even possible to escape God's presence? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- b) Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Jonah may have disobeyed God because he knew talking to the people of Nineveh about their sinful lifestyle would be a difficult task. How are these people described in Nahum 3:1-4? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Jonah may have run away because he didn't want the Assyrians in Nineveh to escape God's judgment. In Jonah 4:2, Jonah said he already knew God might forgive them because He was ...
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
8. While at sea, what happened to the ship on which Jonah had booked passage? \_\_\_\_\_
9. In Jonah 1:7, the sailors decided to \_\_\_\_\_ in order to determine which person was the source of the trouble.
10. This was a common practice in that day. The purpose in doing this was ... (Proverbs 18:18) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Who decided that Jonah should be thrown into the sea?  
\_\_\_\_\_ the sailors \_\_\_\_\_ Jonah

12. What was the immediate result when the sailors picked up Jonah up and cast him into the sea? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. In Jonah 1:16, the sailors moved from fearing the storm to fearing \_\_\_\_\_, just like the disciples in the boat when Jesus calmed the storm (Mark 4:35-41).
14. What had God prepared for the time when the sailors would finally throw Jonah into the sea? \_\_\_\_\_
15. In Jonah 1:15 we read that the men threw Jonah into the sea. But in Jonah 2:3, Jonah stated that \_\_\_\_\_ had thrown him into the water.
16. Jonah used the word “cast” to describe the way he was thrown overboard. The word “cast” is a very forceful word. I am visualizing the discus thrower in the Olympics - the way he throws that heavy disc with all his might, as far as possible. How far from God did Jonah feel as he was praying from the belly of the fish? (Answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. Jonah was delivered in a very undignified manner. I imagine Jonah would have preferred to simply walk out of the whale’s mouth on his own two feet onto the dry land, but instead .... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
18. Jonah landed on the shores of Nineveh, right where God wanted him all the time. (Jonah 3:3) \_\_\_\_\_ True    \_\_\_\_\_ False
19. Check the statement that is true. In Jonah’s life ...  
\_\_\_\_\_ the miracle followed the act of obedience.  
\_\_\_\_\_ the miracle came before the actual act of obedience.
20. In this, we see God is a God of second chances. \_\_\_\_\_ True    \_\_\_\_\_ False

## CHAPTER 17

### Get Out of the Boat

**The Reading:** Matthew 14:22-33

**The Problem:**

The Sea of Galilee is well known for its fierce storms. One storm on the Sea of Galilee is described in Mark 4:37: *“And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.”* Luke 8:23 describes a storm on the Sea of Galilee this way: *“There came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy.”* And in our reading for this lesson, Matthew said, *“But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary”* (Matthew 14:24).

Such storms result from differences in temperatures between the seacoast and the mountains beyond. The Sea of Galilee lies 680 feet below sea level. It is bounded by hills, especially on the east side where they reach up to 2000 feet in height. These heights are a source of cool, dry air.

In contrast, directly around the sea, the climate is semi-tropical with warm, moist air. The large difference in height between surrounding land and the sea causes large temperature and pressure changes. This results in strong winds dropping to the sea, funneling through the hills.

The Sea of Galilee is small, and these winds may descend directly to the center of the lake with violent results. When the contrasting air masses meet, a storm can arise quickly and without warning. Small boats caught out on the sea are in immediate danger. In addition, the Sea of Galilee is relatively shallow, just 200 feet at its greatest depth. A shallow lake is “whipped up” by wind more rapidly than deep water, where energy is more readily absorbed.

Contending with storms on the Sea of Galilee was something Peter, James, John, and Andrew were more than used to, being professional fishermen. But still it must have seemed odd to them to see such a fierce storm come up so suddenly. They were fighting just to hold their own, bailing water like there was no tomorrow, rowing as hard as they could, and yet making no headway.

And then they saw Jesus walking toward them on the water. They weren’t sure if they were seeing a ghost or if it was really Jesus. So Peter called out to Jesus and said, *“Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.”*

### **The Turning Point:**

What an insane request! There he was, already soaking wet but still sitting in the relative safety of the boat, and yet he asked the Lord to tell him to walk on the water over to Him. The Bible doesn't say what the other disciples in the boat were thinking, but I imagine they thought Peter had lost his mind. They were probably asking each other, "Is he crazy enough to step out of the boat in the middle of this storm, this far from the shore?"

We have seen in the past how prone Peter was to open his mouth and say something without thinking first, and I have often wondered if Peter asked Jesus the question before he had really considered the enormity of that would require. In spite of the storm, Peter wanted to walk on water just like Jesus.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

When Jesus said, "Come," Peter obeyed and jumped out of the boat so quickly he had no time to think about what he was doing. Before he knew it, he was standing out there in the middle of a raging sea. Put yourself in his waterlogged shoes, and imagine how Peter felt when he first stepped out of the boat. Surely he felt the wind and rain blowing against his face. As the waves billowed, likely his clothes became even more soaked from the churning sea.

I don't what it felt like to walk on water, but it had to be unlike anything Peter had ever experienced before. Human reasoning would say, "There's no way I can walk on water," but Peter responded to the Lord's call in faith. I am convinced that, in those initial moments, Peter felt safer standing on the water walking toward Jesus, than sitting in the boat without Him.

But then, as the story continues, we see how Peter went from walking on the water with total faith that Jesus would keep him from drowning, to a state of sheer panic and terror. He had confidently stepped out of the boat in obedience, but when he focused on the storm instead of Jesus, he became filled with fear.

In the middle of our own storms, it can be easy to lose our focus. We may start out well, trusting the Lord will carry us through, but as the storm intensifies, some tend to take their eyes off Jesus and focus on the storm. Always keep your eyes on Jesus. He alone has the ability to walk above our storm and keep us safe.

### **The Bottom Line:**

If we are ever going to become all that God wants us to be, and do all that God wants us to do, we need to be willing to dip our toe in the water and do things outside our comfort zone. We need to be willing to obey in faith when the Lord gives us instructions that seem strange. His request might require that we



abandon human reasoning and simply respond in faith. Your friends may assume you've lost your mind and will usually be unwilling to follow. Note – none of the other disciples were eager to get out of the boat. Peter was the only one.

Or maybe you've already stepped out of the boat but now, everywhere you look, you can only see strong wind and turbulent waves. Don't lose your focus. Just keep your eyes on Jesus. *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"* (Jeremiah 29:11).

**Questions:**

1. What was Jesus doing by himself up on the mountainside? (vs. 23) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What happened to the disciples after they boarded the boat and went to sea?  
(vs. 24) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What causes such fierce storms on the Sea of Galilee? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. At what time did Jesus come walking to the disciples on the water? (vs. 25) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How did the disciples react when they saw Jesus? (vs. 26) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How did Jesus try to calm the disciples' fears? (vs. 27) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What did Peter want Jesus to command him to do? (vs. 28) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Was Peter able to do what Jesus commanded? (vs. 29) \_\_\_\_\_

9. What caused Peter to sink in the water? (vs. 30) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. After saving Peter from drowning, for what two things did the Lord scold him?  
a) \_\_\_\_\_  
b) \_\_\_\_\_

11. What happened after they climbed back into the boat? (vs. 32) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. What was the disciples' reaction to this amazing sequence of events? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13. What kind of things do people tend to trust in (instead of Jesus) when life gets stormy, that makes them feel comfortable and secure? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

14. How is accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior like stepping out of the boat?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 18**

### **The Miracle of the Coin**

**The Reading:** Matthew 17:24-27

**The Problem:**

In Jesus' day, Jews paid taxes both to the Jewish temple as well as to the pagan government in Rome. The temple tax was a fee charged once a year to every Jewish man over 20, and was used for the maintenance and upkeep of the temple (Exodus 30:13-16, 2 Kings 12:5-17, Nehemiah 10:32-33). The amount owed by each man was a half-shekel, roughly equivalent to two days' wages at that time.

Faithful Jewish men always paid the tax every year, while others (like today) always looked for ways to escape the responsibility. Rabbis were exempt from paying this tax, and so were the priests in Jerusalem. The men of Qumran (a group of priests and laymen pursuing a communal life of strict dedication to God) paid it only once in a lifetime. However, the Sadducees disapproved of the tax, so it was an ongoing matter of controversy with them.

Payments could be made in person at the Passover festival in Jerusalem, and collections were made in other areas of Palestine and abroad a month earlier. The situation in these verses came up about a month before the Passover.

In these verses, Peter was confronted by the religious leaders collecting the tax. Jesus, knowing about the conversation, asked Peter what he thought He should do. Keep in mind that, in Matthew 16, Peter had confessed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Since the temple was the house of His Father, Jesus was raising a question with Peter regarding the propriety of His being taxed. After Peter said, "No, others should pay the tax," Jesus confirmed that He should be exempt from paying the tax, because the Father doesn't require it of His own Son.

However, after establishing His own exemption, Jesus addressed the issue from a completely different perspective. Although paying the tax wasn't required, Jesus recognized the importance of avoiding needless controversy. He was willing to pay the tax in order to not offend the Temple officials, or set a bad example to other taxpayers.

**The Turning Point:**

Net fishing was the stock-in-trade of the people who lived on the lake, and the Gospels point to Jesus' knowledge of this. Hook-and-line fishing was used much less frequently, since it yielded fewer fish. But Isaiah speaks of it in connection

with fishing in the streams: "*The fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament*" (Isaiah 19:8). Amos also made reference to this type of fishing when he said, "*He will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks*" (Amos 4:2).

Peter was a professional fisherman who always used nets and went out in a boat when he fished. But Jesus told him to fish from the shore, with a rod and hook on a flaxen line. Some commentators have wondered if he was hoping none of his other fishermen friends saw him that day.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Regardless of how he felt about it personally, Peter was obedient and went fishing in exactly the manner that Jesus told him to do it. And the first fish he caught was the fish with a coin in its mouth, and the coin was the exact amount that they owed.

Now think of what had to happen for the tax money to be provided this way. First, someone had to lose a coin in the water, probably another fisherman. Then, a fish had to take that coin in its mouth and retain it. Perhaps the fish was attracted to the shiny coin as it tumbled through the water to the depths below, and the fish ate it before it reached bottom. Then that same fish then had to bite down on Peter's hook with an impediment in its mouth, and be caught ... not get away ... and not drop the coin in the process. It was too complex to be just a coincidence, especially when you factor in that Jesus predicted exactly what would happen. What a display of the lordship of Christ over creation and circumstances!

Jesus' willingness to pay the tax demonstrated His submission to the law of God. He told Peter to take the shekel that came from the mouth of the fish and "*give it unto them for Me and thee.*" Note that Jesus made a distinction between Himself as the exempted Son of God and Peter as the non-exempted subject.

### **The Bottom Line:**

Out of all the Gospel writers, Matthew is the only one who tells about this remarkable miracle. Matthew was led by the Holy Spirit to tell the story, but it might have held a special place in his heart because he himself had been a tax-man by trade. When Jesus performed a miracle to pay taxes, He was talking Matthew's language — just as He was speaking Peter's language when He used a fish to perform this miracle.

Jesus never performed miracles just for the fun of it. They were always "signs" as well as "wonders." They always had a meaning and this miracle teaches several spiritual truths.

- Jesus didn't owe the tax but paid it anyway to demonstrate that, although Christians are free, sometimes we must relinquish our rights in order to

uphold our witness and not cause others to stumble. True freedom is not in serving ourselves but looking out for the welfare of others (Galatians 5:13).

- Jesus trusted in the miraculous provision of God. It's not every day – or any day, actually – that someone catches a fish and takes a coin out of its mouth. But Jesus knew God would provide the money to pay His taxes. Likewise, Jesus can enable us to meet our obligations.
- Jesus demonstrated that He was in fact the Lord of creation through this miracle, because He knew there was a fish out there with one shekel in its mouth, exactly the amount they needed to pay the  $\frac{1}{2}$  shekel tax that was owed for each of them.
- And what a beautiful picture of our redemption. Since He was the Son of the King, Jesus didn't actually owe the tax, but He paid it anyway – and at the same time, by the same method, paid the tax owed by Peter as well.

We are spiritually bankrupt on our own, but there is hope. Though death was not a debt He owed, Jesus paid the debt for us. He satisfied our sin debt, and gave us His righteousness in its place. It is now up to us to accept His payment in full.

**Questions:**

1. What question was posed to Peter at Capernaum? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Matthew 17:24)
2. How much was the temple tax per year? \_\_\_\_\_
3. When was it to be paid? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Why was Jesus exempt from paying the temple tax? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What are some other things Jesus did, that He was not required to do?
  - a) Matthew 3:13-17: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) 2 Corinthians 5:21: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Besides Jesus, who else was exempt from paying the temple tax?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_

- b) \_\_\_\_\_
7. The taxes paid to Rome in those days would have been used for many immoral and ungodly purposes. In spite of this, what does the Bible say we are to do?
- a) Matthew 22:21: \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Romans 13:7: \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Therefore, what should be our attitude when it's time to pay taxes? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What was the act of obedience that preceded the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Peter would typically fish using nets. But Jesus instructed Peter to go "cast in a hook." Why is it important to obey Jesus' instructions exactly, regardless of how we would normally perform an action? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What are the spiritual truths we can learn from this account?
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 19

## **Get Up!**

**The Reading:** Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-39

### **The Problem:**

There was a paralyzed man whose four friends brought him to Jesus for healing. But there didn't seem to be any way to get the paralyzed man into the house where Jesus was teaching, because a pressing crowd had filled the room and blocked the entrance to the house. So his ingenious friends just opened up a hole in the roof of the house and forced the crowd to stand back by lowering the man and his bed down through the roof!

Now understand that this "tearing up the roof" was not a destruction of property. A first century home in Palestine had a flat roof composed of large stone tiles which were easy to remove and easy to replace. The tiles were sometimes covered with dirt or sod for insulation purposes. So there was no need to rip up shingles and saw through plywood and beams in order to make a sizable opening in the roof! The roof was not actually destroyed or damaged - only temporarily opened up.

Also remember that a first century home had an outside staircase up to the flat roof. This enabled the four men to carry their paralytic friend and his bed up to the rooftop without dropping him and without needing an elaborate ladder or block and tackle system! The "bed," of course, was not a heavy inner spring mattress and frame but a lightweight pallet, perhaps like an exercise pad. So the hole in the roof didn't need to be gigantic in size.

When Jesus saw the faith of the paralyzed man (and his friends peering down through the hole in the roof), He simply said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." I wonder if the paralyzed man and his friends were disappointed when Jesus said this. After all, they had come expecting a healing. Wouldn't they have felt shortchanged if he was forgiven but unhealed?

The implication is that the man was paralyzed because of past sins. The paralytic who was let down through the roof may have been weighed down by a burden of guilt which he had carried, rightly or wrongly, for many years. Walking, like all movements, is unconscious and controlled by the mind. And psychologists today have proven that anxiety and guilt can actually result in physical paralysis-like symptoms, feeling numb as though the muscles won't work. High levels of anxiety and guilt can also paralyze our emotions, decision-making process, and ability to function in today's world.

### **The Turning Point:**

In Luke 5:17-39, the parallel passage for this narrative story, Luke mentions that both the scribes and Pharisees reasoned in their hearts, but not speaking, and silently accused Jesus of blasphemy for only God can forgive sins. They didn't realize that Jesus was the Son of God, and they didn't believe that Jesus could heal, lacking the faith of the people around them.

Jesus knew right away what they were thinking, and addressed the skeptics before He continued ministering to the paralytic man. Jesus said to them and said, "Which is easier to say (and do): to forgive or to heal?" Jesus followed this with, "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Both require divine authority and power, and Jesus was well able to do both.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

After the doubters were addressed, Jesus turned to the paralytic man and said, "Get up, pick up your stretcher, and go on home now." And the man did it! He got up, grabbed his stretcher, and walked out with everyone watching. They must have rubbed their eyes, wondering if they were imagining things, when they saw it. Then they praised God saying, "We've never in our entire lives seen anything like this."

### **The Bottom Line:**

Some Christians have a hard time getting up from the bed. They remain partially crippled or even paralyzed by a "victim" mentality or by memories of their past lifestyles and sins. They haven't fully availed themselves of the strength and forgiveness the Lord provides.

Other Christians have gotten up from the bed, but they don't want to shoulder the responsibilities of an active Christian daily life! They seem to think that the Lord owes them and ought to carry their beds - and maybe even carry them as well. Their Christian lives go nowhere because they think that the Lord is obligated to provide for their every desire, whether they're obedient to Him or not.

Many Christians are up and out of bed, but have become too busy with their own lives to serve God. Virtually every church faces the issue of members who are perpetually uninvolved. They are the spectators in the congregation. Many are faithful enough attendees, but never move beyond that to become actively involved in the ministry of the church and mission of God. They go for the show, but not to serve.

I think, the Lord would say to such people, "Get up, make your bed, and get out there. There's a lot of work out there to be done." All of God's people are called to ministry; all of God's people have been given an assignment. Get busy!

### **Questions:**



1. What problem did the four friends encounter, when they brought their paralyzed friend to see Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What did the four friends do to overcome the problem? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Describe roofs in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What quality did Jesus see in the eyes of the paralyzed man and his four friends looking down through the hole in the roof? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What did Jesus say when He looked down at the paralyzed man? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Who was offended by Jesus' words and why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What was the primary need of the paralyzed man?  
a) \_\_\_\_\_ To be healed      b) \_\_\_\_\_ To be forgiven of his sins
8. Read Luke 5:21. What question did Jesus ask the Pharisees? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What is the answer to Jesus' question? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What have today's psychologists learned regarding the relationship between paralysis and guilt or anxiety? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. What was the miracle that followed the act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13. Spiritually speaking, we were once all paralyzed, dead in trespasses and sin. The paralyzed man could not come to Jesus by himself. He needed his four friends. Likewise, we cannot come to Jesus except ...

a) John 6:44: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Romans 10:17: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Jesus would say to us today, "Get up and out of your beds. Get up from your easy chairs and recliners. Get involved." What are some reasons that people give for not taking part and serving at church? (Answers will vary).

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

15. Jesus taught by example, and in His own life, He exemplified the servant spirit. He lived to serve. In Mark 10:45 Jesus said ... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

16. Read John 13:4-17. What did Jesus do for His disciples in these verses and why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

17. In what areas might "getting up" to serve the Lord require that we to replace old habits with new? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 20**

### **The Healing Stretch**

**The Reading:** Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11

**The Problem:**

This is a story about a man with a serious health issue. Tradition tells us that the man had previously been a stonemason. That means that he made his living by laying bricks and stones and working in the construction business. Scripture doesn't say what caused his limb to start withering and dying away. Maybe there was nerve damage in the hand due to an injury on the job. Perhaps he had contracted a disease such as polio, which causes that kind of withering. It could have been a severe case of rheumatoid arthritis. All we know is that the man with a withered hand was there in the synagogue that day, at the same time as Jesus.

Scripture also doesn't tell us how the man came to catch Jesus' attention. It could be that Jesus and the man made eye contact, and Jesus could see his faith. If tradition is correct and the man was a former stonemason that lived around the Galilee area, it's not beyond the realm of possibility that he and Jesus knew each another from the time when Jesus was still a carpenter. They may have even worked on a job together, along with Jesus' father, Joseph.

Most commentaries view this man as a prop, setting the scene to point out Jesus' ongoing arguments with the Pharisees and other religious authorities. They see the main issue as being about what Jews could or could not do on the Sabbath. They also point out the fact that, after Jesus healed the man, the Jews began to plot how they could destroy Jesus, laying the groundwork for the trial that would eventually lead to the Cross.

But the man with a withered hand was a real flesh and bone man, dealing with a very serious health issue, and was probably at the Synagogue that day hoping for a touch from the Lord. This was a man willing to do whatever Jesus asked him to do, in order to be healed. And the man was important enough to Jesus, that He stopped whatever He was doing to address this disability.

**The Turning Point:**

Jesus only asked the man to do one thing - stretch out his hand and arm the best that he could. And he asked the man to do this **BEFORE** he was healed. I wonder if the man was confused – the hand was the problem and Jesus wanted him to perform an action with his hand. I can just see him looking at his hand and looking up at Jesus, looking back at his hand again, and looking back at Jesus. But his faith was stretched, and he finally, slowly, carefully stretched it out.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

The man obeyed Jesus to the best of his ability, and immediately, his arm became healthy and whole. What was withered came alive! What was dry and unless became vibrant and energetic! Jesus had told the man to do something he couldn't do, but the man obeyed anyway and his healing was immediate.

### **The Bottom Line:**

It may be that some of us are experiencing "withering" - some drying out and loss of energy and power in a few areas.

- **Our hands lifted up in intercessory prayer** may have gotten a little withered and dry.

We use our hands for work and some of our best work is the time we spend interceding for one another. However, with all of life's interruptions and busyness our prayer lives can become a little withered and dried out. We can find ourselves mumbling a few words of prayer in a hurry without spending time to really focus. We may need to ask the Lord to help us stretch out hands a little more in prayer for our family, friends, others and ourselves.

- **Our hands of service** may have gotten a little withered and dry.

Just like with prayer, because of the busyness of life, we can find ourselves becoming takers rather than givers and servers. We get used to paying people for services, or just expect people (like our employees) to do things for us automatically, and we forget, as disciples of Jesus, we are called to be servers and givers as well.

- **Our hands of fellowship** may have gotten a little withered and dry.

You might be able to think of a relationship that over the past few weeks, months or years has become a little dry and withered. We didn't mean for it to happen but we have drifted apart. Maybe it's time to reach out to see how they are doing, offer a hand of fellowship again, and begin to bring some new life back to those relationships.

- **Our relationship with God** may have gotten a little withered and dry.

Sometimes life deals us some rather harsh and difficult blows that make us feel like we are drying out and our lives are withering away. Maybe we have made some bad choices, our lives are a little bit of a mess, and we feel like our relationship with our family and with God is becoming a little dry and withering. But this can be healed. Try starting your day by spending quiet time with the Lord every morning.

**Questions:**

1. What day was this, and why was Jesus in the synagogue? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Scripture doesn't say, but why do you think the man with the withered hand was there? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What are some possible reasons why the man's hand had become withered?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Why did the religious leaders watch Jesus closely? (vs. 2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. After asking the man with the withered hand to "step forward," what did Jesus ask the religious leaders? (vs. 4) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How did the religious leaders answer Jesus' question in verse 4? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Briefly describe in your own words Jesus' displeasure with the religious leaders in verse 5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. What was the miracle that followed the act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. In Luke 6:11 (KJV), the Bible says that, after Jesus cured the man with the withered hand, the Pharisees were “filled with madness”. This means that they became ...

\_\_\_\_\_ mentally disordered, exhibiting insanity

\_\_\_\_\_ filled with senseless rage

11. The withered hand may also have a deeper symbolism. What are some areas in our lives where we may be getting withered and dry?

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

d) \_\_\_\_\_

12. What are some things you can do, if you find your relationship with the Lord is becoming withered and dry? (Thought questions – answers will vary.)

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

d) \_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 21**

### **Obedience in the Storm**

**The Reading:** Mark 6:45-54, Matthew 14:22-33, and John 6:15-21

**The Problem:**

This is a story for which we have to read all the accounts, to get every detail. The language in Mark 6 and Matthew 14 makes it clear that Jesus insisted the disciples get in the boat and row over to Bethsaida, while He waited behind to pray on a mountain. We're told that they made it about halfway across the lake, but there was a strong headwind, and they couldn't get close to the shore. The lake was about 7 miles across and, at the time of this account, they had actually only managed to cover a little over 3 miles. And, although some of the disciples were experienced sailors, because the night was so cloudy and dark, they couldn't even see the stars to determine their direction or location.

**The Turning Point:**

In the meantime, Jesus was watching them and praying for them. But Jesus did something more than just watch them and pray for them (as should we). At the fourth watch of the night (around 3:00 or 4:00 a.m.) He came to their aid. And He walked across the lake, in the middle of a terrible storm, right on the surface of the water to do it. In Matthew's account of this miracle, when Jesus appeared to the men on the boat, Peter walked a few steps toward Him on the water, and then he started sinking and Jesus had to rescue him. Mark and Luke don't mention this detail.

**The Miracle That Followed:**

At first the disciples didn't recognize Jesus, but when they realized it was Jesus walking on the water, they cried out to Him for help. And the Bible says when Jesus climbed into the boat with them the storm died down. They were amazed. In Matthew's account they began to worship Him saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." In John 6:15, we see that when Jesus got into the boat, not only did the storm die down, but the boat also miraculously landed on the other side.

**The Bottom Line:**

Jesus didn't judge the men by the distance they had covered, how long it took them to get that far, or the fact that they were toiling. All that mattered to Jesus was that they, to the best of their ability, were carrying out His command. God is not looking for our success. He is not judging us by our speed. He is simply concerned with the fact that we are trying to obey His will.

When Jesus gives us an assignment and we do our best to obey, we may be making little or no headway, and yet it may be no fault of our own because there is a headwind blowing against us. You may be struggling against something and it seems like you are pushed two steps back for every one step forward. But God will observe our willingness to obey and count our progress, not by how far we seem to have progressed, but by the determined purpose with which we have been tugging at the oars.

Another very important part of this lesson is the fact that Jesus said, "Pass over to the other side." If you are obeying personal instructions the Lord gave you, and He told you to "go over," you don't have to be afraid that you might "go under." If you truly heard from Him, know that He has everything under control and lined up for your success.

Finally, it is interesting to note that these men were afraid for their lives, and had the impression they had been forsaken and forgotten. For some reason, they felt like Jesus didn't know about the storm, where they were, or that they were about to drown. But all the time they were doing their best to get to the other side, in obedience to His command, Jesus had been watching them from the mountain. God always has His eyes on us. Never forget Jesus' last words to the disciples in Matthew 28:20, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." And in Hebrews 13:5, the apostle Paul reminds us that God has promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

**Questions:**

1. The language in Mark 6 and Matthew 14 makes it clear that Jesus insisted that the disciples \_\_\_\_\_
2. What was Jesus doing by himself up on the mountainside? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What problem did the disciples encounter in their efforts to obey? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. At what time did Jesus come walking to the disciples on the water? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What did the disciples think when they first saw Jesus in Mark 6:49? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How far had Jesus walked on the water? \_\_\_\_\_



7. Even though each disciple saw Jesus, the impossibility of such an act, and their fatigue and fear in the stormy conditions, prevented the twelve from recognizing Jesus. What did Jesus say to correct this misunderstanding and calm their fear in Mark 6:50? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What did Peter want Jesus to command him to do? (Matthew 14:28) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What cause Peter to sink in the water? (Matthew 14:30) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. After Jesus identified Himself and got in the boat, we find there were actually two miracles that followed the disciples' act of obedience. What were they? (John 6:21, Mark 6:51, Matthew 14:32)
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
11. What was the act of obedience that triggered these miracles? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. After Jesus and the disciples had crossed over the Sea of Galilee, where did they land? (Mark 6:53) \_\_\_\_\_
13. What are some lessons we can learn from this account?
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
14. What does this story reveal about Jesus' involvement in our own trials? (Thought question – answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 22**

### **Persistence Pays Off**

**The Reading:** Mark 7:24-30; Matthew 15:21-28

**The Problem:**

The story begins with Jesus arriving in the region of Tyre and Sidon after leaving Gennesaret, where He had miraculously healed many people. News of those healings soon reached the neighboring towns so, when He reached Tyre, Jesus entered a house but didn't want anyone to know about it. He just needed a little down time and rest. But He wasn't able to keep His presence a secret. It wasn't long before everyone in town knew He was there and, as soon as a desperate woman whose daughter was possessed by a demon spirit heard about it, she came to see Him

However, the woman was a Gentile, so it would be inappropriate for her to go right up to Jesus and ask for a healing for her daughter. She was also a woman. In Jesus' day, women had no rights; they weren't even allowed to attend worship services. How could she even imagine that approaching the Lord of hosts would come to a good end?

But that didn't stop this determined mother. She ran right up to Jesus and begged for His help. I can hear her saying, "I know this isn't protocol, I'm very well aware of the fact that I'm not supposed to be doing this. I realize I could get into big trouble, and people will probably think I'm crazy. But I've tried everything that I know to do, Jesus, and nothing has helped. I need Your help, Lord, and I need it today."

Jesus tried to put her off, reminding her that the children (i.e. the Jewish people) get priority over the little dogs (the terminology that Jews used for the Gentile people of that time). Essentially, Jesus was reminding the woman of her place as a Gentile, while not wanting to push her away completely. But she said to Him, "Even the dogs eat the crumbs from the master's table." In other words, she was saying, "Jesus, I understand Your mission. I know that You were sent here for Your people (the Jews). But right now, Jesus, my child is sick and needs a healing. And I believe You are the only One Who can make that happen."

**The Turning Point:**

The woman responded with great faith, and showed humility, respect, and trust by telling Jesus that she would gratefully accept any leftovers of his miraculous power. In the society of that time, most men wouldn't have taken her argument seriously, and would have sent her away even before she uttered a single word.

But Jesus was nothing like the men of His day. He was so impressed by the faith she demonstrated, and by her persistence in asking for a healing, that He decided to help her. Jesus told the woman to go home, and she would find the demon had left her daughter.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

If the woman had responded, "Who are you calling a dog?" she would not have received from Jesus what her daughter needed. If she had stood there insisting that He had to come home with her to lay hands on her daughter, she would not have seen her daughter healed. Her humble, faith-filled obedience by going home without argument brought the victory and a healing for her daughter.

### **The Bottom Line:**

The prevailing theology of Jesus' day was that people who didn't fit - who didn't have the right status, who weren't the right nationality, or had some type of illness or adverse condition - weren't worthy of God's attention. They believed there was nothing that God would do for such people. As a matter of fact, most believed that if a person needed a touch from the Lord for any reason, that person must have gotten into the unfortunate situation because they had sinned or God had not looked favorably on them for some other reason.

I think all of us, at some time in our lives, have felt unworthy to receive from the Lord. We may have felt like we too were little dogs, like the Gentile woman, and undeserving of any blessings from God.

But the Bible teaches us that we can go boldly to the throne of grace just as we are and ask the One who gives us strength, to help us in our time of need. I Chronicles 16:11 says, "Seek the Lord and His strength; seek the Lord's face continually." Matthew 7:7 says, "Ask and it shall be given unto you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you."

Anytime we petition the throne of grace, earnestly seeking and inquiring of the Lord, He has promised we will be heard. But after you ask the Lord for a miracle, spend quiet time just waiting on Him and listen carefully. He may whisper in your heart specific instructions you must obey, before you will see your miracle.

### **Questions:**

1. Name the two cities to which Jesus had traveled for some privacy and rest.
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Who interrupted Jesus' private gathering with His disciples at the house where they were hidden, and why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Give three facts about the woman found in verse Mark 7:26.
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
4. How did Jesus respond to the Gentile woman's request? (Mark 7:27) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Was the woman insulted by Jesus' response? How did she reply to him? \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. In the woman's response to Jesus' reminder that the Jews should get priority over Gentiles, there were a number of implied facts. Check the one that is true.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ Both Jews and Gentiles have the same Creator.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ Both Jews and Gentiles are answerable to the same Lord.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ Both Jews and Gentiles belong in the same 'house'.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ Both Jews and Gentiles are equally dependent upon the one God for survival.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ Jesus Christ is actually this Sovereign Creator Lord of both Jews and Gentiles.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ All of the above
7. Why did Jesus change His mind about helping the distraught mother? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle that followed? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. What was the miracle that followed the act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. What advice would you give a person who feels unworthy to ask God for a miracle? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. Does it pay to be persistent when bringing an issue before God? What does the Bible say about this?

a) Psalm 55:17: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Mark 13:13: \_\_\_\_\_

c) Luke 5:17-20: \_\_\_\_\_

d) 2 Corinthians 4:16: \_\_\_\_\_

e) James 5:11: \_\_\_\_\_

f) Ephesians 6:18: \_\_\_\_\_

12. How would you compare your level of faith with that of the woman in this story? Are you persistent in your prayers? (Answer optional)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 23**

### **An Attitude of Gratitude**

**The Reading:** Luke 17:11-17

**The Problem:**

In this passage, on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus was traveling the barren landscape along the border of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village near the border, ten men, all lepers, greeted him. Within this group, the Bible tells us that at least one of them was a Samaritan. And even though Samaritans and Jews normally didn't mix together in that day, there he was with the Jews. The reason for their fellowship was simple. They shared a common misfortune.

Leprosy was one of the most dreaded and also misunderstood diseases of that day. Lepers were required to stand at a distance of at least 150 feet away from a healthy person. When lepers entered a city, they were required to wear a bell around their necks, like a necklace, and ring the bell shouting "Unclean," so that others would be sure to stay away from them. The only people they could get near were others with the same disease. Because of their mutual misery, this terrible disease broke down racial barriers and they banded together.

These ten lepers kept the proper distance from Jesus, but not only shouted, "Unclean! Unclean," as required by the law, they also shouted, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

**The Turning Point:**

Jesus took a good at them, and said, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." The law was, once there was a skin infection of some type and a person had been declared a leper, if he thought he was healed the individual had to show himself to the priest. If the priests were not sure that the leper was healed, isolation would be required for another seven days. Then, after the seven days if there was still no change, the priest would pronounce the individual still unclean. But if the skin were clear, the leper would be pronounced clean by the priests.

**The Miracle That Followed:**

I wonder what the lepers thought when they were told to go show themselves to the priests. There had been no big ceremony, and Jesus didn't lay hands on the men or anoint them with oil. He actually hadn't done anything special for them, except take the time to look at them and speak to them.

But the men obeyed and turned around to go and show themselves to the priests. On the way they noticed something amazing. They could feel a current of

health and vigor rushing through every tissue of their bodies. They looked down and saw their skin cleared, and knew they were completely cured. Nine of the former lepers continued on to the priests to be pronounced clean. They were just too excited to remember to thank God. They couldn't wait to do the things they had missed out on doing for so long. They were thrilled that they would be able to pick up their former lives again and see their families and friends.

But the attitude of the Samaritan was different. He knew such an enormous gift could have only come directly from the Lord. He had a different attitude, one of gratitude. As he returned, he praised God, publicly acknowledging Him as the One to whom he owed the great blessing he had just now received. Also, he fell on his face and thanked Jesus, for in the Master he recognized God's representative, and God's power and love operating through Jesus.

### **The Bottom Line:**

Jesus was grieved because only one of the ten, a Samaritan, returned to thank Him for what He had done. But then, Jesus did a second thing for him - He forgave his sins. The other nine lepers were healed, but they were not saved

In the south, there are two things we try to teach our children as they are growing up. One is to always respond to questions with, "Yes, sir," or "No, sir," "Yes, ma'am" or "No ma'am." If my children just answered with a "Yes," I would ask, "Yes what?" And they would answer, "Yes, ma'am." The other thing I tried to instill in my children, and am now trying to teach my grandchildren, is to say, "Thank you." For some reason, this seems to be a courtesy that isn't automatic for them yet.

Gratefulness is an attitude of the mind and a condition of the heart. The outward expression of sincere thankfulness flows from a heart that appreciates every blessing the Lord has showered down upon us.

Did you notice that Jesus was offended that the other nine lepers didn't return to say "Thank you"? Let's not be like those nine lepers. From now on, let's never overlook a blessing or take a gift from God for granted. Let's start every prayer with praise and thanksgiving for all He has done for us in the past. Let's recognize all the promises He has kept over the years and shower Him with words of worship and thanks. He appreciates our taking notice and thanking Him.

### **Questions:**

1. What did Jesus observe about the ten men who approached him in the village? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What were some of the laws of that day regarding lepers?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
3. What did Jesus tell the lepers to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What did the lepers notice along the way? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What was the act of obedience that triggered this miracle? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What did one of the lepers do when he saw that he was healed? (vs. 15-16)
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
7. What nationality was the leper who returned to thank Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What additional thing did Jesus do for the leper who returned to thank Him? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Can you think of any possible reasons to explain why the other nine lepers didn't return to thank God for such a wonderful gift? (Thought question)
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
10. Why do many believers today tend to forget to thank God first in their prayers, before asking for more favors? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## **CHAPTER 24**

### **Filled to the Brim**

**The Reading:** John 2:1-12:

**The Problem:**

In Jesus' day, Jewish weddings were far more elaborate than today. Our wedding ceremonies may last the better part of one day. But as lavish as American weddings can be ... they don't even come close to what the Jewish culture invested into this event.

The wedding usually started with a time of feasting. And then later in the afternoon or early evening, the father of the bride would take his daughter on his arm and parade her and the wedding party through the streets of the village, so that everyone could come out and congratulate the bride.

Finally the wedding party would arrive at the home of the groom, and the wedding actually took place in the front doorway of the groom's house. After the wedding ceremony, the wedding party would light torches and parade the bride and groom through the streets of the town again - always taking the longest route through the village so that as many people as possible could wish them well.

After that is when the real celebration would begin. For nearly a week, the newlyweds would hold an open house. They were treated like royalty, dressed in fancy clothes, often wearing crowns on their heads. The groom's family was expected to provide all the refreshments for the seven days of festivities.

Now, in those days, it was believed to be unhealthy to drink water alone. And it was also thought to be harmful to drink wine alone. Only barbarians drank wine straight from the jug. Instead, it was the common custom to water wine down by at least a 2:1 ratio. Most wine that would have been drunk at weddings and other social gatherings would have had an alcoholic content of no higher than 2.2 to 2.75 % ... well below the 3.2 % that is considered necessary today to classify a beverage as alcoholic.

So this wedding feast wasn't anything like a drunken party, but for some reason the host ran out of wine. To plan for so many people, surely careful preparations had been made. They must have sent out invitations, and carefully counted how many people RSVP'd for the after-party. They had undoubtedly told the caterer how many people to expect.

To run out of wine was more than embarrassing; it was a social crisis because this would damage their credibility in the community. A good host always made sure there was plenty food and drink available. Perhaps, more people showed up

at the party than the groom had invited. Or maybe, the wedding took place during a heat wave and guests were drinking more than they expected. Whatever the reason, the seven-day celebration was about halfway through when word came to the groom, "We're out of wine."

### **The Turning Point:**

Mary, the mother of Jesus, had experienced public shame connected with her own wedding so many years before, so she was sympathetic. She didn't have the resources or ability to solve this dilemma, but she knew that Jesus could take care of everything.

When she learned the wine was gone, Jesus' mother simply said to him, "They have no more wine" (John 2:3). Mary wasn't that much different from other moms that we know. There must have been something in her eyes, or perhaps there was an inflection in her voice that Jesus recognized from His childhood. Her meaning was obvious, and Jesus knew exactly what she was really saying. "Son, fix this problem and fix it now!"

Notice ... Mary didn't try to tell Jesus **how** to fix the problem (as we so often try to do in our own prayers). Mary had the kind of faith that knew Jesus could handle the problem without any instructions from her, because she knew Who He was and she had a pretty good idea about what He'd come to do. In fact, her unwavering faith was why God had chosen her to be the mother of Jesus.

It seems like Jesus was a bit annoyed, because His answer to her almost sounded harsh. He said, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4 ESV).

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

But Mary had paid her dues and she expected to receive the miracle. She had spent many long nights feeding and caring for Jesus, raising him from a baby to the man that He was that day. I believe Jesus loved her, as most sons love their mothers. He respected her position in His life and realized that for Him to not obey her would have been to directly disobey the Old Testament law that says to honor your mother and father. Mary didn't take Jesus by the ear like other mothers do their children. She grabbed him by the heart and made a simple request. She knew that this would be nothing for Jesus to take care of.

Then Mary said to the servants, "Whatever He tells you to do, do it." And Jesus said to the servants, "See those six stone jars over there? Yes, those water pots. I want you to fill each one of them up to the top with water." What Jesus told them to do made no sense! If Jesus would have told them to go buy some wine at the corner store - that would have made more sense. However, that would have meant walking by sight, and Jesus wanted them to begin walking by faith.

The servants did as Jesus asked, and filled the pots up as full as possible. I think it's interesting to note that Jesus asked the servants to help Him. Jesus could have filled these pots with wine by means of just by a look, or by speaking the word. However, God loves to share with us, His servants, opportunities to work alongside Him.

After the pots were filled, Jesus didn't pray over them, or anoint the jugs with oil in His own name. He simply said, "Take some to the governor of the feast." And the catering manager declared that it was the best wine he had ever tasted.

### **The Bottom Line:**

There are several lessons to learn from this account.

1. Jesus honored His mother and obeyed. Then the servants obeyed Jesus, and filled the jugs with water. And when the servants dipped a cup into the jugs and poured liquid into the guests' wine glasses, because of their acts of obedience, instead of water – there was delicious wine in everyone's glasses.
2. When we have done all we can to, it doesn't mean that God isn't still able to do something. The servants had exhausted their own ability, but they hadn't yet tapped into the Lord's ability to solve problems and make things happen.
3. When Jesus gives something, He never gives "just enough" to get by; He always gives so much that there's plenty left over. The six stone jugs could hold up to 20 or 30 gallons each, which adds up to 120 to 180 gallons in all. That's a lot of wine! There's no way the guests would need that much wine to last until the end of the marriage feast. So why did Jesus give them so much? It was because He is an extravagant giver, and as a kindness to the newly-weds. They probably had enough wine left over to last the rest of the year.

Remember when Elisha told poor widow to pour oil into the empty jugs to redeem her sons? She didn't receive just enough oil to pay her debts. She was given so much extra she was able to support herself and her family for quite some time (2 Kings 4:7). When Jesus multiplied the little boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish in order to feed 5,000 men and their families, there were twelve baskets of undistributed portions remaining. He gave abundantly!

Paul experienced God's extravagant grace, for he said, "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13). To a dying thief on a cross he gave the gift of paradise. To a woman caught in adultery he gave the gift of amazing grace and forgiveness. To a grieving father he gave back a child from the shadow of death.

Whatever you need from the Lord, know that He is lavish with His gifts.

**Questions:**

1. Where did this wedding take place? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How did weddings of that time differ from weddings today? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why was running out of wine such a big issue? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What embarrassing situation did Mary face down at her own wedding, that may have led to her wanting to help the newly-weds? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Jesus' mother told the servants, "Whatever He (Jesus) says to you, do it." (John 2:5) What does this show you about Jesus' relationship with His mother? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Jesus said, "My hour has not yet come." (John 2:4). To what hour was He referring? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Describe the water pots. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What were the two acts of obedience that triggered the miracle?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
9. What was the miracle that followed these two acts of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. The servants didn't know they were taking wine to the master, how would you have felt if you were carrying what you thought was water to the master of the banquet? \_\_\_\_\_

11. What did the catering manager (governor of the feast) say when he tasted the wine? \_\_\_\_\_

12. John described this as "the first of Jesus' signs." What was it a sign of? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Obviously, Jesus could have created wine anyway He chose. In your opinion, why did Jesus get the servants involved with the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_

14. What are three lessons we can learn from the story of the wedding feast?

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

15. The groom was utterly clueless at first. He had no idea all this was going on behind the scenes. Has God ever been at in your life, solving a problem before you even knew it existed? Would you like to share that testimony now?

(Answer optional) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 25**

### **From Agonizing Fear to Absolute Faith**

**The Reading:** John 4:46-54

**The Problem:**

There was a man who found himself in a very desperate situation. His son whom he loved very much had been stricken with an illness, and it seemed certain his son would soon die. The father, being a nobleman and of the upper class, had taken his son to all the finest doctors and hospitals in the area, but to no avail. Some type of sickness was ravaging his son's body, and nothing they did helped.

The news of Jesus coming to that area had spread around the region. So when the nobleman heard that Jesus was in Galilee, for the sake of his son, he traveled about twenty miles from Capernaum to Cana, a full day's journey, to beg help from a simple carpenter named Jesus from Nazareth.

This nobleman had rank and status in a culture where rank and status was everything. He was probably an official under Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch (king) of Galilee (4 BC-30AD). It was his custom to command, and whatever he wanted was done for him immediately. Previously, he would not have even considered lowering himself to do such a thing. Before this urgent situation came up, the nobleman could probably have been found laughing and making jokes with some of his country club buddies about the claims of others that Jesus of Nazareth could heal the sick. But his desperation broke down any foolish pride he might have had, and he made the journey to find Jesus as quickly as possible.

**The Turning Point:**

Jesus understood the basis of the nobleman's faith when he said, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." But the nobleman replied, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" This royal official thought Jesus had to travel back to Capernaum, to physically touch his son in order to heal him.

Jesus knew the spiritual condition of His own people, the Jews in the region of Galilee, where He grew up. When He returned to His home turf, He was quite aware of the barrier He would have to breach to get these people to believe in Him. The nobleman and most of the people in Galilee had the "Prove It to Me" variety of faith. This type of faith says, "I'll believe it when I see it." They wanted to see some signs and miracles before they would believe in Jesus. The majority of the nobleman's countrymen were walking by sight and not by faith. But true faith is just the opposite. Instead of basing our faith on "After I see, then I will believe," true faith reverses the order and says, "After I believe, then I will see."

And so, when responding to the nobleman's plea to heal His son, Jesus decided to deal first with a far more important matter, the issue of his faith. Jesus wanted this man to have what He wants all of us to have. He wanted the nobleman to have a relationship with Him based on the fact that he believed in Him. He wanted the nobleman to know Him and know His character, not just know what He could do.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Jesus could have gone to this man's home in Capernaum and healed his son in person. The nobleman believed that convincing Jesus to make the trip was a matter of life and death. But Jesus' response to the man was to simply say, "Go on home. Your son lives."

What we are told in verse 50 is vital to the power of faith in the Word of Jesus. The man believed the Word of Jesus and obeyed without question, heading off in the direction of his home. On the way back, the nobleman's servants met up with him, and reported that his son was not only still alive but also doing well. So he asked them what time his son began to get better. And they said, "It was yesterday, about one o'clock in the afternoon." The father knew that this was exactly the time that Jesus had said to him, "Your son lives."

Overjoyed, I imagine the ecstatic father ran the rest of the way to his house to embrace his son, praising the Lord all the way. His faith must have been greatly strengthened by this amazing news. He knew for sure then that Jesus is not limited by space. All he had to do is place his trust in Jesus' Word, and obey.

### **The Bottom Line:**

Jesus didn't have to travel to Capernaum with this official to heal his son, and the father didn't have to witness the miracle to believe in Jesus. If Jesus said it was going to happen, it would happen. We don't have to "see it to believe it". All we have to do is hear God say it to believe it! If you read it in the Word of God, believe it! Memorize it, and meditate on it.

### **Questions:**

1. Who approached Jesus, and what did he want? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Describe the life of this royal official before his son got sick. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Describe the spiritual condition of the Jews in the region of Galilee, where Jesus had grown up. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What was Jesus' initial response to this man and his request? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. When the nobleman continued to ask Jesus to come with him and heal his son, what did Jesus say? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What was the miracle that followed the act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Why is the moment when the boy was healed recorded in the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. After his son was healed, not only the nobleman believed but also \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Why do you think Jesus refused to go with this man to Capernaum, as He had been asked to do? (Thought question) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. At the beginning of this account, the nobleman displayed a prideful attitude of entitlement. What was his attitude at the end? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What does this lesson teach us about believing and obeying? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## **CHAPTER 26**

### **Change Your Focus**

**The Reading:** John 5:2-9

**The Problem:**

The Pool of Bethesda was a pool in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate. (The Sheep Gate was the gate used to bring the sheep into the city to the temple for sacrifice.) The pool was surrounded by five porches, each open at the front but protected from the sun and rain on the sides and overhead. It was widely held that when the waters in the pool were “troubled,” an angel of the Lord had stirred the water and was standing by, waiting for someone to get into the pool. They believed the person who made it into the water first would be healed of whatever disease he had.

People who were sick travelled long distances to seek their healing, waiting day after day on the porches, watching for the water to move. In his gospel, John never confirmed whether healings actually happened or not. Clearly, the people believed miracles really did occur, and in ancient times it was also common for the word to spread about hot springs in which people claimed to get healed. Even today, in many parts of the world, people travel to hot springs which advertise healing powers.

The Apostle John said the people waiting by the pool were either blind, lame, or paralyzed. As they waited, they probably quietly visited with one another or with the friend or relative who was bringing them to the pool every day. But then, if someone saw even a ripple in the water, pandemonium must have broken out. Every ailing person there would have been competing with the rest of the crowd to be the first into the water.

Can you imagine the pushing, shoving, and shouting that must have taken place? Obviously none of them could quickly step into the water, and what a pathetic sight it must have been ... with people crawling, hopping, rolling, or clawing their way to the water's edge. What chaos there must have been!

If someone was healed, it couldn't have been the most disabled person there, because a person who was quick enough to jump into the water first must not have been in such bad shape to begin with. Wouldn't that mean that, almost invariably, the most severely ill people, the ones who needed the miracle the most, would never be healed? That seems to have been the case for the man Jesus met there.

### **The Turning Point:**

The man Jesus met had been paralyzed for 38 years, waiting for someone to carry him down to the pool of Bethesda when the water moved. His eyes must have been so fixed on the pool that he couldn't even imagine another solution for his problem. Did you notice, when Jesus asked him, "Do you want to be made whole?" the paralyzed man's focus was still on the pool? Instead of giving Jesus a resounding "YES" to such a leading question, the man told his story about the pool again and how no one would carry him into the water quickly enough.

I believe we still do that today. When I pray about a problem, I have a tendency to want to "help" God by suggesting different scenarios for the solution. I've got my eyes glued to the "pool" instead of The Solution.

When you ask God for help, take your eyes off the pool. For example, imagine you have a problem that some extra money could solve. We've likely all visualized getting a better job or maybe even winning the lottery, paying off our bills, and ending up in such a good position financially that we never have to work again. But that probably isn't the solution for your financial problem God has in mind. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. (Isaiah 55:8) Just waiting around to win the lottery, seeing that as the only way to get out of the enormous mess you've gotten yourself into, would only blindfold you from seeing several other opportunities around the pool, doors the Lord might be opening for you. Proverbs 16:3 and Psalm 37:5 says "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass"

The turning point for the paralyzed man came when he changed his focus from the pool, his expected solution, and looked to the Lord instead for his healing.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Jesus told the paralyzed man to just pick up his mat and walk. He didn't lay hands on him or say a long prayer over him. Jesus didn't anoint him with oil. Jesus didn't even extend His hand toward him, like we do sometimes when we're praying for someone's healing. He just gave the man a task, something to do.

Maybe, in the past, you have hesitated to obey God because you fear the consequences of your decision. In this story, Jesus told the man to pick up his mat and carry it. But it was the Sabbath day and, according to Jewish law, he wasn't allowed to carry a mat on the Sabbath. This would constitute "work" in their eyes, but the man chose to obey Jesus rather than the Jews of his day.

The Lord's command is for you to fear Him above all else. The same sovereign, omnipotent God who keeps your heart beating and the planets orbiting is more than able to handle the results of your obedience. If you have asked Him for a

miracle but He told you to do something first ... if you know without a doubt it is His will because it lines up with the Word, then you need to obey based solely on Who is doing the asking.

**The Bottom Line:**

I always assumed the miracle happened first, in other words - the paralysis left first and then the man got up. And I've read several commentaries that put the events in exactly that order. But now, I believe Jesus waited for the man to make an attempt to get up first before the healing came.

The paralyzed man's obedience set the stage for something great to happen. The Lord's simple requests often serve as stepping-stones to life's most wonderful blessings. When you choose to obey the Lord, He will bless you. This is because obedience *a/ways* leads to blessing.

**Questions:**

1. Why did people gather by the Pool of Bethesda? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Describe the difficulties the man whom Jesus met by the pool was having.
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
3. Why do you think Jesus asked the paralyzed man if he really wanted to get well? (vs. 6) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Jesus isn't interested in endorsing our faulty solutions or excuses. He'd rather shoot straight with us just like He did with this man. Basically He said to the man, "Look, do you want to lie here for the rest of your life? Or, do you want to get well? If you want to get well, \_\_\_\_\_."
5. What act of obedience triggered the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What three things did the man do immediately after he was healed, that he had not been able to do for 38 years? (vs. 8-9)
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

7. What law were the Jews referring to in verse 10? (Exodus 20:8-11)

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Why do you think the Jews asked the man who it was that healed him in verse 12? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Why couldn't the man point out Who had just healed him to the Jews? (vs. 13) \_\_\_\_\_

10. Why did Jesus warn the man about not sinning? (vs. 14) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

To what other person did Jesus give a similar warning? (John 8:1-11) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. When Jesus told the paralyzed man to take his mat with him, He was saying that, no matter what happened from that day forward, there would be no reason to return to the porch and sit by the pool on his old pallet. The pallet symbolized what he used to be, where he used to be; it symbolized his helpless and hopeless condition.

Compare this with our own condition before and after salvation. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. Just like this man had used his own resources for 38 years to seek his healing, we tend to rely on our own resources to solve our problems. When they don't work, we become discouraged. What does this true story teach us to do instead?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 27**

### **The Miracle of Multiplication**

**The Reading:** John 6:1-15

**The Problem:**

The people had followed Jesus out of town. As a matter of fact, crowds of people followed Jesus wherever He went. When people heard that Jesus and the disciples had gone off to be on their own, they wanted to be there, too. So they came running from all the towns in the area and actually got there before Jesus and the disciples had even arrived. They were determined to hear Jesus teach, and they wanted to see more miracles, more signs, and more wonders.

But then it began to get dark, and the people were hungry. Matthew 14:21 says there were 5,000 men present. Women and children weren't considered important enough to be counted in those days. Drawing on the work of sociologist Megan McKenna, she suggests in her book "Not Counting Women and Children" (Orbis, 1994) that the ratio of women and children to adult men would have been 5 to 1 or 6 to 1. This means the actual number of people in the crowd could have been as many as 25,000 to 30,000. Other commentaries have put the size of the crowd at 15,000 to 20,000.

There were no grocery stores nearby. There wasn't a restaurant on every corner as there is today. Jesus and the apostles didn't have enough money to buy food for everyone, even if there were supplies available.

So Jesus asked Philip, "Where can we buy bread for these people to eat?" (John 6:5). Since Philip was from this area, this question could have been a simple question of where the shops were located (John 1:44). But Jesus was really asking Philip this question to test him. All throughout the Bible, we see that God asks questions to test men (Genesis 3:9, 4:9, Job 38). Jesus asked Philip "where" but Philip could only think in terms of "how."

Jesus was showing Philip and the other disciples that there was no way they could solve the problem on their own. Jesus wanted the disciples to trust Him - to know that He alone would be able to meet their need. He alone would be able to pull off a catering job of this magnitude.

Finally Andrew, spoke up and said, "There is a boy here with five barley loaves and two small fish."

### **The Turning Point:**

We don't know much about how the day started for that young boy. He set off in the morning with his five barley loaves and two fishes. His mother might have packed the food as a snack for his father out in the field working. Maybe he was headed out to go fishing, took the food along for his lunch, but then noticed the crowd following Jesus and joined them. Or perhaps he intentionally went that way, on that special day, just to hear Jesus.

Whatever his plans were, when the boy left home early that morning, I'm sure he thought he had prepared adequately for the day. It is important consider what this boy was actually carrying. In ancient times, bread was the staple food, and the word for bread was often used as a synonym for food itself. Now the boy only had five barley loaves, the ordinary black bread of the Galilean peasant. Barley was usually used as food for the horses (1 Kings 4:28). But poor people also used barley to make their bread (Judges 7:13; 2 Kings 4:42), and these loaves would have been in the shape of small rolls or little round cakes.

And the two fish? Think sardines. The Greek word used here is *opsarion* – which literally means “tiny fish”. Strong's Concordance says it was presumably salted and dried as a condiment, to be eaten as a relish with the bread.

As we have seen from the counting issue above, children weren't seen as very important in that culture. The young boy hadn't even been counted with the 5,000. But God was planning to use someone that everyone else had overlooked to perform a miracle. God often uses those who are the weakest or least important in the eyes of other people. Over and over in the Bible, He selected ordinary people to do extra-ordinary things in His Kingdom.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

This young boy was willing to give what little he had to Jesus. He only had a small sack lunch, but was willing to give it up to help others. When asked to give Jesus his small meal, he handed it over. He didn't argue with the disciples, or try to run away with his food. As was the custom for children in that culture, he obeyed immediately.

Jesus broke the bread and blessed it, and then told the disciples to pass it out. Everyone received as much food as they wanted, and they all had plenty to eat. In fact, in Matthew 14:20; Mark 6:43; Luke 9:17; and John 6:13, we learn that there were twelve baskets full of food left over.

The Greek word used for “basket” in all these accounts was “*kophinos*,” which meant “a wicker basket,” made of twigs or branches. This was a relatively small basket that could be carried on the back to hold provisions. It is believed that they were about 3/5 bushel, about the size of a backpack.

Some today confuse this miracle with the one where Jesus fed 4,000, recorded in Matthew 15:37, 16:10; and Mark 8:8, 8:20. The Greek word for “basket” in these accounts is “*spuris*.” *Spuris* means “something round, twisted, or folded together (anything rolled onto a circle)”. This was a braided reed basket, considerably larger than the *kophinos*, like a large laundry hamper. Sometimes these baskets were even large enough to hold a man, as this is the same word in scripture used for the basket that Paul climbed into to be let down from the wall at Damascus, according to Luke. (Acts 9:25).

No matter what sizes the baskets for left-overs were, these were both amazing miracles.

### **The Bottom Line:**

The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle, apart from Jesus’ resurrection, which has been recorded in all four Gospels. Because of the repetition, we know God is sending an important message to us today. I believe that besides teaching trust in God’s provision and highlighting the value of generosity, it emphasizes the value of obedience.

If God can use a small boy’s lunch, is it possible that you have something the Lord could use to help someone? Could it be that you’re holding on to a possession of yours so tightly that you’re blocking a miracle God has planned for you?

### **Questions:**

1. As Jesus looked out over the crowd, Jesus asked Philip for suggestions on how to feed this large group of hungry people (vs. 5). What was Philip’s reply to Jesus’ question? (vs. 7) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How much would 200 denarii equal today? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What else do we learn about Philip from the following verses:
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_ (Matt. 10:3)
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_ (John 1:44)
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_ (John 1:45)
  - d) \_\_\_\_\_ (John 14:8)

- e) \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 1:1-13)
4. What solution did Andrew suggest? (vs. 9) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What did Jesus do about this problem? (vs. 10-11)
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Compare the limited vision of Philip with the unlimited power of Christ.
- a) Philip desired that everyone receive a ... (vs. 7) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b) Jesus' blessing provided as they... (vs. 11) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c) When they had eaten they were ... (vs. 12) \_\_\_\_\_
7. Did the boy lose the lunch he gave to Jesus? (v. 12-13) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Who is the only One Who could pull off a catering job of this magnitude without preparing for hours, even days, before? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What part did obedience play in this miracle? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What three lessons can we learn from this miracle to apply to our lives today?
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_



## CHAPTER 28

### I Once Was Blind

**The Reading:** John 9:1-41

**The Problem:**

Jesus met a man who was born with a disability - blindness. He was a grown man now, but things had not been going well for him. Back then there were no Braille books for blind people, no seeing-eye-dogs, and no way for a blind person to be educated or work. And apparently his parents (vs. 18) weren't able to care for him any longer. This man had no choice but to beg for money, as was common for people with disabilities in that day and age.

Visual impairment was the most common type of physical disability recorded in Bible times. Aside from people like Isaac (Genesis 27:1), Jacob (Genesis 48:10), Eli (1 Samuel 3:2 and 4:15), and Ahijah the Shilomite (1 Kings 14:4), whose eyesight failed in old age, natural causes of disability are not mentioned in the Bible. Blindness was usually attributed to God. The general view of the Old Testament writers was that God brings disability as punishment for transgressions for sin or as an expression of God's wrath for people's disobedience. Blindness was seen as a curse and as a result of unbelief and ignorance.

Very often sin leads to pain and suffering (Leviticus 14-16, Exodus 12:29-30). And it is true, the original sin of Adam and Eve was the beginning of all diseases that lead to death and disabilities. The disciples had been indoctrinated with this kind of thinking from childhood, and so expected Jesus to confirm that there was indeed a connection between this man's blindness and some sin with the question, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?*"

But Jesus offered a third alternative for his disciples to consider by turning their question away from the "why." Instead encouraged His disciples to see what God could do through this man's disability. In this man's case, the specific work of God would soon be revealed when Jesus healed him of his blindness.

People with disabilities seemed to catch Jesus' attention quite often. And a big part of Jesus' ministry was to alleviate suffering when He came across someone in need. In this situation, Jesus took all the initiative. The blind man did not come to Jesus and ask to be healed, Jesus came to Him. Jesus wanted to cure the man of his blindness, and He expected the man to respond in faith with obedience to one small request.

**The Turning Point:**

First Jesus spit on the ground and made some mud, and then He used the mud as a salve for the man's eyes. Now Jesus used many different methods leading to His miracles, but this was undoubtedly one of His more unusual ones. We can't begin to imagine why He made up a batch of mud pie to spread on the man's eyes. However, some commentaries have said that it may be that Jesus wanted to emphasize two things.

- Just as God used the dust of the ground and clay to do a work of creation in Genesis, so Jesus did a work of creation with dust and clay for this man.
- Jesus may have found it advantageous to change His methods of healing so no one could say there was a magic formula that He used. He wanted them to see the power was in God, not in His method.

Then Jesus sent the blind man off to the Pool of Siloam. As with many sites in the Holy Land, the origins of the Siloam Pool reach back at least seven centuries before the time of Jesus.

King Hezekiah of Judah correctly anticipated that there was going to be a siege against Jerusalem by the Assyrian monarch, Sennacherib. To protect the city's water supply during the siege, Hezekiah undertook a strategic engineering project that would be an impressive feat in any age, but especially for Old Testament times. He ordered the digging of a 1,750-foot tunnel under the City of David to bring water from the Gihon Spring, which lay outside the city wall, inside the city to a pool on the opposite side of the ridge. In the years that followed, "Hezekiah's Tunnel" continued to carry fresh water to this section of Jerusalem, and different pools were built there over the centuries – including the Pool of Siloam.

The naturally flowing spring water would have qualified the Pool of Siloam for use as a *mikveh* for ritual bathing. In addition, it may also have been an important source of fresh water for the inhabitants in that part of the city.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Then Jesus said unto him, "*Go, wash in the pool of Siloam*" (John 9:7). Now notice Jesus didn't say, "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam and you will be able to see." He just told him to go wash the mud out of his eyes in that particular pool.

Still being blind, it must have been difficult for the blind man to find his way to pool of Siloam, and then down the steps to the pool itself. He may have even needed to find someone who would lead him there. He might have been thinking of a dozen reasons why this was probably a fool's errand. But he went and

washed his eyes in that pool in faith and obedience, because Jesus had told him to do so.

And he came up out of the water seeing. I wonder if the cure was instant and complete. Or, as he washed, did he notice he was beginning to see light, and as he continued washing the light got brighter and he began to see people? The Bible doesn't say, but we do know that when the man who had been born with congenital blindness obeyed Jesus, he was blessed with 20/20 vision.

This is the first account in the Bible where a person who was born blind had been healed of their blindness. From Genesis to John, no prophet, priest, or apostle ever gave sight to eyes born blind. But opening the eyes of the blind had been prophesied to be a work of the Messiah: "*The eyes of the blind shall be opened.*" (Isaiah 35:5)

### **The Bottom Line:**

Symbolically this man's condition represents mankind's spiritual blindness apart from salvation in Jesus. Spiritual blindness is a grievous condition experienced by those who do not believe in God, Jesus Christ, and His Word (Romans 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:12). Those who reject Christ are the lost (John 6:68-69). Being spiritually blind, they are perishing (2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Revelation 3:17). They choose not to accept the teachings of Christ and His authority in their lives (Matthew 28:18).

One of my favorite hymns, *Amazing Grace* written by John Newton, refers to this story in the verse that says, "I once was blind, but now I see" (John 9:25). The miracle of creating sight for this man is really a picture of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. The blind beggar had no hope; he knew he was destined to spend the rest of his life in darkness. He didn't even ask Jesus for help. Actually, Jesus Himself came to the blind man and initiated the miracle.

The same is true of regeneration in a dead sinner's heart. God begins this miracle because dead people can't do anything to help themselves. They are blind to the things of faith, blind to their own condition since they have never seen the light, and they are helpless to do anything to help themselves, just like the blind beggar.

Just as the blind man obeyed Jesus and then could see, our obedient response to Jesus' invitation is required for our spiritual eyes to be opened. Jesus has given us His wonderful promise: "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" (John 8:12).

**Questions:**

1. What was wrong with the man Jesus met, and how long had this condition existed? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What did the disciples think had caused the man's ailment? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What reason did Jesus give in verse 3 for the man being born blind? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How was the work of God displayed in the life of the man born blind? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. On what other occasions did Jesus use spittle in healing a person?
  - a) Mark 7:33: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Mark 8:23: \_\_\_\_\_
6. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Tell some of the history about the Pool of Siloam. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What did the man's blindness represent symbolically? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Physical blindness is often thought of as a difficult handicap in this life. Similarly, how can spiritual blindness be a handicap? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Fill in phrases from John 9:13–38 that illustrate the spiritual blindness of each.
  - a) The parents: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) The Pharisees: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

c) The blind man: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. What is required for our spiritual eyes to be opened? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 29**

### **Fishers of Men**

**The Reading:** Luke 5:1-11:

**The Problem:**

This event happened on the Sea of Galilee, with the sun shining and the water sparkling under a blue sky. Two fishing boats were drawn up close to the shore, with their sails furled and the fishermen were on the shore repairing nets. Nets were expensive and required hard work to maintain, so the men used them with care. Much of a fisherman's time in those days was spent mending, washing, and drying nets - chores he performed at the completion of every fishing trip. Simon and his business partners, James and John, had been out fishing all night, casting and pulling their nets, over and over again. They just wanted to go home, but they needed to finish their repairs and put everything away first.

At the same time, Jesus was walking along the shore and talking to the people. As He walked and talked, the crowd kept growing and pressed so close to Jesus that He was pushed back to the very edge of the water. Then Jesus noticed two boats on the shore, so He climbed into one of the boats and asked Simon if he could move the boat out into the water a bit, to create a little space between Himself and the crowd. Even though Simon was tired and just thinking about a hot meal and his bed, he did as Jesus asked.

This was actually Simon's first act of obedience. It's important to note that he allowed Jesus to take over an extremely important possession in his life – his boat, and use it for His own purposes. Peter's boat represented his livelihood and his income. When you're a fisherman – your boat is your most valuable business asset, and you don't normally let other people use it.

When Jesus finished using the boat to teach the crowd, He turned to Simon and said, "Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch." Keep in mind, Peter and his business partners were professional fishermen. They knew how to fish, they knew when to fish, and they knew where to fish. Today, as in the first century, the most productive fishing grounds in the Sea of Galilee are located near the mouths of the many springs and rivers that feed the sea. At these locations, vegetable matter enters the sea and draws the fish.

To cast the net, fishermen in those days would wade into the water, position the net on their arms, and then toss it up and away from their bodies. The dome-shaped net would spread out, land on the water, and then sink. If a fisherman was fortunate, the net enclosed a few fish as he drew it back by its center rope.

In addition, to catch their quarry, fishermen in Jesus' day usually worked at night, using torches. Jesus was asking Simon to fish in the wrong place and at the wrong time of day.

### **The Turning Point:**

Simon was exhausted, and he must have been discouraged as well after fishing all night, and still coming up empty-handed. To avoid what he must have thought would be an exercise in futility, Simon could have come up with any number of possible excuses to not obey Jesus regarding this second request.

- "I worked all night and I'm worn out."
- "I know a lot more about fishing than a carpenter does."
- "The best fishing is at night, not in the day time."
- "All these crowds and loud teaching have probably scared the fish away."
- "We've already washed, repaired, and folded up our nets."
- "Jesus may know about religion but He doesn't know about fishing."

But, in spite of the objections that must have been running through his mind, Simon agreed to obey Jesus in this second request as well. *"Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets."* (Luke 5:5). The reason why Simon did what Jesus asked was because he believed in Jesus, not because the circumstances seemed right.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Simon started fishing, just as Jesus had told him to do. It was the same lake on which he had fished the night before – the same boat he had used – the same nets that had come up empty – he was the same man who had caught nothing the night before. But this time, there was a completely different outcome. His business associates had to come out and help because they now had not only one boatload of fish - they had two boats filled with fish!

Because Simon, James, and John were such an experienced fishermen, and because they knew how unfavorable the conditions had been, they appreciated all the more what a great miracle this was.

### **The Bottom Line:**

But that's not the end of the story. In fact it was a new beginning for all of their lives. Because of the miracle of the fish – Simon, James, and John reset the priorities for their lives. They left behind their business, their fishing boats, and all their fishing equipment. They walked away from the greatest catch they had ever experienced and followed Jesus!

They realized that if Jesus could perform a miracle like that – He could do anything. Jesus had invited them to become a part of the greatest fishing trip in the history of the world when He said to them, “I’m going to make you fishers of men.” And they accepted His call. This must be an aspiration in our hearts as well ... that we want to follow God, we need to follow God, that we long to follow God and fish for men, in spite of anything else that is going on in our daily lives.

**Questions:**

1. What were Peter, James and John doing while Jesus was speaking from the shore? (vs. 2) \_\_\_\_\_
2. What did Jesus request of Peter? (vs. 3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What did Jesus ask Peter to do when He was finished speaking? (vs. 4) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Why might Peter have been tempted to laugh or even ignore such a request?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
5. What was Peter’s response? (vs. 5) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What happened to Simon’s fishing business when he obeyed Jesus? (vs. 6-7) \_\_\_\_\_
7. How did Simon respond to this experience?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 8)
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 9)
8. What did Jesus say to Simon and his companions? (vs. 10) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



9. What did Simon and his partners do then? (vs. 11) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. In summary, what are three basic steps for anyone who would follow Jesus? (*Thought Question – use action statements that would apply today.*)

a) \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 5)

b) \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 8)

c) \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 11)

## **CHAPTER 30**

### **The Power of a U-Turn**

**The Reading:** Acts 9:10-18

**The Problem:**

The apostle Paul was a Roman citizen, born to Jewish parents who were a part of the class of Jewish leaders called the Pharisees. His given name was Saul, and he was born in Tarsus (which is today in modern Turkey) in about 6 A.D.

Saul was sent by his parents at a young age to Jerusalem to study the Torah under Gamaliel, one of the most prominent Jewish scholars of his time, still revered among Jews to this day. He became so astute in his knowledge of the Torah, the laws of the Jewish people, that he was admitted to the Sanhedrin, the ruling group of Jewish leaders, similar to our Supreme Court. If you were a part of the Sanhedrin, you ruled over Jewish life and religion and you were the most zealous of the most zealous, dedicated to maintaining the Jewish law.

Saul was on a crusade to kill Christians, and wipe out all signs of this new religion proclaiming that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. He planned to travel from Jerusalem to Damascus, a journey of about 150 miles, to continue his vendetta against believers. Before departing on the journey, he had asked the high priest in Jerusalem for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for permission to bring any Christians (followers of “the Way,” as they were known then) back to Jerusalem to imprison them. Anyone who was a part of “The Way” was in his way, and had to be silenced one way or another. In Acts 9:1-2, Saul was given full authority to carry out his plans, and granted the letters requested.

As Saul traveled, he was probably focused on his purpose in going to Damascus, and thinking about how he was going to deal with those followers of “the Way.” Would he beat them with his own hands, stone them, imprison them, or perhaps make them suffer before killing them? He had already been present at and approved of the stoning of the first martyr for the Gospel, Stephen (Acts 7:58-8:1).

But God had other plans for him. On the way, Saul was caught in a bright light from heaven that caused him to fall face down on the ground. He heard the words, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Saul replied, “Who are you, Lord?” Jesus answered directly and clearly, saying, “I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:4-5).

**The Turning Point:**

From this point on, Saul’s life was turned upside-down. The light of the Lord had blinded him, and his companions had to take him by the hand and lead him into

Damascus. He was literally blind for three days, eating and drinking nothing. But when Saul lost his sight, there was more going on than a physical reaction to that really bright light. The Lord was letting Saul know just how blind he had been - that his rejection of Jesus was the result of blindness, that his zealousness in persecuting the church was the result of blindness, and that even his devotion to the Law was a blind devotion.

It became apparent that there was a real transformation in his heart, because the Bible tells us that he began immediately to pray fervently.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

Then God called Ananias to do a job for him. We don't know a lot about Ananias. We don't know if Ananias had been a follower of Jesus for a long time or a short time. We do know that he knew Jesus. We know that he had been in Damascus long enough to be known and respected among the Jews, as well as the Jewish Christians there. Later in Acts, Paul described him as "a devout observer of the law and respected by all the Jews" in Damascus (Acts 22:12).

Now Ananias really didn't want to meet with Saul because he knew Saul's reputation as an evil man and persecutor of Christians. Can you imagine that conversation with the Lord? It might have gone something like this.

Lord: Ananias?

Ananias: Yes, Lord

Lord: I've got a job for you today, pretty high profile.

Ananias: Oh, wow! That's great, Lord. What do you have for me?

Lord: I want you to go and speak with someone quite important.

Ananias: OK, who? The governor?

Lord: Actually, no.

Ananias: Well, who then?

Lord: Saul of Tarsus.

Ananias: Are you kidding, Lord? Do you know what he's been up to lately?

When Ananias voiced his objections, the Lord explained to Ananias that Saul was His "chosen instrument," selected by Him to carry His name before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15) and would suffer for doing

so (Acts 9:16). So, in spite of his reservations, Ananias obeyed the Lord and the rest is history. He found Saul, laid hands on him, and told him of his vision. Through prayer, Saul received the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17), regained his sight, and was baptized (Acts 9:18).

When Ananias laid his hands upon Saul and the scales fell from his eyes, more was going on than a physical healing of damaged eyes. The Lord was signaling to Saul the dramatic changes that would happen in his life, now that he could see Jesus clearly.

### **The Bottom Line:**

When God gives you an assignment, you always have the choice to say yes or no. You always have the freedom to obey or disobey. Ananias chose to obey and a wonderful miracle took place. Paul made a complete U-Turn in his life, and Ananias was the instrument God used to launch one of the most powerful ministries the world has ever seen. The Apostle Paul didn't just win the souls of individuals, one by one, but of whole cities and nations as well. He was not only the most productive evangelist of the early church, he was also the most prolific writer in the New Testament.

Ananias's obedience is actually a part of the chain of events in God's plan that has brought each one of us here today, doing an in-depth study about how miracles follow obedience. Likewise our own obedience will set the stage for great things to happen. Each time we follow God's unfolding plan of grace in our lives, we step into a new adventure prepared especially for us by God.

### **Questions:**

1. Share a few details about Saul's background and education. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why did Saul decide to go to Damascus? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. By what term was Christianity now identified? \_\_\_\_\_
4. In what dramatic way did the Lord get Saul's attention? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What did the voice ask Saul, and whose voice was it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Compare the way Saul actually entered Damascus with the way he had planned to enter. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Saul fasted for three days "in the dark." During that time, the Lord spoke to his heart, and Saul finally realized he had been completely blind about ...
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
8. Whom did the Lord commission to minister to Saul? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Describe what we know about this man. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What was his objection to accepting the Lord's assignment? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. How did the Lord soothe his concerns? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. What was the miracle that followed the act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. What was the long-range, long lasting, result of Ananias' obedience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. As believers and people in ministry, should we be open to being ministered to by others? Of what should we be careful? (Answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 31

### Getting a Good Night's Sleep

**The Reading:** Acts 12:1-11

**The Problem:**

King Herod Agrippa, who came from a line of evil rulers, had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. The church leaders had become targets for persecutors, and when Herod saw that the murder of James pleased the Jews, he came after Peter next.

Peter was caught, arrested, and put in jail. Escape through his own efforts wasn't an option. Sixteen soldiers, working 6-hour shifts in groups of four, were guarding him day and night. One soldier was chained to each side of him and the other two were standing outside the locked gate to the cell, to make sure he couldn't get out. Not only that, but there were multiple guard posts and locked gates that had to be passed in order to get all the way out of this prison facility. It would be fair to assume that Peter didn't know his way around this particular prison so, even if he could somehow get out of the cell, he wouldn't know the quickest escape route.

King Herod assigned the heavy guard because he wasn't taking any chances. He planned to execute Peter publicly after the Passover Feast, and had probably heard about how Peter and other apostles had miraculously escaped from prison before (Acts 5:17-23). He wanted to make absolutely certain that Peter wasn't going anywhere this time.

But man's attempts are all futile when they come up against the will of God. Romans 8:31 says, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* And Peter had not only God on his side, but verse 5 tells us the entire church was praying for him without ceasing.

**The Turning Point:**

Even though Peter knew his days were possibly coming to an end, and it must have been quite uncomfortable to be chained to two soldiers, Peter wasn't worried and fell into a deep sleep. He knew whatever was supposed to happen would happen. He had put the situation in God's hands, and put it out of his mind. An angel came to rescue him, but he was in such a deep sleep that the angel had trouble waking him up. Acts 12:7 says that the angel had to poke (smote) Peter in the side to rouse him from sleep.

Peter must have thought he was still sleeping, because verse 9 tells us he thought the angel shining a light in his eyes was only a vision. But even in his

dreams, Peter was obedient. When the angel told him to get up, he got up. When the angel told him to get dressed, he got dressed. When the angel told him to put on his shoes and grab his coat, he immediately obeyed, even though he still didn't know for sure if he was really awake or this was all just a figment of an overactive imagination.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

When Peter stood up, the chains fell off his wrists. And when he was dressed, he and the angel walked together straight out of the prison – past the guards and directly through all the gates that had previously been locked up tight but now stood wide open. Soon they were out on the street, and the angel went one way and Peter went the other – to report back to the group praying for him what had happened.

### **The Bottom Line:**

How desperately we need sleep. But there are so many people today who aren't getting enough of it. Sometimes, because they're on the go so much, they just don't get enough time in bed. But often, no matter how tired people may feel, when their head hits the pillow, the eyeballs pop wide open. They just can't sleep. Reasons for this might be ...

- The mind is stuck in overdrive - planning, organizing, preparing.
- The body is just too tired.
- Worries that were suppressed during the daytime come back to mind.
- They drank too much caffeine during the day to stay alert at work.
- They watched something disturbing on TV just before bedtime.
- Even if they drift off, they wake up again too soon – body and mind still wiped out.

The medical community has experts who devote all their time to the study of sleep. They have come up with all kinds of tricks designed to help people get a good night's rest – medications, mental thought games, stress relieving activities. People spend millions of dollars every year on sleep aides, both over the counter and prescription.

You won't feel the peace you need to sleep soundly at night until you learn to stop worrying, stop getting angry, stop getting frustrated, stop replaying situations and conversations over and over in your mind, stop complaining, and learn to instead give your situation to God – as Peter did. Then you will experience the good sleep that God grants - peaceful sleep.

Believers are blessed. We have that "peace that passes all understanding," when we keep our minds and hearts focused on the Lord (Philippians 4:7). Because we

have this peace, just like Peter, we can lay down at night and sleep soundly - getting the rest we need to serve the Lord again with energy the next day.

**Questions:**

1. Who was tormenting selected people in the church? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Who had already been put to death? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What three things happened to Peter in verse 4?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What did the church begin to do, immediately after Peter's arrest? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. While the church was doing this, what was Peter doing? \_\_\_\_\_
6. This was not only a dangerous and stressful situation for Peter, but I think it would have also been very uncomfortable for falling asleep. What might have caused discomfort?
  - a) vs. 6b: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) vs. 6c: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) vs. 6d: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Not only was Peter asleep, he was sound asleep. When the angel of the Lord came to rescue him, Peter was so hard to wake up, the angel had to whack him in the side. Then the angel told him to do three things. What were they?
  - a) vs. 7: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) vs. 8a: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) vs. 8b: \_\_\_\_\_



8. What was the miracle that followed when Peter obeyed the angel's instructions in verse 7? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What was the miracle that followed when Peter obeyed the angel's instructions in verse 8? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What was Peter's testimony in verse 11? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. This is an amazing story of someone who was able to sleep soundly in a time of trouble. What are some reasons people lose sleep today?
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
12. What should believers do to be able to sleep soundly, even in times of trouble? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 32**

### **Something to Sing About**

**The Reading:** Acts 16:16-40

**The Problem:**

Our story opens with Paul and Silas proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in the city of Philippi, the chief city in that part of Macedonia, a Roman province. A young girl, who was identified as having an evil spirit, a spirit of divination, followed them around everywhere they went, shouting out that the men were servants of God and preached the way of salvation.

Of course, that statement was true, but the Lord doesn't need any help from the devil. And collaboration with evil is the last thing God wants for His church, because a partnership with evil disguises it and makes it seem innocent, much like a wolf in sheep's clothing. Jesus warned us about that in Matthew 7:15. Partnership with evil also puts a stain on the cause of Christ. Though the young girl spoke the truth, the evil spirit's intent was to disrupt and mock the ministry of Paul and Silas. It was also a part of Satan's strategy to infiltrate a false believer among the true believers. He wanted the people to believe she was a part of their group, and that her power was from the same source as God's. In other words, through this girl Satan was trying to say, "Hey, we're all on the same team!"

Discerning this, Paul cast out the evil spirit. But the men who owned this girl were furious because they had just lost their primary source of income. So they turned Paul and Silas in to the Roman authorities, and claimed the two were troublemakers disrupting their city and violating their customs. Now the Roman influence was especially strong in Philippi, as it was also where the Roman governor resided. The Roman authorities ordered a public beating and then had Paul and Silas thrown into prison.

Now it was the jailer's responsibility to ensure that Paul and Silas did not escape, so he took them down into the innermost part of the prison. To be sure they were secure and couldn't escape, he fastened their feet into stocks. After he was sure they wouldn't be able to make a break for it, he laid down and went to sleep.

**The Turning Point:**

But during the night, instead of sleeping, Paul and Silas began to praise God and sing hymns. They didn't spend their time complaining, nor did they think their predicament was unfair. The faith of these two men transcended the difficult circumstances they were experiencing in Philippi. They were sure that no matter what happened, God was in control and had a good plan for their lives.

Now remember, the apostle Paul had been a Pharisee, so he knew the scriptures very well. Verses such as these might have come to his mind when he was praising God.

- Psalm 32:7: You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.
- Nehemiah 8:10b: "And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."
- Isaiah 12:6: "Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."
- Psalm 59:16: But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.

Later, when Paul was writing the Epistles, he may have been remembering that night when he penned these verses.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
- Philippians 4:4: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice.

Paul and Silas were simply following God's directives when they sang praises to Him, in spite of their pain and discomfort. They already knew from the Word what to do in times of trouble, and they followed through without hesitation. But then, unexpectedly, God moved through their worship and praise and rescued the two men.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

The prison began to shake and all the cell doors were jarred open. This had to have been a terrifying moment for the guard. This jailer was responsible for keeping his prisoners secure. In those days, if they escaped, he would have been punished with death! This was a real crisis for the jailer, and he was so convinced that Paul and Silas had escaped that he was about to commit suicide.

Many times God will use a crisis to get our attention. You have wondered why something bad happened, and often it remains a mystery. But sometimes God is trying to break through a wall of indifference in our hearts. Other times, we need to be sensitive to others going through a tough time, because that may open the door for us to tell them about Jesus.

In the jailer's life, it was Paul and Silas who were sensitive to his emotional state. They told the jailer all about Jesus Christ, and he was so excited - he took them to his home, dressed their wounds and fixed them dinner. None of them got any sleep that night, as Paul and Silas shared with the entire family about Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead. They told them about the Lord's salvation, and how we can have a relationship with God the

Father through His Son Jesus Christ. They told those people how to turn to Jesus, and trust in Him. And in verse 34, every person in that jailer's home put their trust in the Lord, and was saved.

What a change! Just a few hours before, the jailer had no sympathy whatsoever for Paul and Silas, and had been quite content to throw them into the worst part of the prison, locking their feet into painful stocks. But by the next morning, those two prisoners had led the jailer and his entire family to the Lord and they were all friends. It was a night to remember!

I see two miracles in this account that resulted from Paul and Silas rejoicing in spite of adverse circumstances:

- There was an earthquake, and all the cell doors were opened.
- Not one prisoner ran away, which would not be the normal reaction for robbers and murderers suddenly released.

### **The Bottom Line:**

It has been said that it is not what happens to us in life that determines the fullness of our lives, but rather how we respond to what happens to us. Paul and Silas were examples of this truth. God moved through their worship and praise to accomplish miracles and to bring salvation to the jailor and his household.

We only need to read the headlines in the morning paper or turn on the evening news to confirm what we already know to be true ... suffering is an ever-present companion in this world. Since the Fall, every person throughout the history of humanity has known suffering, and Christians are not exempt. Actually, in many cases, the suffering Christians have been called to endure has been even greater (John 15:20) than that which the unbeliever endures in this world.

Not only should we cope patiently with the suffering that comes our way, but we should also rejoice in the midst of it. The world may not understand, but we know our suffering can be endured with rejoicing because it gives glory to God and deepens our relationship with Him. And if we obediently rejoice in the middle of a difficult situation, God may miraculously rescue us, just as He did for the Apostle Paul and Silas.

**Questions:**

1. What was the “fortune telling” girl saying about Paul and Silas? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Since it was the truth, why was this a problem? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How did Paul deal with the problem? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Why were the owners of the slave girl angry with Paul and his companions? \_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What charges did they bring against them? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What did Paul and Silas do while imprisoned? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How did Paul know this was the best thing to do in this situation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Share another scripture in the Bible where we are told to rejoice in times of trouble. Include the Bible reference with the verse. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. How did God intervene in this situation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What was the jailer’s initial reaction to the earthquake? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. After Paul and Silas assured the guard that all the prisoners were still there, what did the guard ask? \_\_\_\_\_
12. The prisoners could hear Paul and Silas praying and singing praises unto God that night (vs. 25). They must have also overheard them share the salvation message with the jailer as well.
- a) Is it possible the prisoners were also saved that night? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- b) Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. What did the jailer do after he believed in Jesus Christ? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. List some of the things that happened while they were at the jailer's home.
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
15. What was the act of obedience that triggered the miracle in this story? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **CHAPTER 33**

### **Prayer with Fasting – My Personal Testimony**

**The Reading:** Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29

**The Problem:**

My husband and I have developed a habit of fasting and praying together as a team on Mondays - and it all started almost twenty years ago when we still owned a restaurant.

We got married on a Sunday, bought our restaurant on Monday, and went right to work that very day. There was no time for a honeymoon. But my husband promised that if I would work really hard with him for five years, we would sell the restaurant, make a big profit and retire. Well, the years went by, we were still working hard, and had not sold the restaurant yet - after 15 years. We had advertised, used word of mouth, talked it up, and prayed about it. My husband even went to a national food convention wearing T-shirts he had made - with a picture of our Old West restaurant on the back, and a sign on the front saying, "Ask about buying my restaurant."

**The Turning Point:**

Finally, I took time off on a weekend (something I had never done since we had purchased the restaurant), and traveled to attend a women's retreat. During the night, it came to my mind that we had not fasted along with our prayers for selling the restaurant. I couldn't wait to get back to tell my husband about this latest and greatest idea for getting out of the restaurant business.

We lived on a lake, and went out on our pontoon boat my first evening back, to plan our strategy. I remember floating around in the dark, discussing what would be the best day of the week to fast. Monday was our favorite day of the week, because the restaurant was closed. Our favorite thing to do on our favorite day of the week was EAT! And we always ate other people's food. We devoted the day to rest, doing errands, going out to eat, and taking food from other restaurants out on the pontoon boat. We might stick to the diet every other day of the week, but Monday was our day to spoil ourselves, and eat whenever and whatever we wanted.

We agreed that the Holy Spirit had told me that only fasting and prayer could break this bondage to the restaurant (Matthew 17:21), and that the day it would most effective to fast, because it would be the greatest sacrifice, would be Monday. We made a pact with each other to fast and pray every Monday until the restaurant sold, no matter how long it took.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

We only fasted three Mondays. That was all it took, and God heard our prayer and sent someone to buy the restaurant. We didn't make a big profit and retire, and the person who took over the restaurant didn't make it, but those requests weren't in the prayer. We just wanted out of the restaurant and out of debt, and He took care of that need. Praise God!

We have continued the Monday habit of fasting and praying as a tradition, because God honored that day of prayer for us. We don't have many requests of our own these days - we are really blessed. But we have fasted and prayed for others' needs as we have been led by the Holy Spirit, and have seen big results on their behalf as well.

### **The Bottom Line:**

A common thread connecting the prayer and fasting seems to run all through the Bible. In the Old Testament, fasting with prayer had to do with a sense of need and dependence or helplessness in the face of an actual or anticipated calamity. Prayer and fasting were combined in the Old Testament in times of mourning, repentance, and deep spiritual or physical need.

- Moses fasted before he received the Ten Commandments and the Law of God. (Exodus 34:28)
- David prayed and fasted over his sick child (2 Samuel 12:16), weeping before the Lord in earnest intercession (vs. 21-22).
- Elijah fasted 40 days before he heard God's voice again. (1 Kings 19:8)
- Ezra the priest fasted for God's protection while carrying valuable things for God's temple. We too can fast for God's protection. (Ezra 8:21-23)
- The first chapter of Nehemiah describes Nehemiah praying and fasting, because of his deep distress over the news that Jerusalem had been desolated. Tears, fasting, confession on behalf of his people, and pleas to God for mercy characterized many days of prayer.
- Esther urged Mordecai and the Jews to fast for her as she planned to appear before her husband the king (Esther 4:16).
- The devastation that befell Jerusalem also prompted Daniel to adopt a similar posture: "So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes" (Daniel 9:3). Like Nehemiah, Daniel fasted and prayed that God would have mercy upon the people.



- Daniel the prophet fasted for the fulfillment of God's promises, and received mighty revelations from God. (Daniel 10:3).
- God made it clear through the prophet Joel that the last days outpouring of the Spirit will be in proportion to our fasting and crying out to God in humility, hunger and repentance. (Joel 1:5; Joel 2:12).
- The prophetess Anna "never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying" (Luke 2:37). At age 84, her prayer and fasting were part of her service to the Lord in His temple as she awaited the promised Savior of Israel.
- Jesus fasted and spoke the Word of God to overcome Satan (See Matthew 4:1-10; Luke 4:1-13).
- Jesus fasted to begin his public ministry, and have the power of God and the anointing. (Luke 4:14).
- The more critical the situation, the more appropriate it is to fast with prayer. In Mark 9, Jesus cast a demon from a boy. The disciples had been unable to perform the exorcism, although they had previously been given authority over unclean spirits (Mark 6:7). Later, the disciples asked Jesus why they failed in their attempts to free the boy from the demon, and Jesus said, "This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21). Jesus was saying that a determined foe must be met with an equally determined faith.
- The elders, prophets and teachers in Antioch fasted and ministered to God, which resulted in the launching of Paul and Barnabas' apostolic ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2,3). Likewise we should fast and pray before getting involved in full time ministry and mission work.

Jesus says to us in Matthew 6:16, "**When** you fast..." not "**If** you fast". A true disciple of the Lord will fast at times. Prayer and fasting should not be seen as a burden or a duty, but rather a celebration of God's goodness and mercy to His children, and an opportunity to draw closer to Him.

**Questions:**

1. What was the problem the author of this course and her husband faced almost 20 years ago? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What was something her husband did to try to resolve the issue in his own strength? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. On what occasion did the Holy Spirit tell the author what was missing from their prayers? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What did the Lord tell them to do to see their prayers answered? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Why did they choose Mondays as the best day to do this? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How soon did the miracle follow their act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Fasting has nothing to do with twisting God's arm by saying, "Lord, I met the terms you asked for. Give me what I want now." \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
8. What was the warning about praying and fasting that Jesus gave in Matthew 6:5-6, and 18? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Fasting is first and foremost about delighting in drawing near to God and coming to Him with a full heart, and only secondarily about approaching Him with an empty stomach. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
10. What did God say about prayer and fasting in Joel 2:12? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Have you ever fasted with prayer and seen a miraculous answer soon follow?  
If yes, please share your testimony. (Answer optional.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. What have you learned in this course that will impact your ministry in the future? \_\_\_\_\_

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## **CHAPTER 34**

### **The Obedience of the Messiah**

**The Reading:** See verses listed in the text below

**The Problem:**

The Bible highlights the total depravity of the human race. Every aspect of every person has been corrupted by sin. “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:10–12).

Because of our sin, we all deserve death (Romans 6:23). While the physical consequence of sin is physical death, that’s not the only kind of death that results from sin. All sin is ultimately committed against an eternal and infinite God (Psalm 51:4). Because of that, the just penalty for our sin is also eternal and infinite. What we need to be saved from is eternal destruction (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:15).

Because the appropriate penalty for sin is infinite and eternal, only God could pay the price, because only He is the only Person Who is both infinite and eternal. But because God has a divine nature, it’s impossible for Him to die. So God became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. And Jesus lived a life of complete obedience to His Father, proven by these incidents in His life.

- At the age of 12, when Joseph and Mary found Jesus teaching in the temple, He “was subject unto them” and obediently returned home with them (Luke 2:42–51).
- Although Jesus was without sin, he submitted to baptism “to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:13-17; John 3:5).
- Jesus kept the Sabbath and attended services in the synagogue (Luke 4:16–44).
- Jesus was tempted by Satan, but He refused to yield (Matthew 4:1–11).
- Though He asked if the cup could pass from Him, He agreed to the suffering ahead while still in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–44; Luke 22:39–54).
- Jesus submitted to be judged of men that the Father’s work and glory might come to pass (Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 26:53).

- Jesus finished His work by allowing sinful men to crucify Him (Matthew 27:35; John 10:17–18; Galatians 1:3–5).

It was impossible for Jesus, Who was one with the Father, to act independently of Him in anything, whether in His actions or in His decisions. He viewed and judged everything, not as they affected Himself, but in relation to the will and glory of His Father. This was in marked contrast to the Jews who viewed everything in relation to their own interests.

### **The Turning Point:**

When the people rejected Jesus and His message, and sought to kill Him, Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself for us, allowing Himself to be crucified (John 10:15). Because Jesus Christ was human, He could die; and because Jesus Christ was God, His death had an eternal and infinite value. Jesus' death on the cross was the perfect and complete payment for our sin (1 John 2:2). He took on the consequences that we deserved. Three days later, Jesus' resurrection from the dead proved that His death on the cross had been accepted by God the Father as the perfectly sufficient sacrifice for our sin.

Jesus obeyed the Father in this willingly, saying, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (John 10:17-18).

Jesus' entire motivation throughout His life was to obey the Father, and in the Gospel of John, there are several verses where He commented on this.

- "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30).
- "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38).
- "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:28-29).
- "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do" (John 14:31).

In other words, Jesus suffered and died for our sins because He purposed to do it. He did it intentionally, and in this way demonstrated that He was in agreement with His Father. The whole plan of salvation that Jesus carried out and finished was motivated by His love for the Father and obedience to His will.

Jesus wasn't a helpless victim. He had both the right and the power to become the instrument of reconciliation between God and men – or not – and the course He chose was that of obedience.

### **The Miracle That Followed:**

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). God has already done all of the work. All you must do is receive, in faith, the salvation God offers (Ephesians 2:8-9). Fully trust in Jesus alone as the payment for your sins. Believe in Him, and you will not perish (John 3:16). God is offering you salvation as a gift. All we have to do is accept it. Jesus is the way of salvation (John 14:6).

### **The Bottom Line:**

Have you ever given a gift to someone and they neglected to thank you? How did you feel? Or have you ever given a gift to someone who treated it carelessly, lost it or ruined it, or put it away in the drawer and never used it?

God has given us the greatest Gift of all - His obedient Son, who died on the cross and rose again so that we can know Him personally and spend eternity with Him in heaven. I wonder how God feels when people show little gratitude for this amazing gift of grace and salvation He has given?

Let us never forget to thank the Lord for all His gifts, but especially the gift of salvation. With the Apostle Paul, let us remember to say every day, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

### **Questions:**

1. Why does every person on earth, without exception, need to be saved? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why is it impossible for man to save himself by his own good works? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. To solve this problem, what did God the Father do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. For what purpose was Jesus sent from heaven? (John 6:38) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. List a few examples from the life of Jesus that demonstrated His complete obedience to the Father.
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
6. What did Jesus teach us about His relationship with His Father John 8:28-29?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
7. What was Jesus' act of obedience that would lead to a miracle in our own lives? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How do we know for sure that God accepted this as a perfect sacrifice? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
9. What is the miracle available to us, because of Jesus' act of obedience? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
10. How can we receive this miracle? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
11. Of all the gifts God has given us, of all the blessings He has bestowed upon us, the one for which we should be most thankful is \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Even as Jesus came to earth to die for our sins in obedience to His God and Father, so we have been brought to salvation that we might live in obedience to Him. What are some ways we might demonstrate our obedience today?
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_