

*Profiles of*  
**PERSEVERANCE**

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Sustained By Hope In The Rough-and-Tumble Of Real Life



**Melanie Newton**

**Joyful Walk Bible Studies**



# *Profiles of* **PERSEVERANCE**

Sustained By Hope In the Rough-And-Tumble Of Real Life



*perseverance* = “holding to a course of action, belief, or purpose without giving way”

View the lives of four Old Testament believers to see that only a sustained hope rooted in the faithfulness of God enables us to persevere faithfully throughout the rough-and-tumble of real life.

Are you ready to develop perseverance in your life?!

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the many women who served as contributors to this study guide, especially Liz Church, Lori Schweers, and Penny Semmelbeck. Without your help, we would never have accomplished this monumental task in a timely manner. Thanks also to Brenda Baker, Lori Schweers, Robin Colley, and Jody Vise for their contribution of essays supplementing the lessons.

Melanie Newton

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We pray that you and your group will find *Profiles of Perseverance* a resource that God will use to strengthen you in your faith walk with God.

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# Profiles of Perseverance

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## How to Use This Study Guide

### Profiles of Perseverance

What is perseverance? By definition, “perseverance” is *holding to a course of action, belief, or purpose without giving way*. Perseverance, often used interchangeably with the word *endurance*, is the quality that enables a person to stand on his or her feet when facing a storm head on. It refers to active staying power and tenacity to hold up under some long-term burden, not just getting stuck in traffic. It carries the connotation of whole life experience.

By viewing the profiles (biographies) of several Old Testament believers during much of their lifetime, we see God’s faithfulness to them over many years, not just during a scene from their lives. By looking at their stories, we gain a long-term perspective through the rough-and-tumble of real life. We can be encouraged to endure faithfully throughout our own rough-and-tumble life in this troubling yet exciting world.

### The Basic Study

This study guide consists of 13 lessons covering the evidence of perseverance seen in the lives of 4 Old Testament believers. If you cannot do the entire lesson one week, please read the Bible passage(s) covered by the lesson.

*Process of Bible Study:* Each lesson includes core questions covering the passage narrative. These core questions will take you through the process of inductive Bible study—observation, interpretation, and application. The process is more easily understood in the context of answering these questions:

- What does the passage say? (Observation: what’s actually there)
- What does it mean? (Interpretation: the author’s intended meaning)
- How does this apply to me today? (*Application: making it personal*) Questions identified as “*Your Life’s Journey*” lead you to introspection and application of a specific truth to your life. You will be given opportunity to use creative means to express God’s faithfulness to you in your life’s journey.

### Study Enhancements

*Deeper Discoveries (optional):* Embedded within the sections are *optional* questions for research of subjects we don’t have time to cover adequately in the lessons or contain information that significantly enhance the basic study. If you are meeting with a small group, your leader may give you the opportunity to share your “discoveries.”

*Study Aids:* To aid in proper interpretation and application of the study, five additional study aids are located where appropriate in the lesson:

- Historical Insights
- Scriptural Insights
- From the Hebrew/Greek (definitions of Hebrew/Greek words)

- Focus on the Meaning
- Think About It (thoughtful reflection)

## Getting The Most Out Of Historical Narratives

Because this study includes historical narratives set in various time periods, this is an excellent opportunity for you to learn how to use a Bible handbook, commentary, study Bible text notes or internet sources (examples below) to discover information about the time period in which each person lived as well as the towns, the occupations, and other cultural information that would add understanding to your study. If you choose to do this research, you will enhance the discussion for everyone else as you share what you have learned at appropriate times in the small group discussion.

- [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org) — study tools, text notes, articles, NET Bible
- [www.christiananswers.net](http://www.christiananswers.net) — archeology information
- [www.crosswalk.com](http://www.crosswalk.com) — study tools, meanings of Greek and Hebrew words

## Sustained By Hope In the Rough-And-Tumble Of Real Life

Jesus said that we will surely have trouble in this world (John 16:33)—yes, even those of us who are faithful to Him. Whatever the struggles we face, we need a secure hope in order to "hang in there" over a lifetime of growing in His grace. The Christian life is not only empowered by faith, it is also sustained by hope. Only a secure hope rooted in the faithfulness of God enables us to weather the storms of life and persevere over a lifetime.

The writer of Hebrews pointed to the one focus in life that can give us hope that lasts, "keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2). We must focus on what He is doing in the midst of what we are doing. It is our total confidence that Christ will complete the work He began in us that enables us to persevere through the rough-and-tumble of real life. Are you ready to develop perseverance in your life?!

"We have approached the Christian life as a subject to be learned rather than as a *life to be lived*. You can't grow in grace in a classroom, through a seminar, or during a "quiet time," as good as those things may be. As a matter of fact, you cannot grow in grace through reading a book...You can only grow in grace through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who teaches you truth from His Word, which you then take out into the *rough-and-tumble of real life* in the real world. The "curriculum" cannot be planned or anticipated. Through the sovereignty of a loving God, the pathway we will tread in this fallen world will be as unique as each one of us...Whatever the situations in *your* life may be, that is where you will have to grow in grace...in spite of our personal failures and sins... as we focus on what God is doing in the midst of what we are doing (Hebrews 12:1,2)."

—Bob George, Growing in Grace, p.13-15 (emphasis added)

## On Studying The Old Testament

The books of the Old Testament were composed by people living under the Old Covenant, the Law of Moses. It is important to keep that context in mind when studying them. Seek first to understand the intentions of the author in his time and place rather than reading into them meanings from the New Testament age or later.

Take for example Psalm 35:9: “*Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD and delight in his salvation (NIV) or “be happy of his deliverance (NET).*” The word “salvation” to most Christians calls up the blessings accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross: forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life. That, however, is not what David had in mind. “Salvation” in the Psalms nearly always refers to a temporal *deliverance* from trouble or danger. Verses 1-3 of the psalm explain the situation:

“O Lord, fight those who fight with me! Attack those who attack me! Grab your small shield and large shield, and rise up to help me! Use your spear and lance against those who chase me! Assure me with these words: ‘I am your deliverer!’”  
(Psalm 35:1-3)

The concept of God as “Judge” also has a different connotation. Most people today think of God’s judgment as something to be feared and avoided, and rightly so! However, the Psalms frequently present God’s arising for judgment, as something earnestly desired. For example:

“Let the sky rejoice, and the earth be happy! Let the sea and everything in it shout! Let the fields and everything in them celebrate! Then let the trees of the forest shout with joy before the Lord, for he comes! For he comes to judge the earth! He judges the world fairly, and the nations in accordance with his justice.”  
(Psalm 96:11-13)

The reason for the difference in perspective: a “judge” in the Old Testament period was not pictured as a black-robed magistrate on a bench in a criminal court but more like a hero or knight in shining armor, one who defended justice and the cause of the poor and defenseless. C. S. Lewis wrote:

“The ancient Jews, like ourselves, think of God’s judgment in terms of an earthly court of justice. The difference is that the Christian pictures the case to be tried as a criminal case with himself in the dock; the Jew pictures it as a civil case with himself as the plaintiff. The one hopes for acquittal, or rather for pardon; the other hopes for a resounding triumph with heavy damages.” (C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms)

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He brought to a close the age of the Old Covenant, the Law of Moses, and simultaneously inaugurated the New Covenant in which we live. In every age, a person can only be accepted by God by His grace through faith, so that will be consistent. God’s method of *managing* His people, however, can be different, so *how* one’s faith is expressed and lived out can differ as well.

The most obvious difference to a reader will be the centrality of the Temple and sacrificial system of worship. The Temple represented the presence of God dwelling among His chosen people, Israel. There the priests represented the people to God, and sacrificial offerings were the prime way to publicly express worship, repentance, and thanksgiving. Superficial people often fell into believing they could “buy off” God through offering

sacrifices without heart (Ps. 50:7-13). On the other hand, those like David who possessed insight and sincerity always knew that God wanted the worshiper's *heart* first:

“Certainly you do not want a sacrifice, or else I would offer it; you do not desire a burnt sacrifice. The sacrifices God desires are a humble spirit – O God, a humble and repentant heart you will not reject.” (Psalm 51:16,17)

Then, where one's *heart* was right, sacrifices could be acceptable to God as an expression of inner faith:

“Then you will accept the proper sacrifices, burnt sacrifices and whole offerings; then bulls will be sacrificed on your altar.” (Psalm 51:19)

While we no longer express worship to God through animal sacrifices, His desire from us is the same. He still desires the hearts of His people above all else.

## Some Theological Differences

Some theological differences are reflected in the Old Testament books due to their pre-cross perspective. David prays after his sin with Bathsheba, “*Do not reject me! Do not take your Holy Spirit away from me!*” (Psalm 51:11). Do Christians need to fear that God will withdraw His Spirit from them because of sin? No. The ministry of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament times was different.

Today, every Christian receives the *permanent* indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the moment he or she trusts in Jesus Christ. Before Christ came, however, the Holy Spirit came only upon *certain* individuals to empower them for special service (such as prophets or kings), and there was no promise of permanence. In that psalm, David is actually praying that God will not take away his anointed role as king of Israel as He actually had done to the previous king, Saul (1 Samuel 16:14). While disobedient Christians may face temporal consequences or the discipline of God because of sin, they do not need to fear that God will take away His Spirit, because He has promised, “*I will never leave you and I will never abandon you.*” (Hebrews 13:5).

Forgiveness of sins also appears slightly different. Under the Law, the key concept was *atonement*, which means a “covering” for sin. Forgiveness was indeed offered by a gracious God to those who trusted in His lovingkindness, but it was at best *temporary* and *up-to-date*. Nowhere in the Law of Moses is there offered forgiveness for *tomorrow's* sins. However, in the New Testament we find an emphasis on Jesus Christ's *finished* work on the cross. Where the Law offered a temporary “covering” for sins, Jesus Christ became “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). While “*for the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins*” (Heb. 10:4), now “*by one offering [Christ] he has perfected for all time those who are made holy*” (Heb. 10:14). The Christian has the blessing and privilege of rejoicing in the fullness of acceptance accomplished for us by our Savior Jesus Christ, “*who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption*” (1 Cor. 1:30).

Therefore, while reading the Old Testament books you want to read first to obtain accurate understanding of what their authors meant. But then you want to apply their great truths in the light of fully developed New Testament revelation by faith in Jesus Christ.

## Brief Summary of the Old Testament

About 1700 years after God created everything, He sent judgment on a rebellious race through a worldwide Flood. He later separated the nations with different languages and scattered them from Babel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were founding fathers of the Hebrew people. Sold into slavery, Joseph became a powerful foreign leader. The Israelites developed into a great nation for ~400 years in Egypt, until their deliverance from bondage. Then Moses took the people across the Red Sea and taught them God's Law at Mt. Sinai. Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land after a 40-year trek in the wilderness because of unbelief.

During the transition toward monarchy, there were 40 deliverer-rulers called "Judges," the last of whom was Samuel. The first three Hebrew kings—Saul, David, and Solomon—each ruled 40 years. Under Rehoboam, the Hebrew nation divided into northern and southern kingdoms, respectively called Israel and Judah. Prophets warned against worshipping the foreign god Baal. After the reign of 19 wicked kings in the north, Assyria conquered and scattered the northern kingdom. In the south, 20 kings ruled for ~350 years, until Babylon took the people into captivity for 70 years. While Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led the Jews back into Jerusalem over a 100-year period, Esther was a savior-queen in Persia. More than 400 "silent years" spanned the gap between Malachi and Matthew.

## Discussion Group Guidelines

1. **Share insights** from your personal study time. Remember, as you spend time in God's Word, that the Holy Spirit teaches you truth! Decide during the first week of your study that you will, with God's help, set aside some time during the week to do the study questions. The goal of Bible study is not so that you will "get the right answer," it is so that you will get to know Jesus! It could change your life!
2. **Respect each other's insights.** Some of the questions are "share questions (*Your Life's Journey*)." The answers to these questions are your personal experiences, not strictly the same factual information for everyone. These questions have no "right" or "wrong" answers.
3. **Encourage each other.** Each woman in your group is important to the group and important to God. He can use each of you in someone else's life. Consistent attendance benefits the whole group, but come whenever you can. Don't miss because you haven't done your questions, or have missed for a while...you are a vital part of your group.
4. **Share, but do not dominate** the discussion. Some of you are more vocal than others are. And, some of you have spent more time in the Bible, so your group will benefit. But, try to share the available time we have with everyone!
5. **Celebrate unity** in Christ! We want to avoid controversial subjects such as politics, gossip and denominational differences or dissatisfactions we have with a ministry in which others present may be affected.
6. **Pray together.** Sharing one another's needs and praises is important as well. Pray for the individuals in your group through the week and follow-up on the requests. Remember that anything shared during the group time is not to leave the group in order to gain each individual's trust and vulnerability to share.
7. **Get to know the women in your group.** Have lunch, start a playgroup, and/or visit one another. However, with the advent of so many home businesses, it is advisable that you do not use your small group members for solicitation purposes.

**ENJOY YOUR JOYFUL WALK BIBLE STUDY!**

## Introduction: What Is Perseverance?

We live in a world where according to Jesus we will surely have trouble (John 16:33). Some trials and tribulations simply come from living in this fallen world and are those that are common to man. Some trouble is the unique variety that afflicts a child of God living in an unbelieving world. Some of our trials are internal—the "Romans 7" type—as we yearn to grow in grace, but find sin still firmly rooted within us. Whatever the brand of struggles we face, we need a secure hope in order to "hang in there" over a lifetime of growing in grace.

In Hebrews 6:19 hope is called an "anchor for the soul." That is a tremendous image, the picture of an anchor giving security and stability to a ship in a midst of a storm. That is what hope does for us, and more. (Romans 5:2-5) We can remain steadfast, trusting God through present difficulties and pains, because we know the outcome...Only with a secure hope rooted in the faithfulness of God will we be able to weather the storms of life...It is our total confidence that Christ will complete the work He began in us that enables us to persevere over a lifetime. Without hope, people give up. The Christian life must not only be empowered by faith; it must also be **sustained by hope**.

—Adapted from Growing in Grace, Bob George, pp. 131-132, 141, 144)

### Day One Study

1. Using a dictionary, define *perseverance* and *endurance*.

- Perseverance—
- Endurance—

Let's now define *perseverance* and *endurance* biblically. **Read Hebrews 12:1-3**. This is our key passage for the whole study. Notice that the imagery used here suggests an athletic contest in a great amphitheater with many witnesses. Just who are these witnesses?!

2. **Read Hebrews 11**. Choose 5 of the witnesses to list below by name or description. Pay particular notice to any challenging life circumstances given about them.

3. The job of a witness is to testify. According to Hebrews 12:1-3, their lives testified that perseverance is possible. The question then is "How?" To help you derive an answer, first reread Heb. 11:1, 6 then look for one phrase that is consistently used in the Hebrews 11 chapter.  
\_\_\_\_\_ What does this tell you about how the witnesses persevered through all those challenging (or ordinary) life circumstances?
  
4. Although the words *endurance* and *perseverance* may be used interchangeably, *perseverance* carries the connotation of whole life experience and is active. It is staying power. It gives us a long-term perspective. Back to Hebrews 12:1-3, who is to be our focus as we run this race with perseverance?
  
5. Read John 15:5; 14:6 and 8:31-32. What does it mean to fix your eyes on Jesus, and why should you?

## Day Two Study

6. The Christian life is pictured as a long-distance race rather than a short sprint. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and Philippians 2:14-16. How are we to run? Explain in your own words.

**From the Greek:** The Greek word translated "endurance" (NAS) or "perseverance" (NIV) literally means "an abiding under; to abide." In other New Testament verses, it is translated "patience." Patience may be passive, that is, **endurance** under the general trials of life, Christian service or discipline. Patience may be active (**perseverance**) involving persistence in well-doing, fruit-bearing and running the appointed race despite trials and distractions of life.

—Vines Complete  
Expository Dictionary,  
page 462-463

**Think About It:** We are called first and foremost to a Person... There is a striking parallel between the baby's dependent relationship with its mother and our life of dependency on Christ. Because of its dependent life, a baby in the womb could say, "For me, to live is Mom." In the same way, we can say, "For me, to live is Christ."

—Bob George, Growing  
in Grace, p. 78

7. ***Your Life's Journey:*** Hebrews 12:1-2 refers to distractions that interfere with our running our "race of life" successfully. Think about things in your own life that are encumbrances or entanglements to you. What are they? No doubt they will be very similar to those distracting the people we will be studying through these lessons. Describe them through words or drawings in the space below.

8. Perseverance involves a choice. What are the benefits of choosing to persevere all the way to the finish? Read the following verses to derive your answer: James 1:2-4, 12; Romans 5:1-5; 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

***Think About It:***

Resolved: That all men should live for the glory of God.

Resolved second: That whether others do or not, I will.

—Jonathan Edwards

9. ***Your Life's Journey:*** Based on your answers to the previous question, how might choosing to persevere in your life give you real hope (*a confident, eager expectation of a coming certainty*) for today and for the future?

10. Read Isaiah 43:1-3; Romans 8:28, 38-39; Phil. 1:6. What does God promise to us as we run the race?

Our study will look at some of those witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 11, in particular, 4 Old Testament heroes whose lives were full of ups and downs. We will look at the circumstances challenging them year after year, what they believed about God and how that faith sustained them. **PERSEVERANCE** We will also see choices they had to make to remain faithful to God or not, and how each was affected by the choices. **PERSEVERANCE** Through their lives, we will glean truths about running with **PERSEVERANCE** throughout our entire lives as believers. May God bless you as you study His word.

**Think About It:** “Living by faith is a life of total dependency, objectivity (Christ is trustworthy as the object of our faith) and availability. We live in total dependency upon the Person of the crucified and risen Christ, and we step out by faith in the objective truth of His written Word, trusting Him for the ability to do what He wills, and entrusting Him with the results of our actions.”

—Bob George, Growing in Grace, p. 86

**“Joseph: A Man of Faith” Lesson One:**  
**RESPONDING TO REJECTION**  
***Genesis 37; 39:1-6***

### Background on “The Patriarchs”

The term *patriarch* denotes the father or male leader of a family or tribe. When used in Biblical studies, it usually refers to the three main characters in Genesis 12-50: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Under God's direction, Abraham left Ur in Mesopotamia, with its culture and conveniences, for the land of Canaan. Patriarchal life was seminomadic meaning they wandered from place to place, searching for grazing land and water for their cattle. They measured their wealth in livestock and movable goods such as silver, gold, and tents.

Through Abraham and his descendants, God began to develop a people of His own. The Abrahamic Covenant contains many precious promises: Abraham would have numerous offspring; his descendants would possess the land of Canaan; and the Messiah would come forth one day from his line. These promises passed on to Isaac and then to Jacob. Jacob's sons formed the nucleus of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Joseph is the long-awaited son born to Jacob (whom God later renames Israel), and his beloved wife Rachel. After many years of childlessness for Rachel, Joseph is born into an extended family of ten stepbrothers. Later, Rachel dies while giving birth to her second son—Joseph's younger brother Benjamin. Joseph is deeply loved by his father and deeply bonded to Benjamin. Jacob's 12 sons were the ancestors of the children of Israel, the people through whom God sent His Son, Jesus.

### ***Reading Joseph's life in context (optional):***

Read Genesis Chapters 37-50 to get the "Big Picture" for the 3-lesson study of Joseph.

### Day One Study

#### ***Setting the Stage:***

Use a Bible handbook, Bible text notes, or other sources to find out more information about the time period in which Joseph lived. Suggested topics to research:

- The variety of uses of a cloak—
- Caravans—
- A slave's life in Egypt—
- The job of a steward—
- Signet rings—
- Egyptian storehouses—

1. Read Genesis Chapter 37:1-11. Describe the nature of Joseph's relationship with his father and older brothers.
2. How do Jacob and Joseph both contribute to the seething resentment of Joseph's brothers?
3. Read Genesis 37:11-36. Describe what happens to Joseph. What is the motivation behind such cruel treatment?
4. We get a glimpse of Joseph's reaction to all of this in Genesis 42:21. How does he respond?
5. Read Genesis 39:1. Joseph is taken to Egypt, and purchased by Potiphar, who is captain of the guard for Pharaoh. In a short period of time, 17-year-old Joseph had been forcibly taken from his adoring father and a simple, rural environment to endure slavery in a foreign land and culture--all from the hand of his own brothers. What sort of traumatic adjustments do you suppose Joseph had to make physically, mentally, and emotionally?

**Think About It:** "Although Joseph's brothers didn't kill him outright, they wouldn't expect him to survive for long as a slave. They were quite willing to let cruel slave traders do their dirty work for them. Joseph faced a 30-day journey through the desert, probably chained and on foot. He would be treated like baggage, and once in Egypt, would be sold as a piece of merchandise. His brothers thought they would never see him again..."

—Life Application Study Bible

6. Considering typical human nature, what potential reactions toward God might Joseph have experienced during this distressing time?
  
7. Read Genesis 39:2. Whatever his feelings and/or reactions towards God might have been, where does Scripture tell us God actually was during all of this (Genesis 39:2)?
  
8. ***Your Life's Journey:*** God tells us in His Word that difficulties are a part of life, even for His children (Matthew 7:24). He also promises us that He will be with us in our darkest hour, just as He was with Joseph. Read the following verses. How do they encourage you? How can you apply them to your life?
  - Deuteronomy 31:6—
  
  - Isaiah 40:27-31—
  
  - Psalm 118:5-9—
  
  - Hebrews 13:5—

## Day Two Study

9. Read Genesis 39:1-6. Joseph was rejected, betrayed and abandoned by his own family. His status changed in an instant from favored son in Canaan to anonymous slave in the house of an Egyptian. Notice that there is no mention of *time* in verses 1-6. We have no idea how long Joseph labored for Potiphar as these events began to unfold. It could have been months or it could have been *years*. At this vulnerable point in his life, Joseph could have easily given in to despair and hopelessness. Instead, he chose (i.e., *exercised his will*), to apply himself to service in Potiphar's household. What does this response to such harsh, bewildering circumstances in his life demonstrate about Joseph?





5. How is God able to sustain us in the midst of temptation? Glean your answers from the following verses: Hebrews 2:17-18; Hebrews 4:15-16 and 1 Corinthians 10:13.

6. Read Genesis 39:20-23. Joseph remained faithful to God in the midst of temptation, but suffered unjustly for it and was sent to prison for a crime he didn't commit. Once again, where was God in the midst of such bitter, unfair circumstances? How did He encourage Joseph?

7. **Your Life's Journey:** Have you, like **Joseph**, ever been faithful to God despite tremendous personal cost? How did God encourage you in your situation? Consider writing a poem of thankfulness for His faithfulness to you.

**Think About It:** The way to wisdom is to consider the cost of sin. Joseph did not yield to temptation because he was convinced God had something marvelous for him to do. Joseph would not throw away God's blessings for the pleasures of sin. Nor was he troubled because he suffered for his faithfulness. God would ultimately honor him as He had promised.

—The Bible Knowledge Commentary OT, p. 90

## Day Two Study

Falsely accused of attempted rape, Joseph remains in prison, forgotten by everyone (except God). He has now been a slave in Egypt for ~11 years. Despite the incredible wait, Joseph refuses to allow discouragement to imprison his heart and make him lose hope. He actively serves others, focusing on God with all of his mind and strength.

8. Read Genesis chapters 40-41. Describe how God dramatically secures Joseph's release from prison and ultimately exalts and blesses His faithful servant.

9. In what ways, *do you think*, Joseph’s long period of “darkness” prepared him for the incredible “dawn” he would eventually experience?

**Think About It:** The dross of our character—pride, rebellion, and self-sufficiency—melts in the crucible called waiting. Yet it is a crucible that we do everything to avoid. We even have a cultural myth that says to wait is to waste time...And even though suffering may force us to slow down, to wait, we complain and seek solace in mindless distractions and miss the refining of our character that God intended.

—Chuck Swindoll

10. **Your Life’s Journey:**

- Do you consider waiting a waste of time?
- Read 1 Peter 5:10. If you are currently in the “crucible of waiting”, consider this verse and ask God to help you see His work in your character with the following question: What in your character does God need to perfect or strengthen in you?

Thoughts to Ponder

Temptation is the oldest of all the inner conflicts in the human heart, and the battle against it is a hard fought one. Although temptation may lead to sin, it is not in and of itself a sin. Everyone, including Jesus, has struggled with it, but Jesus is the only person who hasn’t suffered the consequences of yielding to it (see Matthew 4:1-11). However temptation is “packaged,” it always entices us to step out of our faith relationship with God and believe that we can’t trust Him with the timing and the result of our predicament. If our circumstances are difficult, we can fall into the trap of concluding that God isn’t good and loving or that He doesn’t care about the hardships we are facing. Our tendency is to demand instant relief from our situation, choosing to give up on God rather than persevering, through faith, amidst the difficulties and/or drudgery of life.

In today’s society, Joseph “lost” 13 years of his life and would have been considered a “victim” of unjust circumstances—a man whose personal “rights” had been ignored or violated. But in reality, Joseph was a “victor”. For 13 years God tested and refined Joseph’s faith. Then, when Joseph had proven himself faithful to God throughout everything that

happened to him, God exalted him. When life gets you down, and you are tempted to “give up” on God and take matters into your own hands, remember:

- *Who God is.* He is God, and I am not. He is creator of the universe and all mankind; He knows me and loves me and sees my situation; nothing is hidden from Him.
- *Agree that God knows what He is doing.* He has a greater purpose for me in the midst of my difficult situation. Although I may not see it right now, like it, or understand it, I can trust his character. His word is true, and He will honor his promises and meet my needs.
- *Let your actions be based on the truth of God’s Word,* not your feelings or emotions which can lead you astray. Depend on Jesus for the power to persevere, and trust Him with the results.

11. ***Your Life’s Journey:*** How does the above information encourage you? How can you apply it to your life? Consider transferring the truths to a 3x5 card to keep handy for the next time you need to be reminded of them.

*See the essay “Persevere in Wanting to Do What Is Right” at the end of the study for additional insight into applying this lesson.*

**“Joseph: A Man of Faith” Lesson Three:**  
**GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD**  
***Genesis 42-45; 50:15-22***

## Background

Pharaoh’s terrible dream is realized: a severe famine grips the Earth. Joseph, as Pharaoh’s prime minister, has wisely prepared his country for the oncoming devastation, and Egypt is a land of plenty. Back in Canaan, Joseph’s family is starving. His brothers (except for Benjamin) journey to Egypt to buy grain. More than 20 years have passed since they threw Joseph into a pit. Joseph now lives as an Egyptian in dress and speech, and his desperate brothers do not recognize him as they stand before this powerful official, begging for food. But Joseph recognizes them. One can only imagine his shock as he looks at them. He must find out, without revealing his identity, if they still hate him or have since felt any sorrow or guilt for their wicked actions. He must see if these brutal men have changed in mind and heart. Joseph decides to test them severely, for bitter circumstances tend to reveal the true character of a person.

## Day One Study

Read Genesis chapters 41 and 42.

1. In Genesis 42, describe Joseph’s treatment of his brothers during their encounter. What does Joseph demand of them (verses 15-16, 20)?
  
2. What types of feelings do Joseph’s actions awaken within his brothers (verses 21-22, 28)?

When Joseph’s brothers return home to collect Benjamin, they relate their startling news to Jacob. Angry and distraught, Jacob refuses to release Benjamin, only to relinquish him later when they run out of food. So Joseph’s brothers, burdened with anxiety and bearing gifts, arrive in Egypt with Benjamin.

3. Read Genesis 43:15-34.
  - How does Joseph receive them this time?
  - How does he react to the sight of Benjamin?



## Day Two Study

Joseph becomes emotional when he hears Judah offer himself in place of Benjamin. He realizes the testing is finished; the change in his brothers is genuine. Overwhelmed, Joseph realizes he can finally disclose his true identity. His dreams are fulfilled. Losing control, he emotionally tells them who he really is.

9. Read Chapter 45 and 50:15-22. How do Joseph's brothers react to this news that this powerful Egyptian is really their brother, whom they mistreated and abused over 20 years ago?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What is Joseph's *continual* attitude toward his brothers and everything that has happened to him?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. In your opinion, how is such an attitude possible from someone who has experienced so much pain in his life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. Read Psalm 105:16-24. What further insight does this psalm give us about Joseph's life?

God tells us in His Word that trouble is an everyday part of the human experience (Matthew 7:25). God also tells us that God can and will use each and every painful circumstance we experience in life to achieve a greater good (Romans 8:28). But when we are besieged with trouble, God's greater purpose may not be immediately obvious to us. For Joseph, it took 13 years of waiting and choosing to respond in faith on a daily basis followed by 9 more years before he could look back and say, "God meant it for good."

13. **Your Life's Journey:** Through words and/or creative element (poem, picture, song), describe how our study of Joseph helps you rest in God's promise that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

14. **Your Life's Journey:** What in Joseph's life encourages you to persevere?

### Thoughts to Ponder

Joseph sends his brothers back to Canaan to bring their father and his household to Egypt. Jacob, in his old age, is brought to Egypt to be protected through the famine, living on fertile land granted to him by Pharaoh. Canaan, during the centuries that the Jews were in Egypt, was a highway for the armies of nations to the north and south. The Hebrews could hardly have grown in such numbers living there as they did in Egypt. In a very real sense, Egypt was a womb in which the seed of Israel grew and multiplied until in God's own time a nation was born (Genesis 46:3-4).

Joseph's emotional reunion with his father is detailed in Chapter 46. On his deathbed (chapters 48-49), Jacob prophesies over each of his sons (see summary table, next page) who are the ancestors of the children of Israel. Chapter 50 ends with the death of Joseph.

And so God's greater purpose for the nation of Israel continued through the fortitude and faithfulness of Joseph, whose amazing attitude towards the tragic circumstances of his life is summed up in 50:20: "you meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good."

## “David: The Man after God's Heart” Lesson One:

### A HEART OF HOPE

#### *1 Samuel 16; 18:1--22:2 and selected Psalms*

#### Background

After Moses and Joshua died, the people of Israel were governed by a series of judges and priests. This was an effective system only if the leaders (e.g., the judges) and people were committed to following the Lord. The book of Judges in the Old Testament records the failure of the people and leaders under this system. God had predicted this failure (Deuteronomy 17:14-15) and knew that eventually Israel would be ruled by a king.

Just before 1051 BC, the year Saul became king, the people of Israel demanded that the prophet Samuel select a king to rule over them. Samuel's sons were dishonest judges, not qualified for the job. God had predicted Israel's desire for a king so they could “be like other nations” (1 Samuel 8:20). However, God had called Israel to be unlike all other nations. In calling for a king, Israel was indirectly rejecting God as ruler. The Lord agreed to let the people have a king to rule them, thus Saul was chosen as the first king of Israel. Saul was a “choice and handsome man” and stood head and shoulders above all other men. Yet, he was impetuous, hot-tempered, disobedient and jealous. Saul was 30 years old when he became king and reigned over Israel 42 years. After Saul openly disobeyed God twice, God told Samuel (1 Samuel 13:13-14) that his kingdom would not endure and that God had sought out a man after his own heart. That man was David.

Most everyone who has ever been to Sunday school or Vacation Bible School as a child knows the familiar story of David and Goliath. We know David as the young shepherd boy who slew a giant with a one stone and a simple slingshot. We know that this brave shepherd boy grew up to be a great king of Israel. We also know that Jesus Christ descended from the house of David. Who was this David, and what can we learn from him?

Much is written in our Bibles about David. More has been written about David than any other character in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament there are sixty-six chapters written about David and in the New Testament there are fifty-nine references to this great man. We not only can read about David's life in 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles, we can glean insight into what he thought and felt by reading many of the Psalms he wrote. Seventy-three Psalms are attributed to David.

In Hebrew the name David means “beloved.” David is the only person in the Bible whose epitaph reads “a man after God's own heart “ (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts. 13:22). David was born in 1040 BC and was the youngest son of Jesse (1 Samuel 16:10-11). He is described as handsome and ruddy with beautiful eyes (1 Samuel 16:12). He was anointed as a boy to be God's chosen king by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel. 16:13) and from that day forward, the Holy Spirit remained with him for the rest of his life.

#### ***Reading David's life in context (optional):***

Read 1 Samuel 16-31; all of 2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1:1-2:12; and 1 Chronicles 28 & 29 to get the "Big Picture" for the 3-lesson study of David.

## Day One Study

### ***Setting the Stage...***

Use a Bible handbook, Bible text notes, or other sources to find out more information about the time period in which David lived. Suggested topics to research:

- The process and meaning of anointing—
  - The showbread—
  - The Urim and Thummim—
  - Bathing and hygiene practices—
  - The Philistines and why they were enemies of God and Israel—
  - Meaning of "the kings table"—
  - The "ark of the covenant" and its significance—
1. Read 1 Samuel 13:13-14; 1 Samuel 16:5-13, 18; 1 Samuel 17:26, 32-37, 45-47. The Scripture gives us a descriptive picture of David's character. The above passages give us insight into what God saw in David. What do you observe about his character?

**Scriptural Insight from 1 Samuel 16:14-15:** The Spirit of God not only departed from Saul, but God permitted an evil spirit to "terrorize" (NAS, "torment" NIV) Saul as judgment for Saul's sins. Saul was then left to rule in his own strength without the Holy Spirit to help him. Note that the Spirit of the Lord departs from Saul before an evil spirit came. Before Pentecost (Acts 2), the Holy Spirit never permanently resided on anyone except for David (1 Samuel 16:13) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15, 41). The Spirit of God would come for a temporary time to enable someone for an act of service to God and then depart (and then possibly come again for another act of service). The absence or presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament says nothing about salvation. However at Pentecost, and to the present era, the Holy Spirit comes into the believer at the moment of salvation and seals us until the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). He will NEVER, EVER depart from us!

2. Read 1 Samuel 16:14-23. David now knew that God had something more for him than tending sheep the rest of his life, yet he waited patiently on God's timing and direction. What did David do after Samuel anointed him? (1 Samuel 16:17-19 and 1 Samuel 17:15).
  
  3. What does this show you about David's character even as a teen? (Note: David was about 16 when he was anointed by Samuel and 30 when he became king over Judah.)
  
  4. ***Your Life's Journey:*** Have you ever been in a position where you knew God was leading you in a certain direction, yet the timing wasn't right? Describe how you knew the timing was not right and what you did.
- Think About It:*** I wonder how many people think that David, after he killed the giant, within a matter of just a few days took the throne and became the youngest king in the history of Israel? Well, in case you were one who thought that, you need to know it didn't happen that way.

—Charles Swindoll,  
David, p. 51
5. Read 1 Samuel 18-19:2. (Chapter 17 tells the story of David's valiant defeat over Goliath. You may read it for background information although we will not be looking in detail at that chapter.) Discuss David's life, challenges and rewards, after being anointed as future king.

6. Like Joseph, David was treated unfairly by others. It would have been easy for David to feel deserted by God and alone. But what was really happening (verses 5, 12, 14, 28, & 30)?
7. Read 1 Samuel 19-22:2 (or just the following verses if you are short on time). Saul becomes more and more jealous of David. These chapters describe Saul's efforts to kill David and David's efforts to escape Saul's wrath. Discuss God's provision for his escape from Saul in the following verses (see map at the end of this lesson):
- 1 Samuel 19:11-12; 18-24—
  - 1 Samuel 20 (specifically verses 30-42)—
  - 1 Samuel 21:1, 8-9—
  - 1 Samuel 21:10-15—
8. David, the boy anointed by God as the next king of Israel was now on the run from a madman (and would be for 13 years!). David was now living in a cave with 400 malcontents (those who were evading over-taxation by Saul or who were discontented with how Saul had treated them). Imagine! What could have been David's reaction towards God if David had focused on outward circumstances?

**Think About It:** "If God allows you to be stripped of the exterior portions of your life, he means for you to cultivate the interior."

—Oswald Chambers

## Day Two Study

We can get an inside view of what David felt and did during his years of flight from Saul. It was probably during this time that David wrote many of the wonderful Psalms we know (in particular Psalms 34, 52, 54, 56, 63, and 142). Suggestion: Put slips of paper to hold your place in each psalm.

9. What was the first thing that David did? (Psalm 34:4; 54:2; 142:1, 2, 5)

10. What did David know about God's character that helped him to persevere? (Psalm 34:4, 6, 8, 9; 52:8, 54:4, 56:4,8; 142:3,5)
11. What else did David consistently do in these Psalms? (Psalm 52:9, 54:6, 56:10, 12, 142:7)
12. Though still living as an exile from Saul when he wrote these Psalms, David uses past tense in Psalm 52:9, 54:7, and 56:13. What does this tell you David was thinking?
13. ***Your Life's Journey:*** The bottom had seemingly dropped out of David's life, yet he persevered despite hopeless circumstances. Though God had provided a means for escape, every tangible support system in David's life had been removed one by one until he had nothing left to lean on except God. Yet David had hope in "*the God who accomplishes all things (NAS) / fulfills His purpose for me (NIV)*" as expressed in Psalm 57:2. Where is your hope when all else fails? Support your answer with scripture.

14. David understood waiting on God. If we live by David's example we need to learn how to wait (to be patient) on God's perfect timing. God is in the "human development business." What can we know for sure while we wait? Read Philippians 1:6 and 1 Thessalonians 5:24 for insight. (Note: If you doubt that God has a plan for YOU, read Ephesians 2:10.)

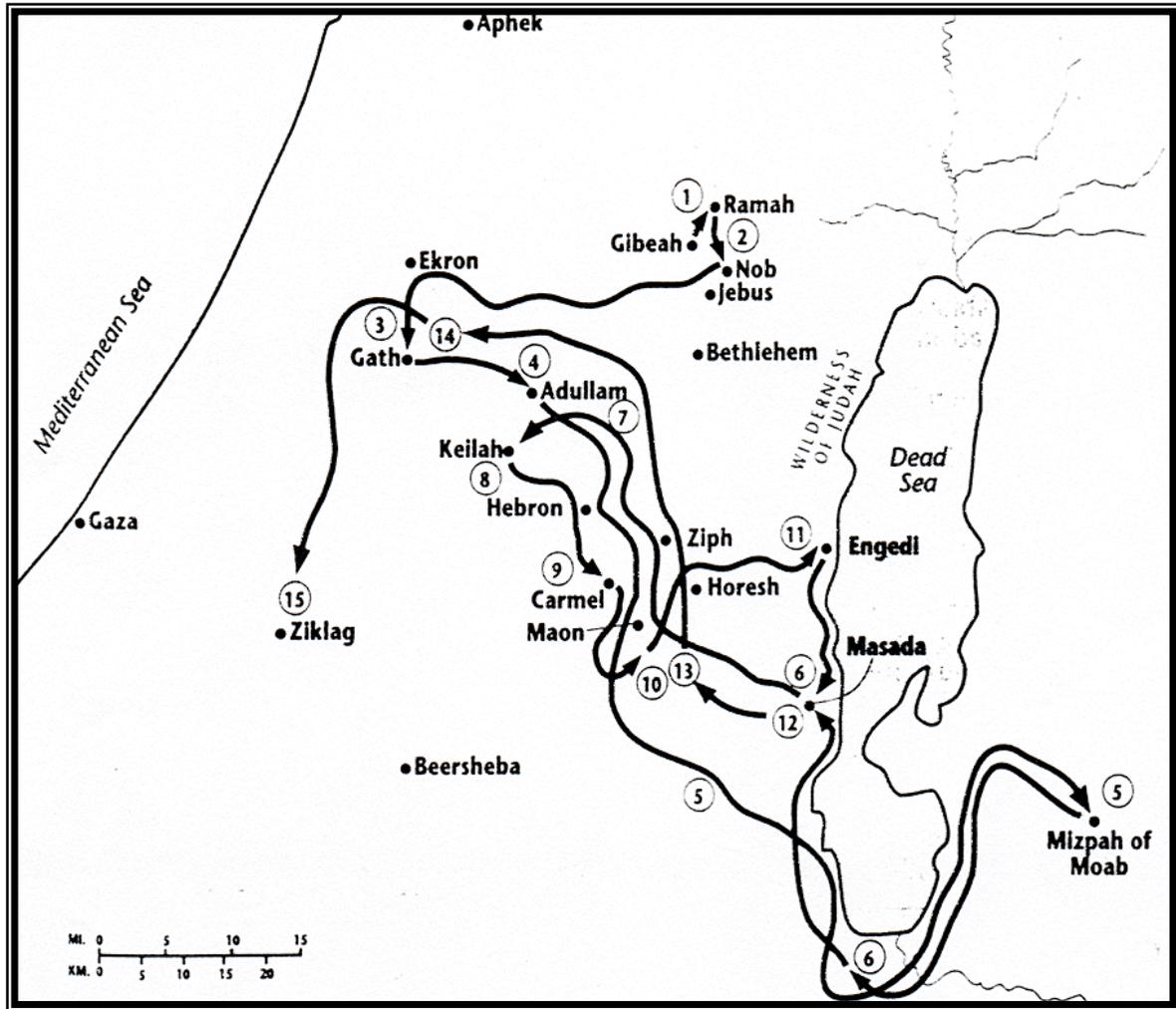
15. **Your Life's Journey:** How does David's example of patiently waiting on God encourage you to wait on God in whatever circumstances you find yourself?

**From the Greek:** The Greek word for patience (one definition) is **hypomone**. It is defined as the "quality of endurance under trials. Those possessing this virtue are free from cowardice or discouragement. It is mainly an attitude of the heart with respect to things" (or circumstances).

—Adapted from The NIV Compact Dictionary of the Bible, by J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney)

*See the essay "The Three "R's" of God's Waiting Room" at the end of the study for additional insight into applying this lesson.*

### Map Of David's Travels To Escape Saul



—Taken from Ryrie Study Bible, 1995 expanded edition, p. 461





4. David knew that he had been anointed for a special purpose. It seemed obvious to everyone that he would be the next king. This was a golden opportunity to kill Saul and take the throne as the rightful leader. Christ was similarly tempted in the wilderness. Read Matthew 4:8-10. How are these situations similar?

5. What prevented David from seizing the moment and killing Saul?

6. Read 1 Samuel 24:8-22. Why do you suppose David risked his life by going after Saul in verse 8?

7. What does David say to Saul? Why?

8. How does Saul react to David?

9. Considering human nature, what impact could this have had on David's men who were watching?

**Think About It:** The Bible is a real book, and this unique story is living proof. In the midst of his mad rush for vengeance, Saul must answer the call of nature. So he finds himself crouching in the privacy of a cave – but not just any cave. He tromps right into the mouth of the cave where David and his men were hiding. Talk about being vulnerable! Bad enough for the king to be seen at that moment, but to be in the very presence of the enemy. Oh, man!

—Charles Swindoll,  
David, p. 84

10. The desire for vengeance or revenge can be one of life's most subtle temptations. We may suffer a personal injury and we wait for just the right opportunity to repay the offending party. Read Romans 12:17-21.

- What does the Scripture say about revenge?
- According to these verses, how often are we to take revenge?
- What are we to do instead?

***Focus on the Meaning:***

Whatever we call it, God calls it revenge. And His feelings toward it are anything but ambivalent. Since we are not all-seeing and all-wise, it's best to leave vengeance in the hands of our just and holy God.

—Charles Swindoll

David was able to restrain himself from killing Saul, but he couldn't resist the temptation to cut off some of his robe. We often do the same to those who have hurt us with a little cut here or a little jab there. Cutting off Saul's robe may have felt good at the moment, but it didn't mend David's injury. Healing came for David when he confronted Saul with the truth.

11. ***Your Life's Journey:*** In what ways does David's honest confrontation with Saul give you a positive example of how to deal with someone who has wronged you?

12. If a confrontation is not possible, what can you do to bring closure to a painful situation? (See also Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:12-13, and 1 Peter 3:8-12.)

13. ***Deeper Discoveries (optional):*** For insight into what David felt during this time in the cave, read Psalm 57.

## Day Two Study

1 Samuel 25 opens with a tremendous loss to David and Israel – the death of Israel’s last judge and David’s mentor, Samuel (verse 1). In verse 44, Saul has also given David’s wife, Michal, to another man. David and his men move on to the wilderness of Maon, a desert area 8 miles south of Hebron. There, they protected the shepherds who watched over Nabal’s flocks. According to the customs of the day, during sheep shearing time the rancher would set aside a portion of the profits and give it to those who had protected his shepherds. This was, in a sense, a gratuity, just as we tip a waiter for good service. The tradition was not a law, but an implied contract.

14. **Read 1 Samuel 25:1-42.** Who is Nabal? How would you describe him?

15. Who is Abigail? How would you describe her?

16. Each character in the story makes a choice amidst the many conflicts and personal agendas.

- What choices did Nabal make?
  
- What choices did Abigail make?
  
- What choices did David make?

17. Throughout the conflict God was at work in the situation.

- How was God faithful to Abigail?
  
  
- How was God faithful to David?

18. In the first half of this lesson we find David immediately responsive to God's Holy Spirit (1 Samuel 24:5). However his quick temper reduced him to initially responding in the flesh (i.e., fallen human nature) to Nabal's selfishness. How can this be?! Paul experienced the same conflict as recorded in Romans 7:15-25. How then can we live victoriously in this life we live on earth? Is it possible? Read John 15:5; Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 5:16 for insight.

19. ***Your Life's Journey:*** What encourages you in learning about how David or Abigail chose to respond in potentially explosive situations?



**“David: The Man after God's Heart” Lesson Three:**  
**A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART**  
**2 Samuel 12**

## Background

Saul tried three times to seize and kill David, but was not successful (1 Samuel 23, 24, 26, Psalm 7:4, 54:3, 57:6). In 1 Samuel 31 we find Saul and his three sons (including Jonathan) killed on the battlefield. Second Samuel opens with David receiving the news of the deaths and mourning the loss, especially the loss of his dear friend, Jonathan. David waits for God's direction as to where to go next. God then tells David to go to Hebron where he is made king over the house of Judah for seven and a half years. After the death of Saul's son, King Ish-Bosheth, David was made king over all of Israel (2 Samuel 5:1-5, 1 Chronicles 11:10, 12:38). This occurred 20 years after he was taken out of the sheep pastures and anointed by Samuel.

During this time in history (since the days of Joshua), the people of Israel thought more in terms of *tribal* than *national* identity. David was successful in unifying Israel and Judah (the two main factions) by centralizing the government in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a wise choice politically and served to create harmony and unity between the two factions.

Through David, Jerusalem also became the center of worship for the Israelites as foretold by God in Deuteronomy 12:5. From that time on, Israel offered sacrifices only at Jerusalem and celebrated three special religious festivals there each year. From 1002 to 995 BC, David expanded his kingdom on all sides and rest from war followed (2 Samuel 7:1). Though David did not build the temple, he designed it and made elaborate preparations for his son, Solomon, to build it (1 Chronicles 22).

Chapters 5-10 of 2 Samuel detail David's many military successes. The tone changes in chapter 11 as it tells of David's sin with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah. The scripture paints a very clear picture of God's hatred for sin and the sad consequences David must face as he endures many family crises resulting from his moment of indiscretion.

In looking at this low point in his life, we wonder HOW God could possibly call David “a man after God's own heart.” The answer comes not in looking at David's personal successes or spiritual failures, but in looking at David's *responsiveness to the Holy Spirit* (as we saw in the last lesson) and to his *teachable heart*.

### **Reading David's life in context (optional):**

If you are not familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba, you may wish to read 2 Samuel 11 as background information for this lesson.

## Day One Study

1. Read 2 Samuel 12. The prophet, Nathan, comes to David with a parable representing David's sinful deeds. How does God view David's actions? (Look back also at 2 Samuel 11:27.)
2. Read carefully through verses 7-14. What does God (through Nathan) say is going to happen as a result of David's sin?
3. How does David react?
4. Instead of David's contrite (repentant) response, how could he have responded? (See also Proverbs 19:3 for insight.)

God never lies. All that He said through Nathan came to pass. We can trace the line of David's sin with Bathsheba to eight consequences that led him on a downward path of grief and heartache. (Adapted from Charles Swindoll, David, Bible study guide)

- David and Bathsheba's newborn son dies. (2 Samuel 12:14-18a)
- David's son, Amnon, rapes his half-sister, Tamar. (2 Samuel 13:1-21)
- David's son, Absalom, hates Amnon. (2 Samuel 13:22)
- Absalom murders Amnon. (2 Samuel 13:28-29)
- Absalom rebels and runs away. (2 Samuel 13:37-39)
- Absalom leads a conspiracy. (2 Samuel 14:1-24)
- Absalom violates David's wives. (2 Samuel 16:22)
- Joab, David's general (& nephew), murders Absalom. (2 Samuel 18:14 & 33)

Keep in mind that David lived under the Mosaic Law not under grace as believers do today. God judged David for his behavior and pronounced him guilty. As king, David had great accountability for his actions. Since he was anointed by God, his reputation reflected on God. Therefore, for the sake of God's holy reputation among the nations, David's sin of adultery had to be judged (2 Samuel 12:14)

5. According to the Law, David deserved death for adultery with Bathsheba (Leviticus 20:10) and murder of Uriah (Leviticus 24:17). However God does not permit it – what did God say (verse 13)?
  
6. What does this tell you about God? (See also Nehemiah 9:31; Exodus 33:19.)
  
7. One of the best illustrations of living through the consequences of deliberate sin is found in the life of David. Re-read 2 Samuel 12:16-25. Let's examine David's response to the situation.
  - What was the first thing David did when the baby became ill?
  
  - Where was David's focus?
  
8. When the child died, what did David do?
  
9. In such a tragic, emotional circumstance how could David have reacted?

## Day Two Study

Psalms 32 & 51 are emotionally descriptive psalms written by David during this time period. (Read both of these if you have time.) In Psalm 51 David confesses his guilt and asks for forgiveness. In Psalm 32 David describes the blessing of forgiveness. Note that in Psalm 32:5, David says God not only forgave him, He also cleansed David of his guilt.

Confessing our sins to our heavenly Father (which is *simply agreeing with God about the truth that you have sinned*) is oftentimes easier than accepting His *unconditional* forgiveness. We often believe we are forgiven but hang on to the guilt. Satan uses guilt to render us useless. As a New Testament believer, God has declared us “not guilty.” At the cross, Jesus Christ bore our sins (past, present and future sins) as well as God's judgment on those sins. We will never have to worry about punishment or judgment as those who are in Christ (see Romans 8:1 & Colossians 2:13-14.)

10. **Your Life's Journey:** Are you still beating yourself up about something for which you have received forgiveness? What does David's acceptance of God's complete forgiveness teach you about forgiving yourself?

11. David, having received and accepted God's forgiveness, went on in his life as King of Israel. Guilt can paralyze us from serving God and make us ineffective in our pursuits. According to Hebrews 9:14, what is the result of being free from guilt?

12. **Your Life's Journey:** We are encouraged as those in Christ to be holy (set apart for God's special use as in 1 Peter 1:15, 2 Corinthians 7:1) and perfect (mature). We are to avoid allowing sin to reign in our bodies (Romans 6:12-14). We accomplish these admonitions by making choices. How do the following verses relate to the choices we make in our lives?

- Romans 12:2 –
- Ephesians 4:22-32 –
- Philippians 4:8-9 –

13. Though God can and does forgive our sins, He will never call sin “Okay” in order to make you feel good about yourself. Read Hebrews 12:7 and Proverbs 3:12. What does God do for His children?

***Focus on the Meaning:*** Discipline is training that develops character, self-control or orderliness and efficiency. It is forward looking to a change of behavior and/or character, is individually tailored, personally applied, and is chiefly concerned with what will benefit the individual in question.

The New Testament declares that believers have been freed from punishment (John 3:16-18, 5:24; Romans 5:9, 8:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 1 John 4:17-19). Under the New Covenant, God disciplines His children in order to conform them to the likeness of His son (Romans 8:28-30; Philippians 1:6; Revelation 3:19). We live under grace. As New Testament believers we deal with a loving Father who teaches, trains and corrects.

14. ***Your Life’s Journey:*** Explain how God loving us enough to discipline us is beneficial for our walk of faith towards godliness (God-likeness).

15. ***Your Life’s Journey:*** Though David fell in his walk of faith, he got back up and went on with his life. David was able to cling to certain truths about God, such as God’s sovereignty, the eternal perspective of life, and God’s love for us even during times of discipline. To what truths about God are you clinging as you’ve studied this portion of David’s life?

16. ***Your Life’s Journey:*** What in David’s life encourages you to persevere in a life of faith *despite* your successes or failures?

## Thoughts to Ponder: A Heart of Gratitude (1 Chronicles 28-29)

More than 50 years after God plucked David from his father's sheepfold, God's work with David is nearly finished. We have seen a life of faith unfold as we've followed David from pasture to exile to military success as king to sinfulness and restoration. Now in 1 Chronicles 28 and 29 as David's life draws to a close, we read about David's parting words to the people as well as to his son, Solomon, the next king.

Instead of reflecting on his many great accomplishments as warrior-king, David focuses on worship of his God (1 Chronicles 28:2-3). David reflects on the covenant God has made with him to bring about an enduring dynasty through David (see also 2 Samuel 7). Rather than focusing on what he couldn't do (build the temple), he praises God for what God had given him.

David's advice to Solomon is good advice to us all. His first advice is in 1 Chronicles 28:9: *know the Lord*. Next he encourages Solomon to *serve the Lord* (1 Chronicles 28:9b). Finally, David tells his son to *seek the Lord* (also verse 9). David concludes his words to his son by giving him detailed instructions for the temple Solomon would build. David's beautiful prayer of praise and worship is recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19. David's positive example produced a great outpouring of worship from the people who witnessed the exchange of power.

David had a heart of gratitude for God. David praised God in the field with his father's sheep. He praised God for delivering him from his enemies. He praised God for helping him bring the ark back to the people of Israel. He praised God for promising him a dynasty that would end in the Messiah. He praised God in good and bad. And at the end of his life he still had a heart to praise God for all he had been blessed with in his lifetime.

The last words written about David's life in Chronicles appear in 29:28a (NAS): "*Then he died in a ripe old age, full of days, riches and honor...*" What an epitaph! God was faithful to complete the good work He began in a shepherd boy many years beforehand. David faithfully served God as one of the greatest kings that ever lived and is remembered by God as "a man after my own heart."

**“Elijah: God's Humble Prophet” Lesson One:**  
**THE GOD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION**  
***1 Kings 16:29-17:24***

## Background

Under Saul, David and Solomon, the loosely associated 12 tribes of Israel formed one nation (1050-930 B.C.). For centuries before that, though, friction had existed between the northern and southern tribes. So after Solomon died (930 B.C.), the 10 tribes dwelling primarily north of Jerusalem broke off and formed a new nation referred to as the northern kingdom, or Israel, with the hilltop city of Samaria as its capital. The 2 remaining tribes—Judah and Benjamin—became known as Judah (Judah was the larger of the two) and is sometimes referred to as the southern kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital. For the most part, Israel's kings were idolatrous and rebellious against God. Some of Judah's kings were likewise.

Our study of Elijah begins during the reign of Ahab in Israel who became king in 874 BC, ~66 years after the death of Solomon. Those six decades were characterized by murder, deception and hatred proceeding from the very throne of Israel. Then the throne was turned over to Ahab who married Jezebel. The mention of the marriage is significant for two reasons: 1) Jezebel was the dominant member of the marriage who controlled Ahab's reign and 2) she initiated Baal worship in Israel (to be discussed in more detail in Lesson 2). Her hometown (Sidon in the land of Phoenicia—see map at the end of lesson one) was the birthplace of this idolatry. It had not found its way into Israel until this marriage.

Both nations, Israel and Judah, were falling deep into idol-worship, so God chose special men and women to be prophets, His mouthpieces. Some, like Elijah, were called into a lifetime of service to God, while God asked others to perform one simple, yet important job. Yet, all responded to God's call to give God's messages to both kings and ordinary people.

### ***Reading Elijah's life in context (optional):***

Read 1 Kings 16-21; 2 Kings 1-2 to get the "Big Picture" for the 3-lesson study of Elijah. To follow Elijah's travels, see the map at the end of this lesson.

## Day One Study

### ***Setting the Stage...***

Use a Bible handbook, Bible text notes, or other sources to find out more information about the time period in which Elijah lived. Suggested topics to research:

- What ravens eat—
- The uses and value of cooking oil—

- The plight of widows—
- The life of prophets—
- God's promise concerning giving or withholding rain—
- Baal worship and why it so provoked the Lord to anger—

The mention of Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1 is abrupt. Unlike David or Joseph, we know nothing of his age, family or youth. His name combines 2 names for God: *EI* (from Elohim which is translated God) plus *jah* (from Yahweh which is the personal name God told the Hebrews to call Him). So, his name means *My God is Yahweh*. This was his choice and his message. His place of birth was across the Jordan River in a land of solitude and outdoor life. The people were rugged, muscular, uneducated and unpolished. Elijah's style was likewise bold with no frills. His clothes—a rough, hairy garment probably woven from goat's hair (called sackcloth) and large leather belt—were part of the dress of prophets at that time (2 Kings 1:8). Our study will reveal why Elijah was indeed a man like us.

1. Read 1 Kings 16:29-17:6; James 5:17-18. By his own words, Elijah knew the drought would last for several years. Discuss the following:
  - What kinds of problems does a drought normally bring?
  - So, what did Elijah trust God to do?
2. Read 1 Kings 17:7-24. Concentrating on verses 7-16, discuss the following:
  - The life circumstances of Elijah—
  - The life circumstances of the widow (her *impossible situation*)—
  - The choices Elijah made—
  - The choices the widow made—
  - God's faithfulness to both—

3. Concentrating on verses 17-24, what further challenge did the widow face?
4. How did Elijah's knowledge of and faith in God benefit this family?

**Historical Insight:** A room on the roof was a sign of once having prosperity, since only a wealthy man could afford to add another addition to his home.

Commentators disagree about the woman's faith initially. Her oath in the name of the Lord was either an accommodation to Elijah whom she recognized as an Israelite or a genuine expression of previous knowledge of and commitment to the God of Israel. It doesn't matter. What does matter is that she responded in obedience to the word of the Lord, which demonstrates faith. The Lord honored her faith by fulfilling His promise miraculously. They could get this provision nowhere else. Only the true God could provide flour and oil in a drought! Only the true God can give life!

5. Read 2 Kings 4:1-7, a similar account of another woman in an impossible situation during the ministry of Elisha who was Elijah's successor. [The ministry of Elisha is found in 2 Kings 2-9.] What Elijah learned in his time with the widow of Zarephath, he must have certainly shared with Elisha who didn't hesitate to help another woman. Her husband had been in the ministry as a prophet at one of the three schools where men were trained in the word of God similar to modern seminaries. Discuss the following:
  - Their life circumstances—
  - The choices she and her children made—
  - God's faithfulness to them—
6. List those circumstances or situations in our lives today that would parallel anything in either of these passages, 1 Kings 17:1-24 or 2 Kings 4:1-7?

## Day Two Study

We will focus on 3 applications to this lesson, all centered on what to do with an *impossible situation*.

### Step #1 Identify it.

7. **Your Life's Journey:** The woman of Zarephath (and the prophet's widow) grew in knowledge of God in their "kitchens" through an impossible situation. What are you (or someone close to you) facing today that is bleak and/or impossible?

### Step #2 Think rightly about it.

When the boy died, the woman immediately entertained error in her thinking, "God is punishing me for my sin by killing my son. It's all my fault." This is a common reaction among many people who do not know God or His ways when personal tragedy enters their lives. But, it is wrong thinking. Although some hardship comes as the consequence of a person's wrong choices (as in David's later life), most does not as we have seen in our study so far. Based on our study of Joseph, was he put into slavery, jailed, etc. as a consequence of his behavior? No! Was David on the run from Saul for 13 years because of his own fault? No! And, God was with both of them.

8. **Your Life's Journey:** Are you blaming yourself (or someone else), thinking that God is punishing you with this impossible situation? Read the following verses to see what God says regarding this error in our thinking: John 9:1-3; Matthew 5:45, 7:24-27 (what happened to both houses?); Romans 8:1. Make any comments below.

**Step #3 Bring it to God.** *Trust that God loves you, He knows what is going on, and He can do something about it.*

9. How does Elijah deal with the difficult situation of the boy's death, a situation outside of Elijah's control? Where does he go? How does he react?

10. Read the following verses: Psalm 27:14; Isaiah 30:18; Luke 1:37; Matthew 19:25-26. What do these verses promise to you about an impossible situation, and how does this encourage you?

11. Think through what you do when tragedy strikes or when a test comes.

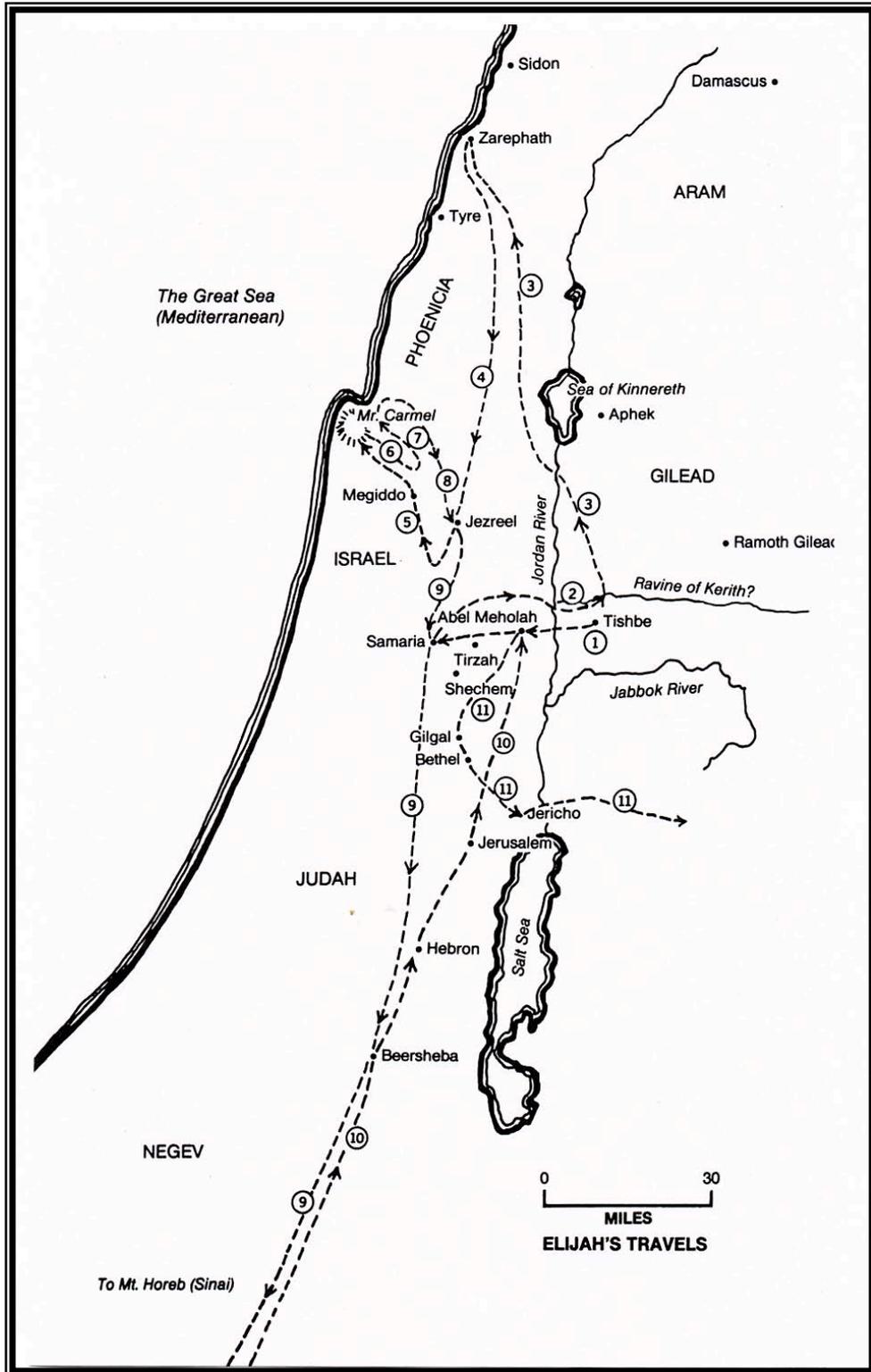
- What's your usual response?
- Based upon what we have learned so far in this study, is this the correct (Biblical) response?

12. What have you learned from today's lesson that will help you deal with what appears to be an *impossible situation* you may be currently facing? Describe anything you have learned about going to God when tragedy strikes. Place on your "bed" that critical situation—that burden that is burning your energy, weighing on your mind. **God is still the God of IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS.**

**Think About It:** Reflect on one man's choice of how to think in a difficult time: First, God brought me here. It is by His will that I am in this straight place. In that fact, I will rest. Next, God will keep me here in His love, and He will give me grace to behave as His child. Then, God will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn and working in me the grace He means to bestow. Last, in God's good time, He can bring me out again—how and when, He knows. Let me say, I am here: 1) by God's appointment, 2) in His keeping, 3) under His training, 4) for His time. Amen. (In Quietness and Confidence, Dr. Raymond Edmund, former professor at Wheaton College)

*See the essay "Prepare by Instruction, Learn by Experience" at the end of the last lesson of the study for additional insight into applying this lesson.*

### MAP of ELIJAH'S TRAVELS



—Bible Knowledge Commentary OT, page 523



**“Elijah: God's Humble Prophet” Lesson Two:**  
**THE GOD WHO WANTS OUR HEARTS TO BE COMPLETELY HIS**  
*1 Kings 18*

## Background

Baal was the Canaanites' chief fertility god as well as the storm god in charge of clouds, wind, and rain—all necessary for crops to grow. Ancient statues show him gripping a lightning bolt in his left hand, ready to hurl it as a spear toward earth. The three-and-one-half year drought had been a great embarrassment to worshipers of Baal. So, Elijah's test to Baal's followers seemed like a good opportunity to vindicate their god and they readily agreed to it.

This chapter (1 Kings 18) is one of the most significant chapters of the Bible. It could be titled "Winner Takes All" or "The Fight of the Century." It is the showdown between the living God of heaven and the idols of men on earth. After three years of drought, God tells Elijah to come out of hiding and go back to show himself to Ahab. He was a wanted man; Ahab thought of him as a snake, a viper. No doubt, the stench of death was all around. The famine was severe by now...

## Day One Study

1. Read 1 Kings 18:1-15. (See the map after the previous lesson to follow Elijah's travels.) Besides Elijah, who else was learning about faith in God at this time? How?
  
2. What is Elijah commanded to do and how does he respond?

Read 1 Kings 18:16-40. There are 3 main groups represented at this showdown: the "No Comment Fence-Sitter" Israelites, Ahab + Jezebel's Baalites, and Elijah plus God. Let's look at them one at a time to glean our lessons.

### ***The "No Comment Fence-Sitters" of Israel***

3. Why was this showdown necessary for them? What did Elijah do in v. 31-32, 36 to remind them of their identity?

4. Divided allegiance is as wrong as open idolatry. It is likely that hundreds, if not thousands, congregated on Mount Carmel in answer to Elijah's directive for Ahab to summon them (v. 19). The people were lukewarm toward God, "straddling the fence," perhaps trying to combine both religions. The easiest thing to do in the hour of decision is to remain uncommitted. But, with God, it's either/or, not both. Read Revelation 3:15-16; James 4:4-5. What does the Bible say about people who try to "straddle the fence?"
5. ***Your Life's Journey:*** Follow the steps below to overcome being a "no comment fence-sitter" in your life.
- **Step 1: Choose to become committed to God and His ways.** One of God's purposes was to turn the hearts of the people back to Himself. This involves a choice. Read John 8:12. If you haven't made this choice for your life already, why not do it today?
  - **Step 2: Choose to stay committed.** *Read the following questions and answer any that apply to your life.* Have you felt that tension between your Christian faith (often snubbed as "traditional") and the pull of your modern culture? In what ways is the tension most challenging to you and why? Have you sometimes been tempted to desert some of God's ways to fit in better by taking the "embrace the best of both worlds" approach? Or, have you stood firm for God and His ways in spite of opposition? What have been the results of any of these choices?

***Think About It:*** When we stray away from Christ as our life, we have no alternative but to return to self-generated, self-centered, and self-disciplined religious experience and the "counsel of the ungodly."

—Bob George, Growing in Grace, p. 36

***Ahab + Jezebel's Baalites***

6. In today's passage in 1 Kings 18, contrast the religious practices of the Baal worshipers with Elijah as a worshiper of the true God.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What does God honor? Read also Romans 10:8-13; Ephesians 2:8-9; and Hebrews 11:1,6. How do these scriptures encourage you as a Christian?

***Elijah plus God***

8. Review from last week: What had Elijah come to know and understand about God over the previous 3 years that prepared him for this very public challenge?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Discuss Elijah's prayer and God's answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. How did the people respond?

## Day Two Study

11. In 1 Kings 18:15, Elijah refers to God as "The Lord Almighty (NIV)" / "The Lord of Hosts (NAS)." This is a very meaningful title for God. Read any or all of the following verses where this title for God is also used: 1 Samuel 17:45; Isaiah 5:16, 6:3; Jeremiah 11:20, 31:35, 50:34; Zechariah 7:9-10. List what is told about Him as the Lord of Hosts.
12. **Your Life's Journey:** In what ways does your life reflect the reality of God's being Lord of Hosts? For instance, do you find reassurance in His power or have you experienced His help? Are there some fearful situations that you have given over to Him?
13. **Your Life's Journey:** Allow God to grow you; you can become the Elijah in your sphere of influence. As Elijah did, you can make the choice to be committed to God and the specific job He has given you to do. Elijah points out the truth and doesn't back down. John Knox, Scottish evangelist of the 1600s, once said, "God and one are a majority." Never underestimate the influence of one unique, totally dedicated life.
- What is your sphere of influence right now in your stage of life?
  - Where do you need to be totally committed to Him?
  - Make a list right now of 5 people in your sphere of influence who need to know the one true God and commit to pray for God to reveal Himself to them in an unmistakable manner. In confidence, wait for and watch Him work.
14. Read 1 Kings 18:41-46. How did God, through Elijah, finish up His Mount Carmel demonstration?

## 15. What does that teach us about God?

**Think About It:** Our day is characterized by mediocrity. Christians blend into the scenery of the times. God looks for special people at such difficult times, and His methods are often surprising. We expect flash; He uses ordinary, everyday lives. He uses women who are engaged in constant ministry to their families in their homes. It may be to only 1, 2, or 3 people. We shouldn't look down on that. What we must remember is that first and foremost, we stand before God. He looks for men and women whose hearts are completely His, who won't blend into the scenery of their culture, bowing the knee to idols. God found a man who was completely His. Would God find you to be completely His today?

*See the essay "And, The True God Is..." at the end of the last lesson of the study for additional insight into applying this lesson.*



**“Elijah: God's Humble Prophet” Lesson Three:**  
**THE GOD WHO LOVES ME AS I AM**  
**1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 2**

### Day One Study

#### **Setting the Stage...**

Use a Bible handbook, Bible text notes, or other sources to find out more information about the significance of these:

- Mount Horeb—
- The mantle worn by Elijah—
- The horses and chariots of fire—

After the phenomenal experience on Mt. Carmel, you might expect to find Elijah openly preaching to all Israel. Instead...

1. Read 1 Kings 19:1-18. (*See the map after the first Elijah lesson to follow Elijah's travels.*) Describe all the reasons Elijah gives for being dejected and fleeing to Mt. Horeb.
2. Considering the great victory on Mt. Carmel, when Elijah stood alone but boldly proclaimed God, why *do you think* he now lost courage? For more insight, read also what happened to Peter in John 18:1-10, 15-18, 25-27.

**Think About It:** In 1 Kings 19:9, the Hebrew text says, "He came to the cave," possibly the very cleft of the rock where God had placed Moses as His glory passed by (Ex. 33:14-23). The Lord told Moses, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." What might Elijah have been seeking at Mt. Horeb?

3. Looking back at 1 Kings 19:3-14, and continuing to read vs. 15-18, what was God's response to Elijah's need? Describe all the ways God helps, encourages, and shows His love for Elijah.
  
4. In 1 Kings 19:13, 19-21, how does Elijah respond to God's word and love?
  
5. **Your Life's Journey:** Although God can and does display His power in mighty acts like that on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18), the majority of us experience His presence as Elijah did—the gentle "whisper." Personal. For us alone. As Christians, we have access to this "power" daily. Read John 14:26, 16:12-15; and Romans 8:15-16, 26-27. Explain in your own words how God has already provided for us to know His presence and power. Add any other verses.

**Think About It:** God "draws" us to Himself in a loving personal relationship. In Romans 8:15, 16, Jesus introduced a revolutionary truth when He taught that we can relate to God on this level. How can we NOT be drawn to a God who loves us in this way?  
—Bob George, Growing in Grace, p. 70-71

### ***The God Who Loves Me As I Am***

Elijah became weak because He stopped trusting God. Peter failed (question 1b) because he stopped trusting God. In God's sight, sin of adultery and murder (David) is just as bad as that of not trusting Him. Romans 14:23 says, "Everything that does not come from faith is sin." The wonderful thing about Jesus Christ is that He knows all about our human weakness and failures. Our God accepts us as we are.

6. *He understands my weaknesses and failures.* Read Hebrews 4:14-16; Psalm 56:3-4; and 1 Peter 5:7.
  - What does He tell us to do with our fears?

- Name some practical ways you can do this.

***Scriptural Insight:***

Preventing despair is far easier than recovery! Next time you encounter a frightening situation, dwell on Philippians 4:6-8; John 14:27; and Psalm 27.

***Think About It:*** There is only one way to determine your identity that cannot be shaken, one foundation that cannot be taken away from you: "I am a child of God." Now you might be a child of God who happens to be a businessman...or a mother...or an athlete. But the core source of your identity is your relationship with your God and Father. Only in this way can you ever begin to discover true security...At moments of failure, we need to be reminded of who we really are so that we can return to dependency upon Him and act in accordance with our true identity. We never outgrow our need to be reminded of who we are in Christ! It is something that God is trying to teach us from the first day of our Christian lives until the day we go home to heaven, and this truth provides a constant standard against which we learn to measure our thinking and responses throughout life...It is only as we learn and rest in what the Word of God teaches us about our total acceptance before God that we can become free.

—Bob George, Growing in Grace, p. 22, 63, and 84

7. *He responds to my need.* Fear, confusion and despair distorted Elijah's thinking, and he ran instead of praying. He withdrew from his sphere of influence and neglected his body's needs. He wallowed in self-pity. God responded to Elijah's need.
- Have you ever followed Elijah's stressed-out steps? What happened, and how did God help you out of such a painful place in the past?
  - Have you thanked Him for this? Consider writing or drawing something to express your thankfulness today.



reminded of how Elijah called down fire from heaven (Luke 9:54). Some thought Jesus called for Elijah to rescue Him from the cross (Matt. 27:47-49; Mark 15:35, 36). The epistle of James cites Elijah as an example of a man who prevailed in prayer (James 5:17-18). Whether Elijah is one of the two witnesses, together with Enoch, in Revelation 11, is a matter of interpretation, resting on the fact that Enoch and Elijah are the only two men recorded as being taken up to heaven without dying.

—Adapted from The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, p. 256)

10. What in Elijah's life encourages you to persevere?

**Think About It:** God can achieve His purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance upon them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because their unusual dependence on Him made possible the unique display of His power and grace. He chose and used “somebodies” only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources.

—Oswald Chambers

### Going Further With Elishah (optional)

#### **2 Kings 2:2- 9:13; 13:10-20**

Elisha was one of those persons who lived much of his life in the shadow of a great individual. Elijah blazed the trails; Elisha enlarged them. Elijah was the prophet of fire. Elisha's ministry was less dramatic. He was the son of a well-to-do farmer, enjoyed living in cities, and relished the comforts of home. Even after Elijah was gone from the scene and Elisha was well-established in his own work, he was still known as the man who "used to pour water on the hands of Elijah" (2 Kings 3:11)...For generations, a special chair has been set for Elijah at the circumcision ceremonies of every Jewish boy. And Elisha? He remains in the shadows...the obscure understudy of a great prophet. Even though God performed twice as many miracles through Elisha as He did through Elijah, the former would probably be content to be remembered as the man who followed Elijah.

Elisha's first ministry was simply to become Elijah's friend. To be a listening ear, to offer words of counsel. To just be there. It was true that Elisha poured water over Elijah's hands as a servant. But more important than that, he poured the refreshing water of encouragement over Elijah's heart as a close companion. For ten years, until the older prophet was finally called into the presence of the Lord, Elisha served Elijah, walked the dusty roads of Samaria with him, and stood by his side until the very end.

It's easy to overlook a ministry of friendship and encouragement. Often it goes unnoticed. It isn't the kind of ministry that grabs a lot of attention and headlines. Jonathan was David's friend at a critical time in David's life. David went on to the throne and to fame and renown, but it was Jonathan who had stood beside him. It was Jonathan who had encouraged the son of Jesse when David felt like life wasn't worth living. Paul initiated the

major first-century thrust for Christian missions, but as you read his letters you discover it was several supportive friends who made the difference in his life: Barnabas...and Onesiphorus...Timothy.

If you were Elisha, gifted with a double portion of Elijah's spirit and launched into your own career as a prophet, how would you begin to shape your ministry? Elisha never tried to imitate Elijah! It was not Elisha's mannerisms, style, or methods he had requested; it was Elijah's strength and spirit. Now, endowed with the strength, Elisha was free to utilize his own gifts—he was free to be himself. Elijah was a prophet of fire and judgment; Elisha became a prophet of mercy and compassion. Elijah was a man on the move; Elisha enjoyed the tranquility of home life. Elijah's ministry was one of stern warning; Elisha's ministry was one of tender teaching.

11. In what ways might Elisha have encouraged Elijah during his years of service to the prophet?

12. ***Your Life's Journey:*** Has God called you to a "background" ministry of encouragement? How?

**Think it through:** Your infinitely creative God delights in diversity! That's why He created you exactly the way you are. He has gifted you with the ability to reflect the life of Jesus Christ in a way that no one else who ever walked the earth (or ever will) can hope to duplicate. Have you found the freedom to be yourself in your ministry and not have to match someone else's style, results or expectations?

—Adapted from Talk through the Bible, Dr. Bruce Wilkinson, pages 116-123

**“Nehemiah: An Awesome Leader” Lesson One:**  
**A LEADER WHO PRAYED...AND PRAYED AND PRAYED**  
*Nehemiah 1 - 6*

## Background

God had promised Israel that if they obeyed Him, He would bless them as a nation. If they did not, then He would judge them and cause them to be taken into captivity (Deuteronomy 28). As God had forewarned, His hand of judgment fell on all of Israel because of their sin. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) fell first and the people were taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The Babylonians brought about the fall of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) in 586 B.C.

The Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were absorbed into Assyria and eventually into other cultures. However, the people of the Southern kingdom remained intact in Babylon, and after the power of Babylon was broken by the Medes and the Persians in 539 B.C., many Jews returned to their homeland. In 538 B.C. the first group returned to Judah under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-2:2). Over a period of years and tremendous opposition from the Samaritans, the returnees eventually succeeded in rebuilding the temple in 515 B.C. Ezra, the priest, then led another return to Israel and restored worship in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Nehemiah also returned in 444 B.C., 14 years after Ezra's return to Jerusalem, and God used him to guide Judah in rebuilding the city's walls and in reordering the people's social and economic lives. What he accomplished in a brief period of time was an incredible feat. How he accomplished this goal is one of the major emphases in the book that bears his name. (Adapted from The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Walvoord and Zuck, p. 673)

Early in the book Nehemiah is employed as cupbearer to the King of Persia. Though Nehemiah retains this position throughout the time of the events of the book of Nehemiah, different roles take precedence in his life at different times. Midway through the book Nehemiah is the builder of the wall around Jerusalem, and in the third part of the book, Nehemiah is the governor of the city and surrounding sections of Jerusalem. The book of Nehemiah is a personal account written by Nehemiah himself. No information is given about Nehemiah's childhood, his adolescent years, or even about his family, with the exception of his father's name (Hacaliah) and one brother (Hanani). Nehemiah begins with Israel in a condition of breakdown and ruin, then grows into a place of peace, security, restored order and usefulness.

### ***Reading Nehemiah's life in context (optional):***

Read all of Ezra, Esther & Nehemiah to get the "Big Picture" for the 2-lesson study of Nehemiah. As you read the book of Nehemiah, notice the personal, eyewitness perspective of this record. The book of Nehemiah is a diary, journal, or memoirs written by Nehemiah himself. As the book of Nehemiah begins, Nehemiah is employed as cupbearer to the King of Persia, King Artaxerxes.

## Day One Study

### **Setting the Stage...**

Use a Bible handbook, Bible text notes, or other sources to find out more information about the time period in which Nehemiah lived. Suggested topics to research:

- Persian kings and government—
- The significance of city walls and gates—
- Sackcloth—

**Historical Insight:** "...It was the cupbearer's responsibility to taste the king's wine before it was served to make sure that no one had poisoned it. In those days of totalitarian monarchs, assassination was the only way one could be removed from office. The usual method was to poison his food or his wine. This was a dangerous job Nehemiah had. It is obvious that he had to be a man of unlimited integrity and trustworthiness. The king relied upon him to keep him safe. He must always be above suspicion, keeping the king's trust at all times. If the king grew suspicious or distrustful, Nehemiah's life would be in danger. He would not only lose his job, he could also lose his head."

—Ray Stedman, Sermon notes, January 8, 1989

1. Read Nehemiah 1:1-11. What was Nehemiah concerned about at this time?
2. How did Nehemiah respond to the news he was given?
3. What does Nehemiah's response reveal about this character?
4. What do you observe about the spiritual condition of God's people at this time?  
(Nehemiah 1: 6,7)

5. Reading Nehemiah 1:5-11 again, what do you learn about who God is, from Nehemiah's prayer? List your observations in the space below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  6. As Nehemiah prays, do you think his focus is more on who God is, or more on the immediate situation? Explain your answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  7. **Your Life's Journey:** Think of one or two areas in your life that most concern you at this time.
    - When you pray for these situations or people, do you tend to focus more upon God and His power, or upon the situation?
  
  
    - How do you think focusing more upon God and who He is might affect your ability to persevere through these times?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  8. Read Nehemiah 2:1-8. Nehemiah received the report about Jerusalem and began praying in the month of Kislev (November-December) and now it is Nisan (March-April), four months of praying later. What do you observe Nehemiah choosing to say and do in this time of opportunity before the King?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  9. Take a moment to think about this scene, with Nehemiah in front of the King of Persia. Remember the job description of a cupbearer and that the King had the power to put anyone to death if that person displeased him or caused him to suspect them of allegiance to someone else. What other choices could Nehemiah have taken at this time?
-

## Day Two Study

**Historical Insight:** Nehemiah faced many difficult issues as he pressed on and led God's people through the task of rebuilding the wall. But the importance of the task was indisputable. The wall of an ancient city symbolized strength and protection. The building of the walls would fill the need for security and strength among the inhabitants. For instance, the walls of the city of Babylon as recounted in the story of Daniel were some 380 feet thick and over 100 feet high, therefore the city of Babylon was considered very safe! The ruins of the wall around Jerusalem had been there for over 100 years and approximately 1.5 miles of the wall needed to be rebuilt to a thickness of 9 feet.

10. As time allows read through Nehemiah 2:11-6:19 (or just read the specific verses listed). Determine what is the problem/challenge presented and Nehemiah's response. Take special note of the role of prayer in these situations.

- Nehemiah 2:10, 19-20—
- Nehemiah 2:17-18—
- Nehemiah 4:1-6—
- Nehemiah 4:7-9—
- Nehemiah 4:10-15—
- Nehemiah 6:1-9—

11. **Your Life's Journey:** Looking back over the previous question, what are some of the lessons you learn from the responses of Nehemiah and the people? How do these lessons both encourage and teach you positive ways to deal with challenges and problems in your own life?

**Think About It:** “One of the most helpful things that we can do to resist temptation {or distractions} is to remember that God has called us to a great task. This is true of every believer in Christ. I do not care how young or old you are in the Lord, you are called to a tremendous work today. That task is: to model a different lifestyle so that those who are being ruined by wrongful practices will see something that offers them hope and deliverance. If they see in you peace in the midst of confusion, an invisible support that keeps you steady and firm under pressure, they will learn that there is another way to live than the destructive ways they have chosen. That is the great work that God has called us to. We ought never to give allegiance to anything less.”

—Ray Stedman, Sermon notes, January 29, 1989

12. **Your Life’s Journey:** Nehemiah was a special man for a special time, but that also can be said for each of us. Where do you think God has placed you in order to accomplish His purposes? Or, what position and/or responsibility do you hold that might be useful in bringing about good in the lives you touch?

“So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it came about when all of our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.”

—Nehemiah 6:15-16



**“Nehemiah: An Awesome Leader” Lesson Two:**  
**BUILDING MORE THAN A WALL**  
*Nehemiah 7-13*

### Day One Study

#### ***Setting the Stage...***

Use a Bible handbook, Bible text notes, or other sources to find out more information about these:

- Scrolls & writing in Nehemiah's time—
  
- The Levites—

***Think About It:*** Nehemiah not only led the people of Judah to rebuild the walls of their city; he had led them to renewed commitment to God and to His revealed will...Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem had given the people a new sense of their identity as God's people. Success despite opposition had helped them realize that their God was truly among them, as small as their people and land had become.

—The Teacher's Commentary, p. 308, 310

1. As we ended the last lesson, we read Nehemiah 6:15,16. Read those verses again for review, and then, as the story continues, read Nehemiah 7:1-5. What choices and actions do you observe Nehemiah taking now that the wall is built?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Read Nehemiah 8:1-12. One indication of an effective leader is the willingness and the ability to turn the responsibility over, or to share the job of leading with other qualified people. That is what happens as Nehemiah shares the stage (literally) with Ezra and then Ezra helps lead the people further spiritually. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are actually one book in the Hebrew Bible. (*See any introduction material you may have in your Bible at the beginning of the book of Ezra.*) What do you learn about Ezra from this passage?

3. How do the people respond to the word of God at this time? Start at the beginning of chapter 8 and trace the people's responses through verse 12.

**Scriptural Insight:** Notice that this seems to be a spontaneous gathering. These people come "as one man." No invitations were sent out. No public notice was given. People were hungry for answers to their problems, for guidelines from the word of God, and with one accord they gathered in this great square before the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the priest to bring the book of the Law of the Lord and to read it to them. This would undoubtedly be the entire Pentateuch—the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This indicates the tremendous desire of these people for the truth. They listened, while standing, from daybreak until noon! Certainly this long attention indicates how deeply they were aware of their ignorance about life and how much they needed answers from God.

—Ray Stedman, Sermon Notes, January 1989

4. **Your Life's Journey:** Recall the problems and challenges of Nehemiah 1-6 covered in the last lesson. God's people went through hard times, yet there was a time for celebration and joy. What do you celebrate? What brings you joy? List the three things that come first to your mind in each of these areas. Use any creative means to illustrate your joy.

5. Read Nehemiah chapter 9. Nehemiah 9:5-38 is the longest recorded prayer in the Bible, and it recalls the highlights of Israel's history. Some of us are inclined to be indifferent to history, but as you read this prayer, observe the very personal involvement of God in the history of the Jewish people, and remember that God does not change. God is the same yesterday, today and forever.
  - Write out as many of the actions of God as you can in the space below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - What jumps out at you the most?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Write our own prayer recalling God's faithfulness through the years to you.

## Day Two Study

So the city of Jerusalem grew. Chapters 11 and 12 of Nehemiah detail this growth." Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine-tenths remained in other cities. And the people blessed the men who volunteered to remain in Jerusalem."  
(Nehemiah 11:1,2)

6. The wall has been built, the gates are hung, the city is now well-defended and filled with people. The time for dedication and celebration has come. Read Nehemiah 12:27-47. Describe the celebration in your own words.

7. Read Nehemiah 10:28-39. Before the celebration in chapter 10, the people made some covenant agreements with God. What are the major elements of the agreement?

8. Read Nehemiah 13:1-31. These events occurred ten years later. What were some of the ways in which the people fell back into disobedience?

9. What did Nehemiah do about these situations?

***Think About It:***

Nehemiah's actions were extreme. Chuck Swindoll offers the following comments on what he calls "taking problems by the throat." Nehemiah faced the wrong head-on. He dealt with the wrong severely. Nehemiah worked toward a permanent correction and always followed up with prayer...The final scene in Nehemiah's book portrays him on his knees asking God for grace. He fought hard for the right, but he had kept his heart soft before the Lord. What a magnificent model of leadership. He was a man of honesty, conviction and devotion.

—Chuck Swindoll, Hand Me Another Brick, p. 179

Nehemiah was a leader of a great many people. Yet, God has given each of us people whose lives are intertwined with ours as well. Some of those people (younger, older, or the same age) follow us.

10. ***Your Life's Journey:*** Think about the ones who are following you. What kind of a leader do you think you are to them? Specifically, as we are examining dealing with sin, how do you normally react to wrong in the lives of those who follow you, or those people whose lives are closely linked to your own?

11. ***Your Life's Journey:*** What in Nehemiah's life encourages you to persevere?



## Conclusion: “Finishing Well”

This lesson is a summary of what we learned throughout this whole study. You will be asked to review your lessons from each section. This should involve a time of *reflection* as well as *evaluation*.

### Day One Study

Read Hebrews 12:1-3. This has been our key passage for the study. Review the lesson titled “What Is Perseverance?” Skim through the questions and your answers as well as the boxes.

1. What does it mean to run the race of life with PERSEVERANCE?
2. What does the phrase "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" have to do with how we "run?"
3. How does this benefit us?

### ***Joseph: A Man Of Faith***

4. Review the 3 lessons from the life of **Joseph**.
  - What one thing from **Joseph's** life would you like to remember?
  - Or, what is the most encouraging thing about living a life of faith that you have learned from studying **Joseph's** life?

***David: The Man After God's Own Heart***

5. Review the 3 lessons from the life of **David**.
- What one thing from **David's** life would you like to remember?
  
  - Or, what is the most encouraging thing about living a life of faith that you have learned from studying **David's** life?

Day Two Study

***Elijah: God's Humble Prophet***

6. Review the 3 lessons from the life of **Elijah**.
- What one thing from **Elijah's** life would you like to remember?
  
  - Or, what is the most encouraging thing about living a life of faith that you have learned from studying **Elijah's** life?

***Nehemiah: An Awesome Leader***

7. Review the 2 lessons from the life of ***Nehemiah***.

- What one thing from ***Nehemiah's*** life would you like to remember?
  
- Or, what is the most encouraging thing about living a life of faith that you have learned from studying ***Nehemiah's*** life?

May God continually bless you as you run with PERSEVERANCE the race set before us.

***Think About It:*** We have approached the Christian life as a subject to be learned rather than as a life to be lived. You can't grow in grace in a classroom, through a seminar, or during a "quiet time," as good as those things may be. As a matter of fact, you cannot grow in grace through reading a book...You can only grow in grace through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who teaches you truth from His Word, which you then take out into the rough-and-tumble of real life in the real world. The "curriculum" cannot be planned or anticipated. Through the sovereignty of a loving God, the pathway we will tread in this fallen world will be as unique as each one of us...Whatever the situations in your life may be, that is where you will have to grow in grace...in spite of our personal failures and sins. How? As we focus on what God is doing in the midst of what we are doing (Hebrews 12:1,2).

—Bob George, Growing in Grace, p. 13-15



## Clear and Present Danger

(Introduction Lesson)

By Brenda Baker

We live in a world of crisis, a world in constant turmoil. For some reason when we become Christians we get it into our minds, or someone has told us, that everything will be fine. No troubles.

*Proverbs 20:24 says, "A man's steps are ordained (directed) by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?"* Our steps are ordained. He knows us and what is going to happen and how He is going to affect our lives because of it. It's a clear and present danger. It's clear that we will face crisis. We live in a world of "crisis". The truth is we are either coming out of a crisis, in the middle of one, or as Texans say, "Fixin' to get into one."

There are many types of crises. Some are by our own choice; some are out of our control. Some are short term (like a storm) but may have long term consequences; others are long term, marathon in length. The devil's purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy us (John 10:10). Steal joy, kill hope and destroy faith. The true danger is that we will miss the gifts God gives us in the midst of crisis.

### God's Gifts In Crisis

#### Gift #1: INSPECT—Reveal What Is Within; Build Character

What happens when we are squeezed? Placed in boiling water? What comes out when someone cuts you off on the interstate? You cut yourself making supper? Your child spills his milk for the third time? Let me introduce a fine example of a character in hot water: David the Divine and the first Biblical Bathing Beauty, Bathsheba.

In this story, David, called a man after God's own heart, has become restless and is wandering the palace—completely bored as he is looking over the breadth of his kingdom. He sees "Bath"sheba (aptly named) bathing, naked, without her attendants on the roof of her home. And, like a king used to getting what he wants, he sends for her. Here is what he knows: 1) who she is and that her husband is off fighting in battle, 2) she is naked, and 3) he wants her. He sleeps with her and sends her home. She sends word to him later that she is pregnant (here is where the water begins to boil). First he tries to bring her husband home to sleep with her, even getting him drunk. But Bathsheba's husband was too loyal and sleeps on the front porch. So, David resorts to sending him back into battle—on the front lines to be killed. Talk about long-term consequences.

James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it pure joy, my friends, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

God wanted David to become a man of dependence and truth. God used this crisis in David's life to expose his sin and to bring him to repentance, to build his character.

#### Gift #2: DIRECT—Accomplish His Purpose

Next, I would like to introduce the character, I call him, Nehemiah Not a Crier. This guy made quite a career choice, the ultimate taste-tester (officially called "a cupbearer"). He

tasted the king's food first to make sure it was not poisoned. He also was in charge of meal planning and development, knowing the king's likes and dislikes in regards to food preparation, a waiter of sorts (wow, talk about some good tips). God called him for a specific purpose, to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. He received a leave of absence with pay, special financing, and letters of recommendation. He was in great personal danger with many enemies. He was in great emotional danger facing jeers and taunting. He was alone at times in his confidence as his peers faced doubt and disbelief. But, through all that, he was focused on God's sole purpose of accomplishing the rebuilding of the wall in record time. Romans 8:28 says,

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose."

Nehemiah knew who was directing him and his focus was on God.

### **Gift #3: PERFECT—Demonstrate His Power**

Elijah is the next guy I would like to introduce. I like to call him the E-man with the G-force. He challenged the people and Baal's 450 prophets to call upon Baal to prove who was greater in the Greatest World Wrestling Federation match of the century—God or Baal. Elijah was so bold as to taunt, jeer, and yahoo his enemies. Yet, the prophets of Baal prayed, shouted, slashed themselves for the entire day with no response.

Elijah then said to the people, "Come here to me," and he repaired the altar of the Lord. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood...Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench around it. At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me so these people will know that you O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." (1 Kings 18:30-38)

Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. WOW, that's some power!

### **Gift #4: CORRECT—Change Our Direction**

Don't get discouraged if your plan is not His plan. He may want you to accomplish something you have never dreamed of before.

A great example of changing direction is found in the story of Joseph. I like to call him a Dude with an Attitude. He wore his Sunday best every day of the week and enjoyed his dad's favoritism. He was also a dreamer without diplomacy. He told his jealous brothers he dreamed they would bow down to him some day. So, they sold him into slavery (actually saving his life) and thought that would be the end. Joseph may have thought it was the end, too, from privilege to poverty. But God eventually made him a wise king who was able to save the lives of his family from famine.

### **What Can We Do to Persevere?**

- *Definition of Perseverance:* Holding to a course of action, belief, or purpose without giving way; steadfastness; persistence, tenacity. (Active)

- *Definition of Endurance:* State or capability of lasting; continuance. Continuing under pain or hardship without being overcome. (Passive)

First let me suggest that if you are in a time of life that is without crisis, now is the time to bulk up. Before a long race or big game, athletes are told to bulk up so that they will have energy to sustain them to the finish. Bulk up in the knowledge of and your relationship with God so that you will finish well.

### **Depend on the Dependable**

Does God know about crisis? The whole Bible is filled with people in crisis, situations that seem impossible from which to escape. Yet God is faithful in every situation. Does God know about crisis? Our salvation came in the form of crisis. Jesus Christ, God's only son, died a most gruesome death on a cross, and then rose from the dead so that we could have a relationship with the Father. Depend on God. Proverbs 3:5-6 says,

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

### **Emphasize the Essentials**

Don't quit church, quit Bible studies, or quit fellowshiping with other Christians. The main thing is to "make the main thing the main thing"— even through shame and pain. Make God your "main thing" and let the circumstances sail by.

1 Peter 5:10 says, "And the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while, will He Himself restore you and make you strong and steadfast."

Make God your "main thing" and pray, pray, pray.

Romans 8:26 says, "The spirit helps us in our weakness, we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words can not express."

### **Rally Around Replenishers; Avoid the Deplishers**

- *Definition of a Replenisher:* someone who makes you feel good; someone who loves the Lord and puts a skip in your step. Accept replenishers' encouragement and support, and allow God to bless you and them. Let them do their job.
- *Definition of a Deplisher:* someone who uses you up.

### **Pursue the Positive**

Seek the silver lining. Allow God to use it for your encouragement.

### **Lean on Laughter**

Keep a sense of humor, which lightens the load

## **Conclusion**

It is a clear and present danger. Thunderstorms are in your forecast. Have you prepared for the storm? The clouds are building, the thunder is rumbling, and lightning is striking. Which gift will you look for? Inspect, Direct, Perfect, Correct? Are you going to grit your teeth? Or, look for the cloud with the silver lining? The storms are coming are you depending on the SON to shine through them?

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

—HEBREWS 12:1-3

## Persevere in the Pit

(Joseph Lesson One)

*By Jody Vise*

Paul writes in II Corinthians 1:3-4, "Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." The Bible tells us plainly that in this life we will suffer tribulation; John 16: 33 states " I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

I have known a dear Christian woman, Becky Nelson, for about 10 years. Several years ago her young son Steven who was very bright and athletically gifted faced a major trial. He had been in a hurry to rush over to a friend's house in his neighborhood after school and quickly jumped on his bike without a safety helmet and took off to see his friend. He was going as fast as his legs could pump and instead of stopping at the stop sign to check for on coming traffic, he simply turned on to the adjoining street. Coming up that street was a car and before the driver could ever react, Steven slammed into the car with his bike. The driver of course stopped immediately, but the impact sent Steven flying into the air and he landed on his head on the cement curb. He was airlifted to Parkland trauma center and a very long ordeal of trying to save his life began for he and his family.

As I talked to my friend Becky in the many weeks that followed, she naturally went through many emotions, but one thing she never got caught up in was why did it happen. The answer seemed quite clear that it was the natural consequence of a little boy who had his mind on playing with his friend instead of following the safety guidelines he had been taught. Becky focused on the present doing everything that she could to help her son get well and minister to those she came in contact with during the entire ordeal. In the waiting room were many families who did not know God and had nowhere to go to find comfort for the pain and worry they were going through as their loved one struggled to live. Becky did try to extend that hand of comfort. Did she ever have days where she and her husband just cried? Absolutely. Were there days of concern of how they would be able to cope with whatever medical difficulties Steven would be faced or how to pay the bills that were mounting up? Definitely. Each time those normal emotions flared up, as it would with any person in such a traumatic situation, she and her family would turn to God for comfort and direction. It took several years to heal him physically as well as emotionally from the severe trauma. He was able later to participate in a statewide campaign for children to wear safety helmets and who knows how many lives were saved because of the push for children to wear those helmets. Becky grew from a Sunday school teacher to being a full-time church worker at a local church. Could anyone have seen the direction their lives would take after such an accident? I don't think so. But, they and others can clearly see that God was with them through it all.

So today as we look at the life of Joseph our focus should be on how he handled the situation once it was thrust upon him. Was he looking for God's direction as he faced each ordeal? Did he spend time blaming God for what his sinful brothers did to him and dwell in depression? Did he seek God to help him endure and continue to live life? All through the Bible there are stories of people who have suffered greatly. Many times it is due to their

own choices such as when the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, the prodigal son who squandered his fortune and King Saul as well as King David whose sinful nature caused them great grief. Job is a different situation because the devil himself caused the suffering and there are other situations where an innocent person has suffered; the most important of all was Jesus Christ who suffered and died though he was completely innocent of any wrong doing. To the very end Jesus stayed in God's will and though he died, the result of his death was his resurrection and the salvation of the world.

In Romans 8:28 it states, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." Sometimes we want that verse to mean that everything will be all right. God will fix it so everything turns out rosy for our lives. The true meaning of that verse I think is illustrated in the story of Joseph. Many wrongful things were done to that young man that could never be restored. He was forced to leave his home losing a life with a loving father. His youth was taken from him as he was put in a position all alone to fend for himself. His inheritance as the son of a wealthy landowner was taken. He was forced to be a servant and work for another with no hope of getting out from his slavery. He was falsely accused of a serious crime for which the truth never came out, and he spent years in a prison probably with brutal conditions. He was seventeen when his ordeal began. Genesis 41: 46 states that Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of the Pharaoh. This lets us know that for 13 years Joseph suffered and could only find comfort and strength in the Lord. We also know it was not for many years later, once the famine had taken hold of all the land, that the whole painful situation with his family was resolved and he was restored back to fellowship with his father and brothers.

It is often so easy to read a Bible story with the same mindset that we had as children; that these were fun exciting stories of a long ago time. I always loved to help the teacher put the paper cut out figures of the characters on the flannel board. That presentation, of course, was kept simple so we could get the picture and the main point that God loves us. The reality is that all the people in the Bible were real people with emotions and feelings just as we have today. It seems so simple to say Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, but later on he became an important person and he knew it all along that God would work things out. Do you really think in the thirteen years that he suffered that he never had a down day, felt lonely or wanted to give in to utter despair at all the rotten things that had been done to him?

I'm sure he experienced all these things and more, but most important of all was how he chose to deal with those emotions and how they affected his daily life. He chose to maintain a close relationship with the Lord and it was this bond of feeling God's presence that helped him keep moving through adversity. In Genesis 39:2-3, we read that no matter how he felt personally he chose to be a faithful servant to Potiphar, he worked hard, and had a good relationship with the Lord. By living in faith he was then able to be used by God when the time was right to be put in the position of overseer of the food supply. So, when God's chosen people needed food, he was the one who could give approval. Joseph could only see in hindsight that everything that had happened to him had led to his ability to be used by God to perform an amazing task to save the eventual tribes of Israel. His initial dreams as a boy to be ruler over his brothers was not a clear map of how his life was going to turn out. He had to walk by faith and lean on the Lord in order to persevere.

Often we do not see the whole picture of why we went through an experience until a resolution comes. Looking back at times in our lives can be helpful in growing our

relationship with God because we can step back and see how he helped, guided and comforted us through it all. However, until we can stand before the Lord and ask why, we may never know the reason for some things happening. I made a very big mistake talking to a young woman one time who had lost a premature baby the previous year. My own sister had a premature baby who weighed less than 2 pounds at birth. His survival was a struggle, and he was in the hospital four months, enduring many surgeries before they were able to bring him home. In that time, I saw my sister come back to the faith she had been raised to hold dear and walk closely with the Lord which she continues to this day. This situation showed my sister how far she had strayed from her faith and how important a personal relationship with God was for her.

Why Zachary, my nephew, came early we never quite found out; though they suspected some of the chemicals at the lab where she worked as a lab tech may have caused the early labor. In hindsight, I felt I could see God working through her life and bringing her back to her walk with him. My statement to this young woman that the Lord must have a plan for her life was based on this experience. Sadly, my comment hurt her deeply as she took it to mean that God had taken her baby to teach her a lesson. Had I done this study my comment would have been completely different. As gently as possible I would have told her how sorry I was for her loss and that I prayed that the Lord could give her comfort and strength to persevere through this difficult time in her life.

Christians need to remember that we live in a sinful fallen world. We often hurt one another, causing harm to ourselves by making poor choices how to live. We have polluted our environment which also causes us difficulty, and of course the devil is prowling around trying to cause as much trouble as he can as well. God is never our enemy. He only wants our good and wants to be there for us when we go through trials and tribulations. We will pay the consequences for wrong choices, but we do not have to face those things alone. And, we have assurance of our salvation in Christ Jesus who forgives our sins. Others who wrong us also face judgment, but we can be free of bitterness and anger by giving it all to our heavenly father who will judge everyone. When things in life happen that have no rhyme or reason, we will always have the word of our heavenly father who says that no matter what happens to us on this earth, we will live a life of eternal joy and praise in his presence in heaven. This fact can comfort us while we wait for that day.

In the meantime, we can persevere in the pit because we know God is with us!

## **Persevere in Wanting To Do What Is Right**

(Joseph Lesson Two)

*By Robin Colley*

Romans 15:4 states, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scripture we might have hope." As we have been studying the life of Joseph we ask ourselves was Joseph prepared to persevere? What had he learned that may have prepared him so that no matter what his circumstances he would persevere in doing right? We can only surmise...He surely must have "caught" from the life of his father that God is the One True God and that it is best to obey him. And, that God would answer you in your day of distress and that He will be with you wherever you go. He had heard these words and seen these actions in the life of his father. (This would be an incredible gift to any child!)

It has been said, "Faith that has not been tested cannot be trusted." How would you know that you possessed faith if it were never tested? Joseph was given the opportunity to test his faith. We know it was all he had left. Everything else that he may have depended on had been striped away. Yet, he knew that God was with him in his distress and that he could call on Him and He would answer. At this point in his life Joseph was left with two choices: 1) go through the situation on his own or 2) by faith go through it with God. God always responds to people of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. What did he choose? What would you choose? That is always our choice because in this life there is always going to be some trouble. Jesus said, in this world, you will have trouble.

So how do we persevere in doing what is right when things in our life go terribly wrong? We choose. It is a choice that we make everyday. Everyday I have to choose between that which I want to do and that which I should do. Doing what I want and doing what I should...doing what I know to be right. This is what the Bible calls the struggle between the flesh, our own human nature and the spirit, God's life in us. We naturally do what we want to do...we don't even have to think about it. Of course, that is part of the problem, we don't think; unless we have the word of God revealing to us the truth.

Fortunately, we do, the Bible tells us what we should do, it also tells us what we should not do, and thankfully, what to do if we didn't do what we should have done. Today's lesson on the life of Joseph provides us with two clear examples of what NOT to do as well as what TO DO.

First, we'll look at an example of what not to do. Who might our example be? Potiphar's wife, of course! Joseph frequently found himself forced into the midst of difficult situations: a pit, as a peon, a pawn in the midst of a powerful marriage, a prisoner and eventually Prime Minister. As a servant to Potiphar, he was forced into the middle of a powerful marriage. And marriage is difficult. Anyone who is married will face difficulties. And we have to be prepared if we want to persevere when it gets difficult. Day after day Potiphar's wife is observing the competent and capable young Joseph who is handsome in form and appearance. He is taking care of everything! He is running the entire household. Her husband concerns himself with nothing, except with what he will eat. (Do you think this may have been part of the problem?!) And she sets her eyes on Joseph and tries to seduce him.

Joseph is forced into a very awkward situation. This powerful woman could make his life very difficult. In fact, she had been making life pretty tough already; now it could become worse. Even though Egyptian society was typically male-dominated, women enjoyed far more rights and privileges than those in other lands. They had almost as many rights as men. They could own property, buy and sell goods and make a will. Peasant girls usually married around the age of 12, and girls of more affluent families married a few years older. Parents often arranged marriage because of the young marrying age, although some young people could chose their own spouse.

Ordinarily a man had only one wife. Often, wealthy men had concubines, and the king always had several wives and concubines. Egyptian carved reliefs depict the important role of housewives, and husbands were aware that it took two to make a marriage. Divorce was an option for a woman, although it was not common. Instead if a husband treated his wife badly, she would go to her family for help. The wife's family would try to persuade her spouse to change his behavior. And if that failed, she could opt for divorce, and she was given the children and freed to remarry. On the other hand, adultery could cost her life, even burning at the stake. So why would a woman of Mrs. Potiphar's stature risk doing something she shouldn't do?

Let's consider some options. Human nature isn't much different today. First, we don't know how old she was, or how old Potiphar was. There may have been several years between their ages. Maybe Joseph was a little closer to her age. Next, we don't know if Potiphar had any other wives or concubines. He was obviously a wealthy man. He held a high governmental position and owned slaves. (Egyptians had a moral code that usually prevented them from mistreating their slaves; it wouldn't be good business practice to do so. That's why some of you may have read that there was no slavery in Egypt.)

Maybe she was just spoiled and used to getting whatever she wanted. Chuck Swindoll in his book on Joseph suggest that Potiphar may have been aware of his wife's shenanigans because as captain of the bodyguard he could have had Joseph executed rather than have him put in jail. Whatever her rationale, the underlying reason was that she was making the choice to do what she wanted to do rather than do what she should.

She was obviously quite enamored with Joseph. He appealed to her. She was attracted to his countenance, his competence, his commitment and his contentment. Surely, she knew God was with him; but instead of seeking his God, she seduced him. She willingly compromised her marriage to satisfy her own desires. We have to realize how depraved we can become in our own hearts when we seek to only satisfy our own desires. We have to be realistic about the pressure that we are up against and prepare to persevere. Long-term marriages require work to keep them together. There are guardrails that can be put up to prevent straying.

Don't **flirt with fantasy**. Your reality will never measure up to your fantasy. Because your fantasy only envisions what is perfect for you. (Not for everyone.) Isn't it interesting that we question our reality rather than our fantasy? We get duped into thinking that we deserve exactly what our fantasy depicts. We waste time and energy imagining the "what if's" instead of creating happiness and fulfillment in the real world with a real spouse and real children and a real God who promises to be with us wherever we go and who will answer us in our day of distress. Instead of challenging our fantasies, we look at our marriages and think, "Why doesn't my life read like the pages of a romance novel?... Or

look as passionate as that in a soap opera?" If we continue to flirt with fantasy, our lives may eventually look like a soap opera or read like a romance novel. Reality and fantasy are like oil and water. They intermingle for only seconds. Enjoy it when they unite! But understand it's the exception, not the rule.

Don't be **cohorts with compromise**. When we've been hurt in our relationships, and we will (we are imperfect people, married to imperfect people) the first thing we may want to do is inflict pain in return. Then, we may be tempted to do something that we know we shouldn't do. And we are never given the right to do wrong. Internet affairs are becoming a big problem for lonely wives. The reality is that when we compromise what we know to be right, we end up inflicting more pain on ourselves than we are already experiencing.

There are other ways that we use to attempt to get needs met that prevent us from pursuing a fulfilling relationship with our spouses. In Dennis Rainey's book, Staying Close, he states that some women are having an "affair" with their credit cards. They have let **plastic become their playmate** instead of their husband and run to them to have their needs met. But the need is only soothed temporarily until it is exposed again. When we search for fulfillment in things, we always come up empty. Ecclesiastes says, "*Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied.*" Our ultimate fulfillment comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ and the people He has put into our lives. Rainey goes on to say that an affair is an attempt to escape reality.

And some women have run to the **companion of career**. Rainey also says both men and women are having affairs with their careers, and the effect on marriage is undeniable. Many people are running to their jobs to escape the reality of dealing with the difficulties in relationships. Recently on a news program, eight women were interviewed who confessed to going to work to escape the difficulty of their families. How many people use work as a refuge from home? This can lead to a potentially explosive situation when you have a need that you feel that your spouse isn't meeting. *You may attempt to get that "legitimate" need met in an "illegitimate" way.* When people of the opposite sex work long hours side by side on the same project, focus on the same goal, and generate enthusiasm about a subject in which your spouse has no interest, this can create a level of camaraderie very appealing and can ignite a flickering flame. You see each other at your best. You don't do any of those disgusting things that you save for the people that love you the most. And, you begin to get a false picture of reality that can propel you into a fantasy.

Then there's the **siren of seduction**. Be careful how you present yourself, what you wear, how you interact with other men. What we often don't understand is how that flickering flame gets ignited, when we didn't intend to do so. In their book, *Every Women's Desire*, Stephen Auterburn and Fred Stoker state that women who ignite the flickering flame are as "innocent" as female joggers, receptionists and secretaries wearing tight fitting or revealing clothes as well as attractive women coming to church dressed in provocative fashions (especially those standing on stage). Something to think about! I've recently tossed out a couple of things that I felt brought too much attention! (Maybe in private, but no longer in public!) You have to be prepared to persevere because this is the kind of pit with which we have to deal. There's a cesspool located just around the corner for whoever is willing to take the plunge!

Our best defense is an offense. The Bible doesn't just tell us what not to do, but also what to do. It provides principles and guidelines that protect us, as well as giving us realistic

understanding of our own human nature. We need to prepare to persevere, plan to persist, stay plugged into our power source, and pursue a fulfilling relationship in our own marriages.

Back to Joseph, he is a shining example of one who, by faith, trusted God and did what he should. And it cost him big! But, only for a season. One can never out do God. His reward is always more satisfying than how we might try to satisfy ourselves. How did Joseph face the problem? First, he tried to prevent the problem. It seems that he tried to not be alone in the house with "Satan's Siren" because the text specifically mentions that the situation occurred at a time when there was no one else in the house. It's as if she sent everyone out so that she would be alone with Joseph. It appears to be an obvious set up. But Joseph didn't take the bait. He just ran. He immediately fled the situation; no negotiation, no flirtation, just evacuation! He didn't entertain the idea of immorality even for a moment.

It is God's desire that His people be morally pure (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8). We are to flee sexual immorality. We are not to flee sex! Sex is a marvelous and joyous experience when kept within God's boundaries. Christians hold to a higher view of sex than the world does. "Religious" women statistically express a greater level of satisfaction in the area of sexual intimacy because we possess God's view of sex. Dr. Richard Land says that Americans have a pornographic view of sex. Our society has bought into the lie that sex is just a means of entertainment rather than the soul-bonding gift that God created for married, faithful and committed partners.

Some of you have also bought into the lie and have let yourselves get too close to the fire, but God is always there for us. He'll either give us a red light and tell us to stop or a green light and say go, get out of there! God never leaves us stuck; He always provides a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). God is never surprised by what we do. He knows us better than anyone. Prepare for those potential pitfalls. Realize that God often uses a husband and a wife to reveal those areas of our lives that He needs to work on. Living together exposes those parts, and that often makes marriage difficult. But, if we will endure the refining process we will eventually enjoy the end result. The problem is that too many couples give up too early and then end up in another pit of problems.

God only wants the best for us. He never says I can't believe that you did that. He knew before we did. He says, "I'm sorry you went that way, I have a better way. I am here for you, all you have to do is call and I will be there for you. I will never leave you." Psalm 103 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits, Who pardons all you iniquities, Who heals all you diseases, who redeems you life from the **pit.**" God's forgiveness covers everything: our perversions, our twisting the truth, our rebellion, our crossing the line and our missing the mark of His standard of perfection.

Knowing the One True God, persisting in an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ will result in our obedience, in our doing what is right. And our doing what we want will become consistent with doing what we should.

## The Three “R’s” of God’s Waiting Room

(David Lesson One)

*By Lori Schweers*

Most of us hate to wait. We would rather spend our time doing anything other than waiting, yet we spend much of our day waiting. We wait at the grocery store, in traffic, for repairmen and in the doctor’s waiting room. It’s not just the mundane things we wait for; it’s the big things in life we wait for, too. We wait for periods of unemployment to end, for babies and grandbabies to be born, medical test results, reconciliation of relationships and for loved ones to turn to Christ. Waiting is a common experience in our lives. I think we tend to dislike it so much because it implies that we are not in control.

We’ve already looked at Joseph, who waited 13 years in prison – unfairly treated and forgotten for years. What about some other examples: For the next 3 weeks we’ll look at David who waited 13 years to be made king after his anointing by Samuel and as we saw in the lesson spent most of those years running from crazy Saul. Who else?

- Noah was told to build an ark. He waited 120 years for rain – something he had never seen before.
- Abraham was promised an heir at the age of 75. He waited 25 childless years for Isaac to be born.
- Job had sores from his head to his feet, lost his family and waited an undetermined time for relief.
- Moses was 80 when he led the exodus from Egypt – having just spent 40 years in the desert!
- Paul spent 3 years in Arabia before he started his ministry.
- Jesus was 30 before he started his ministry.
- The church has been waiting just under 2000 years for the return of Christ who is recorded in Revelation 22:20 as saying, “Behold I’m coming quickly!”

Here’s the observation: waiting (especially in the Bible) is the rule rather than the exception. So we had better learn how to deal with it and still grow as we go through it.

It’s interesting to note that some key words from our study, “perseverance” and “endurance” by definition in the Greek give the idea of a patient, steadfast waiting for something. I was shocked to see “wait” as part of that definition. To me it’s always had a negative, passive connotation like waiting in traffic or in line at the grocery store. According to the dictionary to wait means: to remain in a place so as to be ready for something or because something is expected. Even in Hebrew, the word “wait” is closely aligned with the word “hope.” By definition, waiting implies readiness, something you expect and hope. It doesn’t imply inactivity, passivity or stagnation.

When we are in a position of waiting on God, one of the first questions we ask is, “God, what are trying to tell me?” or “God, what are you doing?” I think I can answer that: He wants YOU to have the three "R's": a RELATIONSHIP with Him by seeking Him first and a

full RELIANCE on Him through your obedience and trust plus a decision to REST in Him while He works in our life.

### **Relationship, Reliance, and Rest**

Before David, the people of Israel demanded a king so that they could be ruled like the other nations. They refused to wait in RELIANCE on God in a relationship and demanded a king! He was a beautiful specimen of a man; he was handsome and stood head and shoulders over all the rest. The problem was that Saul was impressed with himself as well as jealous, self-seeking and prone to rage. Saul had a very impatient spirit that didn't tolerate waiting.

In 1 Samuel 13, the people of Israel are up against one of their archenemies, the Philistines. There were so many that they were like the sand on the seashore in abundance. The men of Israel hid in caves and some even ran away. The battle couldn't commence until a burnt offering was made. In order to do this, they needed Samuel, the priest, to make the sacrifice. Saul was deliberately disobedient (vs. 8-14) which grew from his fear and concern for public opinion. Verse 12 is the icing on the cake. "I was forced..." he says (in effect), "They made me do it." Saul was falsely pious. He was making an offering just for the sake of how it would look, not because he loved God and wanted to obey His law. In Hosea 6:6, God says, "I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice." The word in Hebrew for "loyalty" is a word that connotes a love relationship. In Isaiah 29:13 God speaks against those who give lip service to Him – that is their reverence for Him consists of tradition learned by rote. Is it any wonder in verse 14 Samuel tells Saul that *"the Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart?"* Saul's desires were not God's desires. He practiced religion by rote and not a RELATIONSHIP by faith. David had that RELATIONSHIP, a loving RELATIONSHIP, with God.

After David was anointed, he goes right back out to tend the sheep. He doesn't run on up to Jerusalem, throw Saul out of the palace and change his business cards to "King over all"! He waits for God to work out the details to get him there. David was able to REST in the mundane tasks of God's waiting room because of his RELATIONSHIP and RELIANCE on the Good Shepherd. Even after Saul is killed in chapter 31, we still see David waiting on God. 2 Samuel 2 begins with David inquiring of God about what to do. David doesn't assume that since Saul is dead, he is to automatically become king. David prays and then obediently goes where God tells him. David's heart beat in time to God's timing and plans for him. Why? He had a RELATIONSHIP with and was RELIANT on God; he loved God and chose to wait for His timing and REST in the goodness and sovereignty of God.

### **Why do we have to wait?**

We are a fast-food society! We ask, "Can't God just do this NOW?" Or "God give me patience, but give it to me NOW!" There are many reasons why we wait. Let's look at them:

- God wants our focus to be on HIM. Remember that RELATIONSHIP and RELIANCE we talked about with David and Saul? David's focus was on God; Saul's focus was on himself. Psalm 62:1&5 says, "My soul waits in silence for God only." Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord." Go to God first; wait for Him.
- Only God knows the perfect timing of His plans. You've heard, God may not be early, but He's never late. That's so true. Remember Saul's sacrifice moments before Samuel walks up. We have preconceived notions of how things are going to be and when it doesn't happen that way, we find our faith shaken to the core. Think

back to the story of Mary, Martha and their brother, Lazarus who has just died (John 11). These were Jesus' closest and dearest friends during His earthly ministry (verse 5, Jesus loved them). Jesus arrives at precisely the moment necessary to fulfill God's purposes. God's timetable is different than ours, so don't despair when He appears to be 4 days late.

- God wants us to stretch our faith. Rom. 8:24-25 asks, "Who hopes for what he already sees?" Hebrews 11:1 tells us that "faith is an assurance of things hoped for." Barbara Johnson says, "Faith is putting all your eggs in God's basket and counting your blessings before they've hatched."
- Only God knows the circumstances, particularly if others are involved in the process. Maybe we need to wait on someone else to be ready to move along in God's timeline.
- He wants us to grow and mature. God is ultimately concerned about us becoming like Christ. (Romans 8:29) Noted author, C.S. Lewis says, "*If you think of this world as a place intended simply for our happiness, you find it quite intolerable: think of it as a place of training and correction and it's not so bad.*"
- Because He's God and we're not. We don't view life from His perspective. Psalm 147:11 says the Lord favors those who fear Him. Now, that doesn't mean you're scared of Him, it just means you have a reverence and awe for Him as the creator of the universe and Lord of all.

Expect your faith to be tested while you wait. You will be tempted to doubt God's love and goodness, His power and wisdom. There will always be the temptation to run, to take matters in your own hands or even to take the easy way out which may be unethical or immoral. Saul decides to take matters in his own hands and deliberately disobeys God's Law by making the sacrifice because he assesses the situation by his own lack of understanding. You must be prepared beforehand for those times of being in God's waiting room through a strong RELATIONSHIP with Him.

It's a blessing to know that during those waiting room times of our lives, we don't wait alone. We have many resources to build us up and prevent discouragement. We have the gift of godly friends to encourage us in our times of waiting. Look for example at David and his dear friend Jonathan. When David was in the wilderness Jonathan came and encouraged him in the Lord (1 Samuel 23:16). In 1 Samuel 22:1 we also see David's family coming to him in the cave to be with him. One of the best things we can do for someone in God's waiting room is to encourage them (1 Thess. 5:11).

We have God's words of encouragement in the Scripture. Romans 15:4 says, "*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*" We have the power, guidance and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26 tells us that even when we don't know how to pray, the Holy Spirit does and will intercede on our behalf. We have a means to tell God what's on our hearts through prayer to Him. In the Psalms David continually pours his heart out to God when he was waiting or troubled.

Notice, that each of these implies a given—a RELATIONSHIP with God. The only way you are going to have a RELATIONSHIP with anyone is to spend time with him. God is not a 911 number, though many of us use Him that way. He is eagerly waiting for you to tell

Him everything on your heart so He can act. Isaiah 64:4 says, *“For from old they have not heard nor perceived by ear, neither has the eye seen a God beside you, who acts on behalf of the one who waits for Him.”* God wants to be actively involved in your life if you let Him. David says in Psalm 40:1, *“I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined to me and heard my cry.”* The great God of the universe will listen to you, hear you and act on your behalf! David says He is near to the brokenhearted and puts all your tears in a bottle. He is very aware of everything going on in your life. God cares for you in an intimate and tender way when you need it.

What can you do while you wait? The temptation is to fold your hands and hold your breath. I can't tell you what to do, but God can. Let's look together at His advice in Jeremiah 29:3-11. Here we find a letter from Jeremiah to 3000 Jews taken into captivity in Babylon. Essentially, God says to carry-on. Live your life even in the waiting of captivity. He even tells them to pray for the captors! Notice in verse 10, they are not here for just a day or 2—God says they will be there for 70 years. But read on in verse 11, I have a plan to give you a future and a hope. God urges them on to a life of faith through expectant waiting.

The world we live in is difficult. We are faced with times of waiting when we have what appear to be no immediate answers and just days of breathing and waiting. Paul says, *“Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now (1 Cor. 13:12).”* One day, we'll see the whole picture from God's perspective. Until that day, we are to persevere through eager, hopeful waiting. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Paul gives us some great instructions for what to do while we wait. Rejoice always (verse 16). Rejoice means to return to the source of your joy, which for the believer is our RELATIONSHIP with God. Pray without ceasing (verse 17). Again, RELATIONSHIP with God. In everything give thanks (verse 18). You can always thank God for who He is and what He is working out in your life.

Are you in God's waiting room? Remember the three “R's”: 1) Seek Him in a deeper RELATIONSHIP. 2) RELY on His trustworthiness and sovereignty and finally, 3) REST in His promises of hope. Romans 15:13 *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

## The Place of Grace

(David Lesson Three)

By Lori Schweers

The Scriptures remind us multiple times that David was a man after God's own heart (Psalm 78:70-72, Acts 13:22). David the shepherd boy, the skilled musician, the valiant giant slayer, the successful military leader is given the throne over all of Israel. He takes a nation that has bottomed out spiritually, militarily and economically and binds it back together. He expands its boundaries from 6000-60,000 square miles. He establishes trade routes with the world. He builds up a mighty military force. He centralizes worship in Jerusalem. He is a national HERO. What a courageous, faithful man after God's own heart UNTIL you get to 2 Samuel 11.

We wonder in reading this about David, how can he be called a man after God's own heart when he commits adultery, kills Bathsheba's husband and covers up the whole mess for a year! Eugene Peterson, author of The Message and Leap Over a Wall says it best, *"The story of David isn't set before us as a moral model to copy. In the company of David we don't feel inadequate because we know we could never do it that well. In the company of David we find someone who does it as badly as, or worse than, we do, but who in the process doesn't quit, doesn't withdraw from God. David's isn't an ideal life, but an actual life. We read David to cultivate a sense of reality for a true life, an honest life, a God-aware and God-responsive life."*

The greatness of David is in his willingness to face his sin and to return wholeheartedly to God; it's that repentant and contrite or broken heart. Let's look again at Saul for a contrasting example. I think you'll see a striking difference between Saul's reaction to deliberate sin and what we see in 2 Samuel with David's reaction when confronted by Nathan.

Here's the scene: Samuel goes to Saul to tell him that God has sent him to strike the Amalekites and to destroy them. Here's what Saul chose to do instead. He destroyed everything EXCEPT he captures Agag, the king. He also spares the best sheep, oxen, fatlings and lambs. So Samuel comes out to meet Saul after the battle and Saul says, vs. 13, "I have carried out the command of the Lord." Really? Samuel is no dummy and he says, "So then what is this bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen that I hear?" Uh- oh! Saul's busted! He tries to explain his PARTIAL obedience away by deflecting blame on others who took some of the spoil and adds, "But, hey, I saved the BEST animals for sacrifice!"

Samuel tells Saul that God wants Saul's obedience not his sacrifice and likens his rebellion to the sin of witchcraft and idolatry because in effect whom has he made more important than God? HIMSELF. He did what was right in his own eyes. Proverbs 21:2-3 says, "every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts. To do righteousness and justice is desired by the Lord rather than sacrifice." In verse 24, it looks like Saul might be repentant, since he does acknowledge that he's sinned, but then he blames others for his poor decision.

Now compare this response to that of David when Nathan confronts David regarding his sin. David says, "I have sinned against the Lord (Psalm 51:16-17)." David realized what Saul never understood. God is interested in our **HEART** attitude. I don't hold David up as

the moral example. God's word is clear that what he did was EVIL and deplorable, but His word is also clear that because of David's repentant heart and God's abundant grace that David was cleansed and forgiven and was still a vessel God could use for His glory. He could persevere in his role as king and God could still use him.

There is no sin that is too big for God. God knows who we are without Him. Romans 5:6, 8, 10 say that we are helpless, ungodly, sinners and God's enemies as do Romans 3:10-18, 23. Pretty bad news, huh? Kind of hard to hear our faults, isn't it? But there is good news here: *"BUT God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)."* That's amazing grace. Unmerited favor. We don't deserve it, yet He freely provides.

Back to 2 Samuel 7. David is feeling blessed and thankful and decides to build God a beautiful house/temple to house the ark, which up to now has been kept in a tent. But God says (in verse 11), *"No, instead, I will make a house for you. Your house (vs. 16) and your kingdom shall endure before me forever – your throne shall be established forever."* God promises David His steadfast love as well as His fatherly discipline. We can see the fulfillment of God's promise to David when we look at the genealogy of Christ through Joseph in Matthew 1:1-17 (verse 6 refers to David) and the genealogy of Christ through Mary in Luke 3:23-38 (verse 31 refers to David in this line-up). So God fulfills His promise to David in both Mary and Joseph. God is faithful and keeps His promises!

Did God know that David was going to sin with Bathsheba just a few chapters later? Of course! Does God know we are going to sin later today? Tomorrow? Next year? Yes, yes, and yes! But, He demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. How can this possibly be? The only way it can be explained is by God's amazing grace. Let's look at a beautiful picture of grace in the life of David and another man with a difficult name—MEPHIBOSHETH.

### **David, Mephibosheth and Grace**

At the time of this story (3000 years ago), the family members of a previous king were generally exterminated once the new dynasty took control in order to prevent them from trying to come back into power. Therefore all family members of the prior dynasty had reason to live in fear once the new king took the throne. Once Saul and Jonathan, his son, were killed and David was made king, the living members of Saul's family fled for their lives. In 2 Sam. 4:4 we are told about Saul's grandson and Jonathan's son, who in a hasty escape, suffered permanent injuries and lived the rest of his life lame in both feet. His name was Mephibosheth. Technically, Mephibosheth was the presumptive heir to the throne as the last living relative of Saul.

In 2 Sam. 9, David and Israel are in a time of peace and prosperity. In verse 1 David asks, "who is left from the house of Saul that I may show kindness to?" Why would David ask that? In 1 Sam. 20:13-17 David and Jonathan make a vow that David won't kill Jonathan's family when he becomes king. David is merely making good on his promise. His move is not a political one. He's not seeking to be applauded by others. David is driven by the thought that he once was weak and in his weakness, good friend, Jonathan, helps him escape Saul.

David's use of kindness is like saying, "I want to demonstrate the same kind of GRACE (loyal love) that God has demonstrated to me." It's interesting to note that David does not ask if anyone is deserving or qualified for this grace. He offers it unconditionally. So his

servant, Ziba, steps up with a response, “Yea, I know of someone, but you won’t want him around – he’s crippled – he won’t fit in with us royal types.” David could have said, “Oh yea, never mind!” But he doesn’t. He responds, “Where is he? Get him here on the double!”

Mephibosheth is living in a place called Lo-Debar which means “barren land.” There are no crops, just wilderness and wasteland. Mephibosheth responds to David’s summons. Though he was frightened and sure he would die, the king had sent for him and he had to go. When he arrives, he falls on his face before David. He even calls himself a dead dog, a contemptible slur. Mephibosheth has been called, found and rescued, but he still needed assurance. But David offers beautiful words of comfort and assurance to Mephibosheth, “Do not fear.” Do you know what the most common command of Christ was? DO NOT FEAR. As a matter of fact, the command from heaven to not be afraid appears in every book of the Bible. David gives Mephibosheth an undeserved grace offering (verses 9-10). He basically makes him part of his household and 4 times says he would eat at the king’s table

### **Parallels to Us and Christ**

- Mephibosheth came to David as a helpless cripple. When we come to Christ at salvation we are crippled by sin. Romans 5:6
- Like David pursuing Mephibosheth, God is ardently pursuing us so He can extend to us His glorious grace. Luke 19:10
- Like poor Mephibosheth, we have nothing to offer God for His priceless gift of grace. We can only humbly accept that which we don’t deserve and could never deserve. Titus 3:5a
- God can bring us into a place of fellowship and honor. God can rescue us from our own personal “Lo-debar” of death and bring us to His house of grace. Colossians 1:21-22
- When Mephibosheth was mentioned, he was referred to as being lame. He carried the stigma of his handicap for 20 years. King David never refers to him this way. When God sees us as believers, He doesn’t mention our plight, pain or problem, He calls us His child. John 1:12
- Just as Mephibosheth was adopted as a son and made royalty and ate at the king’s table, we too are adopted as royal daughters with all the rights and privileges of royalty. Galatians 4:7
- Mephibosheth’s limp was a constant reminder of his imperfections and of David’s grace. Our imperfect state reminds us that where sin abounds, the grace of God super abounds. Romans 5:20b

Being a believer is not synonymous with becoming a model of perfection. It is not impossible for believers to sin, but it is stupid to do so. Romans 6:6-7 says that when Jesus died, he released us as slaves to sin. You are free. You have died to sin’s claim on your life. We were like prisoners who have been presented with an open door to freedom. Why would we choose to go back into the cell? Romans 6:17-18 says now we are slaves to goodness.

You’ve seen the bumper sticker, “Christians aren’t perfect—just forgiven.” That’s pretty good theology. When we trusted Christ as Savior our identity was changed—we are new

creatures in Him—but our sin nature still remains. We still have that natural propensity to sin. Galatians 5:17 says that there is a war between our flesh (our sin nature) and our Spirit so that we may not do the things we please. The Holy Spirit can empower us to obey God and walk in a newness of life, but He will never FORCE us to do it. That is a choice we make each day.

Galatians 5:16 says to “live by the Spirit.” That literally means to “by the Spirit keep on walking.” It implies a moment-by-moment contact. The tense of the verb conveys a continuous action that suggests the Christian life is a process not a one-time event. Everyday it takes perseverance to live by the Spirit and not walk by the flesh. You have to continually make that choice. No wonder Jesus says that apart from me you can do NOTHING (John 15:5b), but with Him we can do ALL things (Phil. 4:13).

Someone who sees grace as permission to sin, has missed grace entirely. Grace fosters an eagerness for good; it doesn’t spawn a desire for sin. Paul says in Romans 6:1-2, *“Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be!”* In effect, Paul says, “How can grace result in anything but gracious living?”

Can we out-sin God’s grace? Some of you may say, “You don’t understand, I have done \_\_\_\_\_.” Like Mephibosheth we have been called, found and rescued. Through faith in Jesus, Romans 5:2 tells us we have a place in God’s house of grace. Jesus has brought us to a place of high privilege – we have been ushered into the presence of royalty. There we find grace, not condemnation; mercy not punishment and nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39) We are welcome in His throne room anytime, not just occasionally. It’s not like your mom’s fancy living room that you couldn’t go into except on special occasions.

Sin cannot change the believer’s identity or position in Christ and cannot change our eternal destiny. But, it can influence our temporal condition – that is, how we live today. In other words, you are forgiven completely, but there are sometimes consequences to sin. Sometimes we make a mess of our lives by our foolish choices and decisions. So many times we experience consequences to our foolish behavior and look at heaven and say, “Why me, Lord?” As James Dobson so succinctly phrased it, *“In truth we are suffering the natural consequences of (our) behavior that is guaranteed to produce pain.”* You can choose your sin, but you can’t choose your consequences.

Bob George, in his book, Growing in Grace, makes an excellent statement. “The more clearly we see the righteousness of God, the more we see our own sinfulness in reflection. But when we have an understanding of our identity in Christ and of His acceptance of us, this discovery does not bury us. It causes us to give humble thanks for the mercy and grace of our Lord. We learn in turn to abide in Him who is full of grace and truth.” The Christian life is a day-to-day, moment by moment walk with God. We must fully rely on Him for His strength in everything. Now that really defines perseverance!

Our study of David shows how sin can distort even the best of men. But it also shows how the best of men deal with sin in repentance and confession. David is a testimony to us of God’s love and His goodness. God’s marvelous grace touched David – he was a man after God’s heart, then a man with a brave heart, then a man with a broken heart and then a man with a repaired heart. As believers, when we sin, we can confess our sin – which is agreeing with God that we have sinned and then we can repent, which means we turn from that sin and go on with our lives. Our broken heart can also be a repaired heart.

How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself covered in the blackness of sin, ripped at the seams by the effects sin has had on your life? There is a solution! God's house, that is, God's throne is a place of grace! God's word promises that because of Jesus' shed blood on the cross, we can "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." If you have never placed your faith and trust in Jesus, you can do so and He will remove the cloak of sin from you—all sins—past, present and future. If you are already a believer, you need to see yourself as God sees you. You are a saint who sometimes sins.

We love to go visit friends and family whom we describe as gracious hosts. They welcome us with open arms and we are fully accepted and unconditionally loved. God is the ultimate gracious host! He beats Martha Stewart hands down. Like Mephibosheth, we often limp more than we walk, but by God's grace we are able to take our place next to the other sinners-made-saints and share in God's glory. At God's place of grace we are served generous servings of mercy and grace no matter how often we dine. We will always be filled at God's table because He says, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matt. 5:6).*" He has seated us at His right hand as royal daughters and dressed us in His robes of righteousness. His table is a never-ending feast.

Like David let God build him a house and establish his throne forever, we too, can let God build our house. God wants to build Himself in us, clothe us in His garments of righteousness and make us fully complete and perfect in Him. You are all cordially invited to God's place of grace. Won't you join me?

## Prepare by Instruction, Learn by Experience

(Elijah Lesson One)

By Melanie Newton

### A Prophet and Theologian

ELIJAH. Even in pronouncing his name, there's a tendency to say it with emphasis and power. No wonder. His name combines 2 names for God. The first part *EI* is from Elohim, which is a generic, name for God and references the God of power who is also the Creator. The second part *jah* is from Yahweh, which is the personal name God told the Hebrews to call Him. This name refers to the relational, gracious, promise-keeping God. So, Elijah's name means *My God is Yahweh*. This was his choice and his message. "Yahweh, whom I serve." Elijah was a prophet.

### What was a prophet?

The basic Hebrew word refers to someone being under divine influence, divine referring to a spiritual being. Those under God's influence spoke God's words to the people or praised Him visibly. This is what we saw in Saul and his men when the Holy Spirit came upon them (1 Samuel 19:23-24). They prophesied or were visibly under the Holy Spirit's control. Those under demonic control spoke deceiving words usually with the purpose of drawing attention away from God's message. These are frequently called false prophets in the Old Testament and false teachers in the New Testament.

God's prophets, men or women, were chosen by Him to deliver messages from Him through writing or speaking or both. They could minister locally or to the nation as a whole. The last half of the Old Testament, Isaiah through Malachi, are books written by prophets. Elijah and his successor Elisha do not have any named writings. Also in Israel were schools of prophets similar to our modern seminaries where men studied God's Word and made themselves available to be used by God for teaching, worship and service. God's national prophets such as Samuel, Elijah and Elisha would teach at these schools. That's probably why the students are sometimes called "sons of the prophets."

Prophets knew God. They knew who He was and understood His character. We call that THEOLOGY. They taught people about God. David was a prophet in that sense. Prophets didn't just predict future events, what we usually associate with prophets and prophecy, but they more often taught people in the present about the God they served or claimed to serve. They taught THEOLOGY.

### What Is Theology?

What is theology? It is really a simple matter of knowing God, something women have always done and still do today. Carolyn Custis James, author of *When Life and Beliefs Collide*, emphatically declares, that whether or not we realize it, ALL Christian women are theologians. Since theology is really about knowing God, then anyone who believes ANYTHING about God is a theologian. Not only are you a theologian, but also it truly does matter whether you are a good one. The Bible as well as church history records the stories of countless women whose theology led them to make significant contributions at home, in the community, and in the church. She says that, "Knowing God is a woman's highest calling and her most pressing need." Also, it is not private. If you have a sphere of influence, your theology is public as you are called upon to use it for the good of your

friends, your husband, your children, and your church. You use your theology to give them strength or drag them down. It is sobering to realize that someone else is helped or hurt depending on the state of my theology!

### **Where Do We Learn Our Theology?**

Go to seminary. Wrong! If you wait until then, it's too late. Read a Theology book. You do get head knowledge that way. But, it also biases you to think that only professionals and academics who write books can know theology. Attend Bible classes. Getting warmer. Read God's Word, which is His revealing of Himself to us. Closer. You learn theology like you learn most anything else in life— Prepare By Instruction (Study The Truths About God); Learn by Experience (Trust in What You Believe about God). In fact, apart from experience, theology is dull and detached. It's as we look at the lives of real people and see God at work in their lives, as well as our own, that we learn true theology. It's as we study the truth about God then trust Him with our lives that we learn true theology.

### **Prepare By Instruction—Study The Truths About God**

Take Joseph. Sometime in his early life, someone taught him truth about God, perhaps that he was faithful, a promise-keeper, merciful, and personal. What did Joseph learn by experience? God was faithfully with him through all those trials he experienced. God was wise and gifted him with wisdom both to interpret dreams and to prepare a nation for famine. God was loving and compassionate to him so he could be loving to his brothers.

Wow, did David know who God was? Before he ever had to run from Saul, he wrote the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. *The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...He restores my soul...For you are with me, your rod and your staff comfort me.* Someone taught him about God. He paid attention. When trouble hit, he learned that all those wonderful things about God were true. Experience verified the instruction.

### **Learn by Experience—Trust in What You Believe about God.**

Many people in the Bible learned truth about God through experience. In fact, they attributed names to God based upon what they learned to be true about Him. So many of the rich Hebrew names for God are lost in our English language. We have God and Lord. The Hebrews referred to the one true God as Elohim. This carried the idea of power, sovereignty, and creator. That's the word most often translated "God" in your Bibles. When we say God, in our culture, it could refer to the God of the Bible or any generic god that people choose to worship. *Yhwh* referred to the God who had a personal relationship with them. It is translated LORD with all capital letters. Ever wonder about that? Another word for God is *Adonai*. It means "master" and is translated Lord with small letters. [See Psalm 16:1-2 where all three words used.]

### **Learn by Experience—Trust in What You Believe about God.**

Other names also reflected their theology, what the people progressively came to know about God through their experience. *El Shaddai* and *Adonai Sabbaoth* are two names translated "God Almighty or Lord Almighty." You'll see this in next week's lesson. *Yahweh Yir'eh* is "the Lord will provide." Abraham used this name for God when he was called upon to sacrifice his son Isaac but God provided a ram instead. The woman who had been bleeding for 12 years learned about God when she touched the hem of Jesus' robe and was instantly healed. *Yhwh Rapa*, the Lord who heals or "restores to normal."

## Elijah's Boot Camp

Where did Elijah learn about God? We don't know about his background. But, someone had prepared him by instruction. A mother or father or local priest? Perhaps he attended one of those "prophets" schools. Where did he learn the truth about God through experience? Elijah was sent to Kerith. By the way, the word Kerith means "to cut off, to cut down". Like whittling a piece of wood. Filing away at an object to make it smooth and shaped. It involves being probed, pushed, and penetrated. Elijah was in a "boot camp" of sorts. What could God have been doing? Why make it so hard on him? Why not have him preaching all over Israel? We are told that God moved Elijah for his protection and provision. I believe God had in mind his preparation as well. How did Elijah sharpen his THEOLOGY through experience? Let's examine this.

### Elijah's Boot Camp

- Protection: Elijah had to hide because he would soon be hunted by the king and queen. Ever been moved away from an evil influence or danger?
- Provision: Hiding means a loss of independence. You are forced to trust in someone or something besides yourself. Kerith was remote, away from usual sources of food. So, God promised to provide it. Raven's Catering Service. Only thing is you aren't doing the choosing, the ravens are. Served twice a day. Ravens eat just about anything. Insects, fruit, nuts, seeds, eggs, baby birds, small mammals and dead tissue. I bet whatever they brought was approved by God so probably no dead tissue. Ravens probably kept him company as well.
- Preparation: So, what did Elijah learn about God? "God keeps His Word to stop the rain. God can protect me. God can provide even my basic needs. God can truly be trusted." What did Elijah learn about himself? "I need to be thankful for whatever God provides. To be content with where I am. To be ready to move when God says 'Go.'" God was nourishing not only his body, but also Elijah's faith. Just think about the wonderful prayer time Elijah must have had with God. Perhaps he had access to a portion of the scripture or dwelt on all the passages he had memorized. Elijah was removed from all kinds of distractions. There was time to concentrate on his relationship with his creator.

### God's Ravens

Have you ever been fed by God's ravens? Sure you have. You just didn't know they were God's ravens. Ever receive meals when you were sick or hurt or in grief? Ever provide meals or other help to any woman or family in distress? God's ravens are still feeding. Even today, when we are in our own "Kerith", God doesn't forget us. Isaiah 49:14-16 states that I am engraved on the palm of His hand. He knows where I am. My response is to be thankful and content. To trust God to take care of me in whatever manner He chooses. That means to be content with raven food! The concentration should be on what you have, not what you don't have. That's living by faith in a faithful God.

### What Happens in Boot Camp

We don't like boot camp. It's a time when God may: 1) cut down or cuts off in order for us to grow and mature, 2) whittle at our pride by removing us from the limelight, from involvement, 3) chip away at the status we have erected for ourselves so we are humbled enough to depend on Him, 4) prod us by making us release our rights, the rights we hold onto and try to defend, including the right to choose the way we want to live, and 5) cut

through our habits to renovate us from the inside out. Through experience, we can become convinced of who God is. He gives us opportunity to sharpen our THEOLOGY!

### **The Brook Dries Up!**

Okay, Elijah is adjusting to being alone, being fed by ravens, and drinking from the brook. But, then the brook dries up! He's watching it dry up. Probably thinking to himself, "I know God will do something. I just don't know what and when." Chuck Swindoll says in his sermon series on Elijah, "The God who gave the water has chosen to take the water. It's His sovereign right! He gives the child; he can take it away. He gives the business; He can take it away. He's given the house, He can take it away." How do you like that?

There's an interesting question in 1 Corinthians 4:7. "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast a though you did not?" There isn't anything we own that we did not receive from God. Think about it. Being in America is something received—either by birth or by grant from the government. Your height, your attractiveness, your intelligence, your natural talents, your ability to function well in society and prosper yourself through work. All of those are gifts. You received them. Yet, we boast as though we had anything to do with our genetics or privileges at all. In the middle of boot camp, it's easy to resent being stripped of our "rights." Elijah was truly living by faith while following God's direct commands.

### **Living by Faith?**

A phrase that is often misused. Not some mysterious power. It's simply a trust in someone who is trustworthy—the object of our faith. For a Christian, the object of our faith is God. Another reason you need to know THEOLOGY. As you saw in the two widow stories in your lesson, God doesn't do the same thing for everyone. For one, she had only enough for today with a promise that the daily provision would last as long as the drought did. For the other, she had enough for today and the future. You cannot equate faith with prosperity.

### **God Grows Us Through Needs**

We want to grow in our faith and mature as Christians so we pray, "Lord, make me a godly woman." But in our minds we are thinking, "Don't let it hurt too much!" So, God shaves our hair, changes our diet, removes our comforts, and it hurts. We may look at it as an impossible situation. But, it could be our boot camp that has all the ingredients to make us strong if we complete it. To quote Tim Stevenson, pastor of Crossroads, "God is in the human development business. How is God going to teach us faith if He never allows us to have needs?! By crying "uncle" and giving up our self-sufficiency, we actually begin to depend on God and think of Him as God Almighty. In our weakness, He is strong (2 Corinthians 12:7-10. We think of Him as Lord. Not an appendage to our lives but as an essential. That's how Elijah viewed God.

### **Where Do We Use Our Theology?**

All the time. Especially when life hits. Elijah had learned that God would miraculously provide for him, but now he would learn that God could do the same for others as well. God was again using an unusual source to feed His prophet. First birds, then a woman. Totally opposite of what you would expect. Interestingly enough, the name Zarephath means *melting, crucible*. So, Elijah was poked and prodded and whittled while along at Kerith. Now, his experience will be one of refining. It's hard to be refined if you are alone. It's that interaction with others that usually reveals our weaknesses and impurities. Women are the

theologians of their homes. Elijah and the two women in the lesson learned that God is greater than any impossible situation. They learned to trust Him. They learned to follow directions. Even when it made no sense. That is so hard for us.

### **Applications**

*Lesson #1: Prepare by instruction those within our sphere of influence, including ourselves.*

Take advantage of whatever resources are available. Be serious about knowing Him. Study the Scriptures with that intention. Nurture your faith on the truth of our God's character. Fix your eyes on Jesus with your mind filled with the truth about Him. Teach children and others the truth about God. Take this job seriously. You never know how much sinks in and how it will sustain them later in life.

*Lesson #2: Be ready to Learn by Experience*

Be willing to be moved out of our familiar surroundings. When God moves us, it may be for our protection, provision, or preparation. God's direction includes God's provision. It is still His choice of what He gives or takes away. We must be as willing to be set aside as we are willing to be used. A hidden life is a valuable life when you are functioning well, trusting God with each day. Joseph was hidden in prison for two years. He functioned well and it was noticed. If you are a mom of small children or caring for an elderly person in your home, you may be set aside from doing other things for God during this time. Your life is valuable to those who need you so desperately right now. Don't resent it. Elijah had to learn to trust God one day at a time. God didn't tell Elijah the next step until he took the first step. Think about the challenges facing you today. Trust God and take the next step. Depend upon Him to lead you.

We have approached the Christian life as a subject to be learned rather than as a life to be lived. You can't grow in grace in a classroom, through a seminar, or during a "quiet time," as good as those things may be. As a matter of fact, you cannot grow in grace through reading a book...You can only grow in grace through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who teaches you truth from His Word, which you then take out into the rough-and-tumble of real life in the real world. The "curriculum" cannot be planned or anticipated. Through the sovereignty of a loving God, the pathway we will tread in this fallen world will be as unique as each one of us...Whatever the situations in your life may be, that is where you will have to grow in grace...in spite of our personal failures and sins. How? As we focus on what God is doing in the midst of what we are doing (Hebrews 12:1,2).

—Bob George, Growing in Grace, p. 13-15.

## And, the True God Is...

(Elijah Lesson Two)

By Melanie Newton

Women are theologians. Whether we want to call ourselves that or not. We are the theologians in our spheres of influence. And, it matters if we are good ones. It matters what we know about God, what we think about God, and what we relate about Him by words or actions to those around us. If you have any sphere of influence at all, understanding the truth about God and being able to communicate that truth in casual conversation and serious discussion is one of your greatest assets for any relationship.

Your lesson today covered a chapter that is one of the most significant in the Bible. And, it is loaded with theology. Mt. Carmel was on the border between Israel and Phoenicia, the home of Jezebel and Baal worship. Mount Carmel was regarded by the Phoenicians as the sacred dwelling place of Baal. So, this spot was a battleground for the minds and hearts of many people. Which side would win?

### *Theology Revealed*

In review, we learn theology as we **Prepare By Instruction** and **Learn By Experience**. God also instructed the Israelites about Himself. Then, He demonstrated it to them. Let's look at some truths about God presented in 1 Kings 17 and 18.

- **The true God is ALIVE.** Read 1 Kings 17:1, 12, 18:10, 15. Notice the one word that is the constant. Four times, God is referred to as the one who lives. Why is that? This reference to the God who lives occurs 14 times in the books of 1 and 2 Kings. God's existence is sure. *Yhwh* is the living, active, ever-present Lord. This is obviously in contrast to idols that aren't. The Baal worshippers believed that Baal actually died during the summer months each year. Elijah certainly knew that God lives. He received word from Him directly. And, he saw God perform miracles before his very eyes.
- **The true God is FAITHFUL.** Our God is a promise-keeping God. In 17:4, He promised to feed Elijah; in 17:6 His promise is fulfilled. In 17: 14 He promised that the flour and oil would not run out; in vs. 16 we read that He kept that promise. In 18:1, He promises to send rain, conditional upon Elijah being faithful to do his part. Elijah is, and God does (18:45).
- **The true God transcends geographic location; is EVERYWHERE at once.** While God was present in Jerusalem in the Temple at this time, He was also present with Elijah and with the widow in Phoenicia. The Baal worshippers believed that Baal sometimes went on journeys with the sailors so he wasn't always present with them. In 18:37, all Elijah had to do was pray, and God immediately answered. Didn't have to wait for Him to travel from Jerusalem. He never sleeps. He is everywhere at once. He is always alive. He is always online.
- **The true God is LOVE and loving.** God showed Himself to these people of Israel even though they were not worshipping Him. They were not committed to Him. They were rebelling against Him. That's His love. Romans 5:8 says, *"But God demonstrated His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Elijah told the people to make their choice. God loves us and wants us to love Him in return. True love

involves a choice. There has to be the possibility of rejection in order for there to be real love. God created humans with the ability to choose. He gave us freedom to choose Him and His ways or our own self-sufficiency and independence. God's rule of this universe He created includes His plan to allow us that human freedom. That's His sovereignty. Allowing us that freedom is part of His love.

- **The true God is HOLY and JUST.** Sin must be judged and removed from His presence. The people of Israel repented and declared the Lord to be God; the prophets of Baal did not. In 1 Kings 18:40, they were judged and removed. Here is an example of God, through Elijah, stopping evil for a time.
- **The true God is POWERFUL and VICTORIOUS.** In 18:15, Elijah refers to God as the Lord of Hosts or Lord Almighty. We looked at this name last week. This is a reference to His power; to the mighty general who in the past led Israel in glorious victory over her enemies; and to God's active presence in history. *"Elijah's description of God as the Lord Almighty who lives and whom Elijah served indicates that he was confident in God's ability to handle the physical and spiritual situation in Israel, an assurance that had grown as a result of his experiences at Kerith and Zarephath."* (BKC)

Unlike the time in Egypt when Moses stood before Pharaoh and Pharaoh's magicians copied some of the wonders done by Moses, the false prophets were powerless here. When God takes charge to prove to humans that He is who He says He is, there is no interference. This is a perfect example to show that Satan is not God's equal. He is a created being and here he was shut down from operating. Can you think of another time when God demonstrated His power without interference in a tremendous way? The resurrection, for sure!

This brings to mind another name for God in the Old Testament—Messiah. Messiah was to be the redeemer, the coming ruler. In the Greek language of the New Testament, the name is translated Christ. God raised Jesus from the dead proving Him to be the Christ, and He remains alive today. In heaven, He sits at the right hand of God, still in human form. Every founder of a religious system is dead in his/her grave. But not Jesus, because He is God and alive forever.

By the way, God performed a lot of miracles during the time of Elijah and Elisha who followed him. Not since the time of Moses when the people came out of Egypt and Joshua when they conquered the Promised Land had God done so many "miracles." Several times in scripture we are told that miracles are done to get people to listen to the message from God. This was a very bad time in the life of Israel. God gave them sign after sign of His grace, but their hearts stayed hardened and they pursued other gods. The miracles ceased and didn't happen again in great abundance until the time when Jesus was on earth and for a short time afterwards when the church was being established.

- **The true God is MERCIFUL and GRACIOUS.** He promised rain before the people had repented. He sent rain although Ahab never repented. He allowed Ahab to live. He demonstrated Himself to Ahab in an unmistakable fashion yet Ahab still rejected Him.

### ***Theology Leads to Choices—Choice 1: To Commit Yourself to Him***

Like Zorro using his sword to leave Z's to declare his presence and strength, God places Z's in our paths that say, "Here I am. Look at me. Come to me." This was an unmistakable Z to the Israelites. How could you ever forget such a demonstration of God?

But, the Israelites did and people still do today. What was the single most important event in human history? The cross followed by the resurrection. A gigantic Z. God demonstrated His **power** over our greatest enemy, sin and its consequence—death. God demonstrated His **love** in that He did this while we were still His enemies. (Rom. 5:8) God demonstrated His **justice** in that Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us and took that penalty for sin that we deserved—death. (2 Cor. 5:21) God demonstrated His **grace** in that He offered this payment for our sin so that we might be declared righteous, perfectly acceptable to Him, by faith.

What is the responsibility of man? To accept His plan. There is only one way to the true God—faith in His Son Jesus Christ. That's His plan. Notice how it is stated in Acts 17:23-31: Paul says, *"For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.'"* God has provided enough natural revelation in this world so that people would be drawn to belief in Him. Paul goes on to say, *"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist."* God, the Creator, the powerful one, the sovereign of heaven and earth wants men to seek Him and declares He is not far from anyone. He's not watching from a distance. His Holy Spirit is present in this world in believers and elsewhere to convict nonbelievers of their sin and need for righteousness from God.

Paul continues by saying, "Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. (Baal) Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man who He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." What did I say was the gigantic Z God placed in the paths of men to call them to Him? The resurrection.

The choice Elijah gave to the No Comment Fence-Sitter Israelites and Paul gave to the Athenians is the same choice you and I have today. It's either being for God or not for Him. There is no in-between. Not a sliding scale. But a line. You are on one side or the other. Being on the fence is on the other.

### ***Choice 2: To Serve Him No Matter What***

Nobodies can become somebodies. Elijah was a plain man. Not royalty or governmental leader like Joseph and David. A nobody. But, God uses nobodies all the time to do some of His most impressive work.

God can achieve His purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance upon them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because their unusual dependence on Him made possible the unique display of his power and grace. He chose and used somebodies only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources. (Oswald Chambers, 1874-1917)

## By Taking One's Stand Before God

Elijah said twice, "The Lord, the God of Israel, before whom I stand/whom I serve." The actual meaning of that phrase is much richer than "whom I serve". The "before whom" part means *facing Him, in His presence, face to face*. I love the definition of stand. To take one's stand, to present oneself, to hold one's ground, to station oneself. In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah was physically in the presence of King Ahab. But, in his mind and heart, he was standing in front of God. We are individually accountable before God. Has nothing to do with geographic location.

## By Faith

God honors faith and faithfulness. After 3 years had passed, the Word of the Lord came to Elijah and told him to go and face Ahab. Elijah chose to go. Elijah was a confronter. He was given a task to confront his culture, and he did it. He acted in obedience to God's commands and not his own initiative. He set up the scene so that God would get the glory.

Others who were faithful to God made choices at this time. Obadiah stayed where he was placed, in governmental service. God used Him there and gifted him with diplomacy, confidentiality, and resourcefulness to be able to care for the prophets he had hidden from Jezebel's rampage. Somehow he was able to find food and water for 100 people and get it to them regularly. God obviously gave him protection from Jezebel who was an evil woman. The 100 prophets hidden in the caves were set aside. God had given them a different task of service to Him. To trust God through Obadiah for provision and protection. Probably spent a lot of time in prayer. Perhaps had their scrolls of scripture with them.

What about the ones martyred? Did you think about them? We don't know how many, but they made a choice to stay true to God and were killed. They didn't recant their faith. They were the Lord's. We are all called to unique lives, not all of us will have rosy endings in this life. Millions of men and women have been martyred through the years because of their steadfast faith in God. They made a choice to serve Him no matter what. Their attitude is the same as that of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3:17-18. *"If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."*

When we go to Hebrews 11 and read verses 35-39, we see references to 1 Kings. Remember the theme of this chapter from Lesson 1? By faith, each person lived his life by faith in the living God. Not knowing the outcome. *"Women received back their dead by resurrection (woman of Zarephath); and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword (killed prophets); they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins (Elijah), being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves (100 hidden prophets) and holes in the ground. And, all these, having **gained approval through their faith**, did not receive what was promised."* The promise was redemption through the Messiah. They received it after they died. Robert Pyne, Professor of Systematic Theology at DTS makes this comment,

"We simply do not know why one survives and another does not, and we should not attempt to explain what God has not revealed to us."

## By Prayer

Our most effective tool in serving God is prayer. Chuck Swindoll makes this insightful comment which is "right on": "In contrast with Baal's prophets, Elijah simply prayed He didn't do anything flashy; he didn't draw attention to himself; he didn't try to take on the false prophets in his own power. He just prayed that God would affirm what he had been telling the people so they would know the Lord wanted them back. Prayer does not manipulate God into doing what we want. Rather, it expresses our willingness to conform the desires of our hearts to the desires of His. Prayer invites God to work so that others might see that He is real and turn to Him." (Chuck Swindoll, *Elijah: A Man of Heroism and Humility* study guide, page 44.)

Elijah addressed His prayer to the Lord of Hosts, Lord Almighty. The God of unlimited power. How appropriate. We should acknowledge Him as the One who is able to intervene on our behalf. It is because God truly is exalted above the heavens that we can pray to Him, having total confidence in his ability to answer prayer. We have the confidence that He loves us, He knows what is going on, and He can do something about it. Leaving it in His hands is our choice. What He does is His. To quote a song of the last decade: "sometimes He calms the storm; other times, He calms His child." To someone who is a *casualty* of this wicked world (cancer, death, rape, murder), try giving them this counsel: "I don't know if there is any answer to this. But I do know that Jesus said, 'Come to Me, and I will give you rest.' I know for a fact that if you go to Jesus Christ today, you will find comfort and light. He invites you to come to Him for comfort. And, He can fulfill that promise. The world is not always good, but God is. That's why you can trust Him."

## Conclusion

Women need theology. So we don't get caught sitting on the fence. So we don't do harm when family and friends depend on us for counsel. So we train our children rightly about Him, giving them the best information to make their own decision about the God we know and serve. The God who answered by fire in Elijah's day never tires of hearing us individually stand before Him and say, "The LORD, He is MY God."

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*Quotations from Oswald Chambers, Chuck Swindoll, and Jonathan Edwards are named but not sourced.*