

# The Cross in the **TRAGEDY** The Japan 311 Disaster

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## Leader's Guide

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THE CROSS IN THE TRAGEDY: LEADER'S GUIDE  
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14 Stories and Studies for  
PERSONAL OR SMALL GROUP STUDY  
**Kevin Laverman**

# LEADER'S GUIDE

## Introduction

Thanks for choosing to use this simple textbook of 14 stories and studies from Japan's 311 tragedy with your small group. I pray it will encourage and strengthen your group's mission vision and walk with our Lord.

Leading a small group to discover God's truth together is a *life-changing work*, both for yourself as leader and for the group participants. God's Word is *life changing* and we can expect it to have this effect in those studying it. Make no mistake, though, it is also *work*. Each participant comes to the text with a different idea of what the passage is about, a different experience and background through which to filter those ideas, and a different line of questions and thoughts they would like to pursue. An effective small group leader needs to be more than just a student of the Word, they need to be a student of people and methods for leading those people through thoughtful Bible discussion and discovery together.

There are many excellent resources available on leading a healthy Bible study group. This leader's guide is not intended to duplicate what others have shared on this topic. If you are new to leading a small group, or would like to improve your skills, you would benefit greatly by reading up on some principles and practices for small group Bible study.

You might consider "[Leading Small Groups with Purpose](#)" by Steve Gladen (Baker 2012) or "[Leading Bible Discussions](#)" by James Nyquist (Intervarsity 1985) for good small group principles. Also consider "[Transforming Bible Study](#)" by Bob Grahmann (Intervarsity 2003) or the work by Roberta Hestenes, "[Using the Bible in Groups](#)" (John Knox Press 1985) for spiritual formation and teaching helps for groups. Be sure to consult with your pastor for help in choosing appropriate resources and guidance in leading a small group.

## Using This Textbook

In general, you should avoid splitting a lesson over two or more sessions. The lesson should be treated as a whole and its theme completed in one sitting. Knowing the way your group prefers to interact with God's Word

(quiet and contemplative thinkers, active talkers, curious investigators, etc.), you may feel that there is more material than you can study in the time you have available. If that is the case, once you have reviewed the textbook questions carefully, feel free to eliminate or give some less time in your discussion.

The pages to follow provide a summary of the lesson to help you get the big picture, and guidance on the questions to help you understand what the question is getting at (and where you should lead the group to get to). You want the group or individual to make their own discovery of these truths, so don't simply read the answers. Lead them to find out on their own. Moreover, the guidance on questions below is not intended to be comprehensive. Your group may have some other insights that fit with an accurate interpretation of Scripture.

## Personal Preparation

Do your own careful study beforehand using Bible study tools at your disposal online or from your Christian bookstore or church. Go through the questions and prepare your own answers and thoughts. You may not have the time or need to share all that you have discovered, but it will give you confidence and shape how you present the lesson and lead the discussion time together.

Bible discovery is a work of the Holy Spirit who illumines Scripture to human hearts and reveals the deep thoughts of God. So be sure to treat it with spiritual preparation and authority, not merely as an academic exercise. Pray beforehand for your small group participants.

## With the Group

As the group leader, you best know the blend of people, personalities and dynamics that make your group unique. The below is not intended to be a hard and fast approach, but only one possible one, for using this textbook together.

WARM-UP: As people gather, start with the warm-up question at the beginning of the lesson. It is intended to tease out the subject matter and get people talking amongst each other easily. Depending on your time constraints, you may choose to eliminate this warm-up question and allow

the first question in the Close Look section to serve as your warm-up. See notes below.

**SCRIPTURE:** Take a minute to pray. Then read the Bible portion carefully and thoughtfully together. You might choose a participant in the group to do this, or read verse by verse around the group. Next, take a few minutes to reread the passage and make silent observations.

**STORY:** After a few minutes and transition to the story. The story is intended to correspond to the lesson topic and show how this spiritual truth was borne out in the 311 tragedy. If you are using the text in a small group, you may eliminate the Heart Check section at the end of the story. This is intended for those who choose to use the textbook as a personal devotional, without exploring the Bible study questions.

**CLOSE LOOK:** Start with the questions. You will notice that the first question of each lesson is also a warm-up or starter question. Don't spend too much time with it if you have already talked around the warm-up question at the beginning. The final question is intended to be used as reflection and application and so need not be answered verbally.

**JAPAN NOTES:** There are culture notes at the end of the questions. This is intended for people to read on their own. You needn't spend time reading it as a group unless you are needing extra filler or feel compelled to do so because of the nature or interest of your group (i.e., a mission team preparing for short-term service or a mission committee in the church educating themselves on Japan as a field).

**PRAYER:** How about wrapping prayer for Japan inside your closing prayer? A sample prayer as it relates to the topic and culture notes, is found at the end of the lesson. But any way in which the Holy Spirit moves you to pray for the country, their response to the gospel, and their openness post-311, is certainly a way to make a difference for eternity in lives here.

May God bless your discussion and study of His Word through the lens of the Japan 311 tragedy!

## DAY 1 – Tsunami Stones

### Summary

No one likes being told what to do, even if it is for their own good. Teenagers can be especially resentful of and resistant to wise warnings. But with maturity comes understanding that the good warnings are motivated by genuine concern and love, not anger or abuse. We needn't be "spiritual teenagers" toward God's warnings. With spiritual maturity, we should realize that God's warnings to us are "love calls" that draw us back to himself, away from the things that can harm and cause us grief, and toward all the best he has in store for us. He has made these warnings plain and simple for us to know and obey. Are we paying attention to these warnings? Are we choosing to heed the advice for living?

### Close Look: Heavenly Warning Signs

**1. Why do people give warnings?** A good warning motivated from genuine love or concern is usually given to protect the life or well-being of the individual receiving it. A good warning might be given by one who has experience or wisdom in a matter beyond our own. They may have personally seen the devastating results of a certain action or behavior and wish to protect us from that personal tragedy.

**Why do you think we often do not obey good warnings?** We may believe a warning is misinformed or needless worry. Or, we might believe the individual is using a position of authority to control our behavior. Sometimes pride gets in the way and we believe we have more wisdom in the matter or are able to care for things by ourselves. Other times our feelings toward the individual get in the way and we purposely reject what she/he has to say in an effort to "show them who's right."

**2. What did God warn the Israelite people to do in 30:1-3?** God warned the Israelite people to take his words (their covenant agreement with him) seriously, giving weight and respect to them as coming from One who is worthy of such regard, knows all things and loves them absolutely. They were to pay close attention to the blessings and curses and obey God, who had already revealed through power and miracles that he could be trusted to care for them. Notice the repetition of "heart" in verse one and two.

The Israelites were to be authentic in their obedience, not simply doing so to avoid curses or gain blessings. They were to truly love God and find joy in obeying him.

**How difficult was this warning/promise? (30:11-14)** The warnings (and promises) God gave in his covenant agreement were neither hard to understand nor hard to access (beyond their reach or up in the heavens). The Israelites did not have to solve some anagram or try to sleuth it out on their own. God had brought it to them and plainly and thoroughly spelled out the details in a language and way they could know. God's revelation to man is always clear "so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

**What would happen if they disobeyed? (30:16-18)** They would "be destroyed" (killed) by their enemies, and/or they would "not live long in the land" because God would allow other nations to take them into captivity. God is speaking in a literal and physical sense regarding their destruction, but certainly they would also experience personal destruction and spiritual devastation in their lives.

**What promise of blessing did he give in the same verses?** They will "live and increase" and "God will bless" them. The very life, both individual and corporate, of the Israelite people was dependent on their obedience to God. This is true in the life of the believer today. Obedience to God is our safe haven. Moreover, our full enjoyment of life is dependent on obedience of God's Word.

**Why did God give them this warning? (30:19)** God's desire is that they would live, in a real and physical sense, and also be spared of personal and spiritual destruction in their lives. He urges, "now choose life, so that you and your children may live." God is for them and wants what is best for both them and their posterity for generations to come. By obeying they were making a choice for their children as well. One generation could pass down a heritage of blessing to the next generation by loving, listening to, and holding fast to God (see v20).

**3. Read Jeremiah 7:1-26. What was the historic response of the nation of Israel to the warnings/promises God gave?** Look carefully at verses 22-23. God wanted things to "go well" for the nation of Israel. But their pattern of behavior throughout the periods of judges and kings showed a stubborn disregard for God's words. Notice how many times the phrases "did not listen," "did not pay attention," and "did not answer" are used. In spite of blatant rejection of God's commands and warnings, the people still concluded "We are safe" (v10). They erroneously believed that the

presence of God's temple (v4) would shelter them from judgment. But God valued their obedience far more than this building.

**Do you see yourself in the Israelite people? How is the record of the nation of Israel in Scripture a type of tsunami stone for the church today for how they are to live? (see also Heb 3:12-19)** The Israelite people can be a mirror in which we see ourselves and our own imperfections reflected back. Romans 15:4 reminds us that the history of the nation of Israel is there to instruct us in how we are to live today. We can see the entire story of what resulted from their refusal to obey and love God as he required. We needn't go through the same devastating consequences (see also, Hebrews 3:12-19) in our life. These lessons have already been recorded in Scripture for us to easily read and heed, just like the warnings on the tsunami stones in northern Japan.

**4. What warnings from the Bible about how to obey and please God come to mind? [Discuss and write a few you come up with.]** There are abundant examples that might be given here. If participants are stuck, you might prime the pump by asking what commands God gave in Exodus 20. Proverbs is full of warnings and advice. Also consider the many teachings of Jesus in the gospels, and any of Paul's instructions to the early church. You may want to have a few references ready in advance if participants are not familiar with the Bible, or still draw a blank in remembering any.

**Read aloud Psalm 16:11 and Matthew 7:13 slowly. We usually think about warnings in a negative way. Why does God warn us to change the way we live or believe? What motivates his warning to us?** Just as with the nation of Israel, "life" (v14) and "destruction" (v13) lie in the balance for us. Whether we prosper or perish depends on our obedience or disobedience to God's revealed truth. The small gate/narrow road of God's wisdom leads to life, whereas the wide gate/broad road of human wisdom leads to destruction. God has "made known to [us] the path of life" so that we can experience all that he has prepared for us. God is not a celestial killjoy, rather He wants us to be filled with "joy in [His] presence" and "eternal pleasures at [His] right hand." Warnings are given out of genuine love for us and desire for our best.

**5. Now think of and write down a few ways that God's warnings are different from other warnings in this world. Look up a few Scripture passages if you need help getting started.** Unlike other warnings in this world, God's warnings...

Psalm 139:1-3 ...are based on his perfect knowledge of us as our Creator.  
 Psalm 19:7 ...are trustworthy because they flow from his character.  
 Psalm 24:5-6 ...result in spiritual blessing and eternal rewards.  
 1 John 5:2-3 ...are not burdensome, and they show that we belong to him.  
 John 15:10-11 ...result in joy and spiritual oneness with Jesus.  
 2 Peter 3:9 ...come from a patient desire to call us to repentance.

**6. What promise does Jesus give in Luke 6:47-49 about living according to the warnings and promises of His Word? (see also John 5:24)** The one who lives life according to God's words is like a man building his life on a firm foundation. He avoids personal and spiritual destruction others face by their disregard for God's ways and wisdom. He can rest in the knowledge that his life is secure on the Rock (Psalm 94:22), a place of safety regardless of what troubles may come.

**7. Is there an area in your life that you sense God is warning you about for your own good through the words of others, the Bible, or the church? Take a minute to reflect and humble yourself before God.** At the end of your study, be sure to include time for this important question of reflection and application. The question is rhetorical; do not press for an answer. Allow the participants a minute or two of silent heart searching before closing in prayer. [1st edition correction: "Take a minute" not "Time a minute"]

## DAY 2 – The Day Japan Stood Still

### Summary

Fear or faith, trembling or trust, panic or peace? If only the choice was easier to make, of course we would always rather have the latter one in life. Choosing to focus on the size and nature of our God, instead of the size and nature of our problem, can make all the difference. God's remedy for the heart that's all shook up is a fresh vision of his power and goodness. He is *bigger* than our fears and problems, and he *cares* for us more than we can ever know. What's more, he has no intention of letting us face these things alone. He whispers, "Take courage, I am here!" Matthew 14:27. "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God" Isaiah 41:10.

### Close Look: All Shook Up?

**1. How do you react when things are shaken up in your life? Has there been something recently that shook you unexpectedly?** Let people share about their typical reaction to a problem in life. In the face of trouble, some people fly into action and plans, others run away (fight vs. flight) and seek escape in friends, recreation or vices. Others will complain loudly and frequently to anyone who will listen. Still others will fret and worry quietly, assume the worst will result, and sometimes even question the reason for life. Many times in the process we also find fault with God and doubt his goodness. All too infrequently do we stop, pray, and trust God's power, presence, provision and promises for us.

**2. What types of trouble does the psalmist find himself surrounded by in Psalm 46? (verses 2-3, 6, 9) Do these continue on today?** Most Bible scholars recognize this psalm to be authored by King Hezekiah during the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian army. It may be helpful for you to read the historical context in 2 Kings 18-19 and Isaiah 36-37.

All of *creation* is under God's authority. Hezekiah points to all the worst that nature can dish out (*verse 2-3*), great movements of earth and water. Earthquakes and tsunamis are no match for the sovereign control of Almighty God who "*speaks and summons the earth*" (Psalm 50:1). Likewise, all *nations* and *kingdoms* (*verse 6*) are of no challenge to his power. All the power they can muster is no more than "*a drop in a bucket*" (Isaiah 40:15) when compared to the sheer power of the King of Heaven's voice. Moreover, the weapons they assemble for war (*verse 9*) are useless. Where diplomatic measures fail, God is able to bring an instant end to any threat or act of war. Those who trust in Him find the ultimate defense, a "*refuge*" (v1) and "*fortress*" (v11) far beyond man's best efforts. So we, too, can say, "*In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*" (Ps 56:11).

Certainly disasters and wars, violent acts of nature and man, continue today. We shouldn't miss the symbolism behind the psalmist's words. All possible disasters and troubles man experiences are within the breadth of this description in Psalm 46. But the child of God need not fear that any of these things are running outside of God's control or purposes for us and this world. He remains sovereign.

**In the midst of these "world-shaking" circumstances, what does the psalmist affirm in verses 1, 5 & 7 regarding: 1) Where God is? 2) What God is (imagery used)?** Hezekiah affirms that God is right there in the

thick of it all with us. He's an "ever-present" (v1) help, "within" (v5) and "with us" (v7). We shouldn't think God watches our troubles with distance or disregard. He is intimately concerned and involved in what we are going through. Emmanuel is the God that is *there* with and alongside of us. Note the military imagery Hezekiah uses in verses 1, 5, and 7. We can see why this Psalm was the basis for Martin Luther's hymn "A Mighty Fortress." God is a "refuge" and "strength" (v1), the One holding us up so that we "will not fall" (v5), though his timing after the darkest trouble may not come until the "break of day" (v5). He is the "LORD Almighty," the One who has historically shown himself to be a "fortress" for his people. As he was for Jacob, and Hezekiah, so he will be for us in our troubles. (*He is also the River in verse 4, a powerfully soothing source of peace and healing.*)

**3. Read the 46:10 in a couple of different versions. Do you understand this as a: Command? Promise? Action? Attitude? How is it all of these?**

The words "Be still, and know that I am God." can be understood in a multi-faceted way. You might discuss what Biblical stillness looks like. The *command* is to "Be still!" and to "Know that I am God!" The *promise* is if we are "still" we will come to "know [He is] God." The *action* is to stop our striving and be "still," so that we may "know [He is] God," not us. The *attitude* is to seek stillness within our turbulent hearts, turning over our fears that we may find strength in the knowledge that "[He is] God." The Good News Translation reads this way: "Stop fighting," he says, "and know that I am God, supreme among the nations, supreme over the world."

**4. In Mark 4:35-41, what did the disciples and Jesus head right into?**

**Why do you think Jesus was able to sleep so peaceably through it?**

**What similarities are there between the state of the sea and the state of the disciples' emotions?** Jesus and the disciples headed straight into "a furious squall" (v37). Sudden, violent storms are not unusual for the Sea of Galilee and could not have been predicted even though the disciples were experienced fishermen. Jesus, on the other hand, as the Son of God certainly had the power to foresee what was to come. And yet he allowed them to go right into it! However, don't miss his statement in verse 35. They were assured of making it "over to the other side." That promise, and not the storm's prediction, was the center of Jesus' word to them. Jesus was a model of resting in God's plan and purpose for him, in spite of circumstances about blowing and crashing about him.

Even though the Son of God was there in the boat next to them, the disciple's emotions mimicked that of the turbulent weather all around. It took the words of Jesus, "Quiet! Be still!" (note the similarity with Psalm 46:10) to settle down both the weather and their panicked hearts. The word of God has this absolute power to not only calm creation, but calm the human soul. In the midst of troubles, we need a fresh word from God, a new glimpse at his glory. Scripture provides this to us.

**What does Jesus point to as the source of their fear (4:40)? Where was their faith to be focused in this unexpected calamity?** When Jesus said, "Be still!" he directed his words to the wind and waves, but he might also have been thinking of his disciples. Their problem was not the circumstances around them, but the level of trust within them. They did not exhibit faith in God's power to care, protect, and carry them "to the other side" even after hearing his extended teaching in Mark 4. Instead, they looked at events about them and let their panic carry them away into even questioning whether the Son of God cared (v38). Their faith should have been focused on the power and promises of God. And so should ours. Because He is "good, a refuge in times of trouble" (Nahum 1:7).

**5. In 1 Kings 19:9-13 we find the prophet Elijah hiding in a cave. How do you picture him? What circumstances and emotions led him here?**

We might picture Elijah to be utterly exhausted, body, soul, and mind, sitting in a dark cave, slouched over with his head buried in his arms, a fearful shadow of the prophet who called down fire from heaven in the previous chapter. It may be helpful to review 1 Kings 18 and the events on Mt. Carmel. Elijah had just experienced a spiritual highpoint, a thrilling victory and taste of God's awesome power. But things changed quickly. Jezebel made her wicked threats (v2), Elijah panicked and fled for his life and became almost suicidal in his thought process (v4). What an emotional rollercoaster of a journey for Elijah!

**How does God reveal himself to Elijah in 19:11-12? Why do you think God now uses this very individual, up-close method?** Elijah is invited to experience again the Lord's presence (v11). A powerful wind, then an earthquake, and then a fire all rocked the mountain around him. All were demonstrations of God's power and perhaps characterized the dramatic ways that Elijah expected God to reveal himself. But God was not in any of them. After all this "came a gentle whisper" (v12) that drew Elijah out of his cave (v13). Here, God uses a very personal means of for Elijah to "know that I am God." He is still in control of all the events of Elijah's world, and still has a purpose for him (v16-18). Elijah needed a reminder

that God has a variety of tools on his workbench for revealing himself to man. Elijah had experienced a God of power in an impressive set of miracles. He might have forgotten that God can accomplish his work in small and quieter ways as well. So do we.

**6. Why do you think we miss the whispers of God? What are our usual expectations of his work?** Like Elijah, we might be looking for God in dramatic ways around us. But God is a God of small stuff, too. He is in the little things as equally as he is in the big things. His thoughts and ways are different. *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD*” (Isaiah 55:8). As the hymn writer, William Cowper, noted, *“God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.”*

**7. When troubles come into life that shake us up badly, what perspective from these passages can be of help to us still us? Read Psalm 27 aloud. Meditate on the whispers of God to you in this passage.** Take time to reflect on this question as a group. No answer is necessary, but some time of quiet meditation may be. What can we personally take away from the things King Hezekiah, the disciples, and Elijah, who all faced fear and panic, came to discover about the character of God. Read Psalm 27 quietly and thoughtfully as you close your time together. Note David’s fear. Note where David goes. Note his conclusion in verse 14.

## DAY 3 – The Humbled Tsunami

### Summary

Every daily rescue points us with certain hope toward a greater rescue to come. Psalm 23:4 says *“I do not fear...because you are with me.”* That Jesus is with me in the middle of my troubles can ease my fears. He is strong enough to take charge of any situation, and loving enough to carry me through them. We needn’t doubt his presence or wonder about his power. And even if God chooses not to save us from the troubles of life, we needn’t question his love. The Lord God has, in his unfathomable plans, greater purposes that include the glory of God (himself), spiritual rescue of humanity, and restoration of all creation. In the end, and for all eternity, he will prove himself faithful, wise, true, and loving beyond our imagination. Until the final rescue, however, we wait, trust and surrender.

### Close Look: Under His Wings

**1. Has there been a time in life when you sensed God’s protection in your circumstances? When or what was it?** Participants may share a dramatic event in which they recognized God at work. But divine protection usually comes in ways we don’t notice. It’s often only when we have a “near miss” with our life, a victory over a serious illness, or some of dramatic event about us that we turn our gaze upward in thanks. But we shouldn’t overlook the little things God does constantly to not only preserve our life, but protect us from evil and wicked influences around us. God protects even each breath we take.

**2. With what four names for God does Psalm 91 begin?**

verse 1a: the Most High (Elyon)    verse 2a: the Almighty (El Shaddai)  
verse 1b: the LORD (Yahweh)    verse 2b: my God (Elohim)

These names for God (this is a messianic psalm and so they apply to Jesus, as well) invite us into a level of deeper confidence and trust in him. He is the *“Most High God”* (Elyon), higher and holier than gods and rulers of this earth. He is the *“Almighty God”* (El Shaddai), all sufficient and more powerful than evils and powers of this earth. He is *“the LORD,”* Jehovah, the one who makes covenants with man and keeps them. He is *“my God”* (Elohim), the God of great glory is *for* me and *with* me.

**3. List the metaphors for protection the psalmist uses in 91:1-9.**

verse 1a: a shelter	verse 4b: wings
verse 1b: a shadow	verse 4c: shield
verse 2a: a refuge	verse 4d: rampart
verse 2b: a fortress	verse 9a: dwelling
verse 4a: feathers	

**How do these metaphors fill out our understanding of who God is?** God is a *“shelter”* from destructive forces physical and spiritual in this world. He is a *“shadow”* for us that shades from the “heat” of much trouble. He is a defensive *“refuge”* and *“fortress”*, a place to run and be protected from all that can injure us body, mind and soul. He cares for us with the tenderness of a mother bird whose *“feathers”* and *“wings”* shelter from the outside. He guards us with the might and power of a warrior whose *“shield”* and *“rampart”* spares us from attack. He is a *“dwelling”* place to find belonging and sanctuary in life.

**Why is it important that you first have a proper understanding of who God is, if you are to feel secure in Him?** One glimpse at the power and

majesty of God, puts our situation in perspective [see notes, questions 2 and 4 in previous lesson]. We are in the hand of the One who hung the stars. He has both the power and desire to handle all of our needs, and protect us from all of the world's harms.

**4. Look at the metaphors and description of dangers in life from which the psalmist assures us that God is able to save. How continual and all-encompassing is His protection (91:5-7)?** It is both “night” and “day” (v5), in “darkness” and “midday.” Remember “he who watches over you will not slumber” (Ps. 121:3). It is over “arrow” (v5), the weapons and attacks of man. It is over “pestilence” and “plague” (v6), the sicknesses over which man has little control. Whether things seen or unseen, the missiles in North Korea and terrorists in the middle east, the cancers in our bodies and bird flu in Asia, or the earthquakes and tsunamis in Japan, God has sovereign control over all these things.

**What other forces does God have charge over (91:8, 11, 13)?** God has charge over the evil and “wicked” (v8) of this world. He has command over angelic hosts and uses “angels” in his preservation and care of his children (cf., Luke 4:10 quote by Satan in temptation of Christ). He has power over all nature and created things, regardless of how ferocious (like a “lion”) or venomous (like a “cobra”) (v13) their attacks may be. When we see our power ebbing and our fear rising, we can should affirm with the psalmist, “When I am afraid, I will trust in you” (Psalm 56:3).

**5. What promises does God give in 91:14-16 when we place our love and trust in him? Finish God's declarations to us from these verses: “I will...”**

v14a: “I will rescue him”	v15c: “I will deliver him”
v14b: “I will protect him”	v15d: “[I will] honor him”
v15a: “I will answer him”	v16a: “I will satisfy him”
v15b: “I will be with him”	v16b: “[I will] show him my salvation”

It should be noted that Psalm 91 is a messianic psalm and so speaking in a prophetic way of Christ, and how his life, being and purpose was guarded by his Almighty Father God. But we can be sure that those of us who identify with and abide in Christ receive these blessings and care from God as well. We have been reborn into the same family with Christ and now call God our Father in Heaven, too. So, while the primary interpretation of this psalm concerns Jesus. We, in Him, now also appropriate these promises!

**6. Does Psalm 91 suggest that Christians are immune from all danger? How does the truth of Psalm 91 calm you in the middle of life's dangers?** We are immortal until God's purpose for us is completed.

God's purpose for us, however, may involve permitting things that we humanly regard as hurtful or unnecessary. Because God *CAN* provide for our rescue from every harmful thing in this life, does not mean he *MUST*. There are reasons for human suffering that we cannot comprehend, but we trust in the *PERSON* and his *PROMISES*, not in our logic or doubts. We pray for *HIS* will to be done, not our own. Our model is Christ who, in the garden of Gethsemane, desired his Father's glory and purpose over his own wellbeing.

**What is the ultimate danger man faces from which God rescues you? (See Romans 8:1-2, Matthew 10:28.)** Matthew 10:28 reminds us that physical rescue is not man's ultimate need. Our spiritual rescue is the deeper, more pressing issue for man. When man was faced with condemnation and imprisonment by sin and death, Christ stepped into history, took the condemnation for us at the cross, and broke the power of death for us at empty grave. We need no longer fear the “One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Even while we look forward to the day in eternity when we will receive full deliverance from sickness and suffering, we can rest today “in the shadow of the Almighty” today! We can know that our future has been secured!

**7. Read Romans 8:31-39 aloud. How should you handle your fears in light of this truth? Take a minute in prayer to reflect on God's care and protection, and surrender your fears to Him.** God has made it abundantly and graphically clear to us in the cross of Christ that we are his treasured possession. He will allow nothing to come between Himself and us. He gave us the greatest gift with his Son Christ. So we needn't think he will hold back smaller gifts from us now. We can rest secure in the abundant love and awesome power of our Savior and our God.



## DAY 4 – The Woman Who Made Room

### Summary

Making room in our busy lives for our neighbor was just as difficult 2000 years ago as it is today. Man is broken *inside*. Our sin nature is bent toward self fulfillment and self preservation. If there can be any hope for man to become genuinely loving, it can only come from *outside* of man; it must be a divine source. God has provided this for us. Our example for love can only be found in the person of Jesus Christ (Mark 10:45). Our motivation for love can only found in embracing the love he first demonstrated to us (1 John 4:19) at the cross, allowing it to change our way of seeing our world. And after seeing, allowing it to change our way of responding to what we see. We love because we are greatly loved.

### Close Look: Seeing Others with Jesus Eyes

**1. Who do you think of as a Good Samaritan for modern times? You can mention famous people, but also think of examples nearer to you?**

You might ask why the participant regards the individual mentioned as a Good Samaritan. Are there certain exemplary characteristics that stand out in that individual's life? What would those be? Self-sacrifice, service, humility, compassion, passion, or something other?

**2. What do you think is behind the lawyer's question in Luke 10:25?**

**What attitude or "way of seeing" controlled his heart (10:25-29)?** The lawyer's question in verse 25 seems to point to a heart controlled by duty rather than love toward God. This trickles down into the way he saw his fellow man. Loving his neighbor was a point of *debate*, not *doing*. At the very least, the lawyer wanted to limit his obligation to love his fellow man, turning into a philosophical question (v29). Jesus reminded him by the story that it loving is a simple and practical matter.

**3. How did the robbers treat this traveler? Note the actions (10:30).**

The robbers ambushed the traveler, "*stripped him*" of what was usable to them, "*beat him*" needlessly, and "*left him*" to die, completing their utter disregard for the value of this man to God.

**How did the priest and Levite respond to the man's need (10:31,32)?**

The priest and Levite avoided the issue and instead "*passed by on the other side*" After all, this man's problem wasn't their fault or concern!

Perhaps they reasoned someone else would come along. Perhaps they thought the bandits might still be waiting about. Perhaps they were concerned with impurity issues of handling a corpse. Regardless of their excuse, they failed to demonstrate the love and mercy they had just experienced in the temple, forgetting that serving man is the primary way we serve God. When love for God is divorced from love for man, Christianity become an empty religious system.

**How did the Samaritan respond? Note five actions (10:33-34):** The Samaritan "*saw*" the wounded man (v33). He recognized the need. He "*took pity on him*" (v33). He had genuine concern. He "*went to him*" (v34), turning his emotion into action and response. He "*bandaged his wounds*" (v34), tenderly treating the man's injury with oil and wine, and easing his transport to an inn with a spot on his own donkey. There, the Good Samaritan "*took care of him*" (v34), nursing him back toward recovery, and paying out of his own pocket for his full convalescence. It might be said that the Good Samaritan used all the resources in his means to help this stranger (and enemy) in need.

**Of the characters in the story, who can you most identify with? Why?**

**When have you been a traveler, a robber, a priest/Levite, or Samaritan?**

All of us have felt victimized in life at one point or another, but it is harder to recognize that we may have knowingly or unknowingly victimized our fellow man. Perhaps we haven't acted in the brutal way of the robbers and their flagrant use of the poor traveler, but we may have used another "traveler" in life to advance our own purposes or desires. Or, perhaps like the priest/Levite, we have intentionally side-stepped a fellow "traveler" when it was well within our means to bring physical, emotional or spiritual comfort and healing. On the other hand, we may not regard ourselves to have even acted as the Good Samaritan did in this story. Let's remember, though, that any small act, done with great love because of Christ, is never wasted by God. Each one act of love in the hands of our Lord is multiplied and used to reveal his great glory, and to reveal his great love for us.

**4. Each character "saw" the traveler. How did they "see" him differently? What attitude of these characters controlled their actions?:**

The robbers saw the traveler as an object to exploit for their own selfish wants. The priest and Levite saw the traveler as a problem to avoid. The Samaritan saw the traveler as a human of worth with a need to be met.

***With what set of eyes are we to see our neighbors? What makes it difficult for you to have Good Samaritan eyes toward others?*** Multiple reasons can be given here for why we don't act more like the Good Samaritan toward our neighbor. Fundamentally, before love can be given in great measure, it must be received in great measure (see Luke 7:47). Let's drink deeply, joyfully, and humbly from the well that is the love and compassion of God for us.

***5. Now note how God "sees" us and responds to our need. Write down your observations from these verses***

Matthew 9:36: Jesus shows compassion for helpless multitudes, seeing beyond the noise and commotion, to the need of the person.

Psalms 103:8-14: The psalmist recognizes the great compassion of God in His physical, emotional and spiritual care of man.

Matthew 14:14, 20:34: Jesus' great compassion moves him to heal and touch those regarded to be unclean and unapproachable.

2 Corinthians 1:2-4: God comforts us. His comfort for us is intended for us to "pay forward" to others in need of comfort.

Psalms 147:3: God knows our heart's hurts and pains. He acts as the Great Physician for our souls.

1 John 3:16: Jesus' divine selflessness led him to give the ultimate gift, shedding his blood for the church he loved.

***6. How are the actions of the Good Samaritan like what God has done for us in Jesus Christ? How is Christ the ultimate Good Samaritan?***

While we must be careful not to interpret this story as a spiritual allegory of salvation – Jesus is teaching about practical Christian living through this story – we can still see how the passage whispers the name of Jesus as the ultimate example of service. We can see in Christ's example, a model and motivation for serving our fellow man. A true Good Samaritan is one that selflessly gives beyond what the recipient might ever hope to repay [see question 1]. Is this not what Christ has done for us? Jesus saw our need for forgiveness. Instead of passing by, he sacrificed all to rescue us from guilt, punishment and death. Looking at the depth of Christ's love for us, how could we choose to do nothing in the face of needs around us that cost us far less to meet?

***7. Read Colossians 3:12-14 aloud. What is the basis for the appeal Paul makes? Take a minute to ask God to help you see others as he does.***

We are "chosen," "holy," and "dearly loved" (v12). Moreover, we have been forgiven in Christ (v13) of an enormous debt. In a word, grace can be a powerful motivating force in our service to one another. Take time to reflect quietly on this as a group before thanking God in prayer.

## DAY 5 – Toilet Paper Panic!

### Summary

Panic comes when we take our eyes off of the Lord's care, and our minds off of the record of his provision. We have a gracious Heavenly Father. We have his record of care in the lives of his children. We needn't doubt that he knows our need, nor that he has the power and desire to fill it. We can trust his daily grace in our lives and experience His peace. Perhaps the greatest grace, is not just giving us "bread for life," but giving us The Bread of Life. We have more than our daily bread to assure us that God is faithful and loving. We have Jesus, too! What more do we need?

### Close Look: Heaven's Bread Truck

***1. Was there a time in life for you when God provided for your need in an unexpected or unusual way? What was it?*** Give your participants time to reflect a bit on their past experiences with God's provision. God's provision for our needs can sometimes come in remarkable ways. Just consider Elijah's experience of being fed by ravens! (1 Kings 17:6). Remind your participants, however, that God is also in the "mundane and ordinary" daily supply of their needs.

***2. What was Israel's response to their need in Exodus 16:1-3? What might have been a better response (Philippians 4:6)? What is your typical response to a need in your life?*** The Israelites *looked around* for someone to blame (v2), and *looked back* at what they supposed they once had (v3), instead of *looking up* to God to supply their need and relieve their anxiety (Philippians 4:6). It may be hard to understand why they thought God, who led them out of Egypt through powerful miracles and dry sea bed, would now allow them to starve in the wilderness. But we

see in the Israelites the natural inclination of sinful man. Grumbling instead of praying is a natural response, but it is the wrong place to put our energy when we have a loving Heavenly Father waiting to care for us.

**3. What purposes other than filling their stomachs did God have for giving the manna (Exodus 16:4)? (See also Deuteronomy 8:3.)**

God said he was giving the Israelites a test by giving them manna every morning. Every morning they went out and picked up just enough for that day. Every night they went to bed without any bread in the house. There were no stores, no marketplaces, no gardens. There were no human means of filling their need. There was only heaven's bread truck. In this way God showed the Israelites that he alone is the one who graciously supplies the life-giving needs of man, and they should place their faith and trust in Him to do so, and obey Him with joy in life.

**What ultimate provision did the manna foreshadow (John 6:35)?**

Don't miss the context for this verse in chapter 6. Jesus had just miraculously filled the physical needs of a large crowd with five loaves and two fish. Now he turns their attention to their true spiritual need. Of all our needs, God wants to supply our spiritual hunger the most. We are reminded that "*Man does not live by bread alone*" (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4). Jesus is the provision for a spiritual need nothing else can satisfy. The Bread of Life fills our deepest hungers. "*If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever*" (6:51).

**4. How frequently did God bring the manna (16:21)? How long did this provision last (16:35)? When did it end (Joshua 5:12)?** The manna came every morning, except on the seventh day (v21, v26), for their entire 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (v35). That daily provision lasted until they reached the border of Canaan and began to eat the food from the land there (Joshua 5:12).

**What does this teach us about the nature of God's provision and care?**

Each day for forty years two million people in the desert picked up their needed food for the day! For two million people, they needed 1,500 tons of manna each day. For cooking they needed 4,000 tons of wood. For drinking and washing they needed 11,000,000 gallons of water every day. All of this came from the hand of God! God is gracious and faithful. He can be trusted to provide today as he provided then.

**Even though God supplied the manna, what did the people have**

**to do (Numbers 11:7-8)?** The Israelites need to gather the manna, grind it, cook it and prepare it into cakes for eating. There was real work involved!

**What does this teach you about what your responsibilities are in your needs, and what God's are?** Even though bread fell from heaven, it did not fall straight into their mouths. Some effort was required by the Israelites to receive what God had waiting for them. It is the same with us. Although God takes ultimate responsibility in providing for his children (Philippians 4:19), we must still move out in faith and do our part to receive the provision waiting for us.

**5. When the work of gathering was done, what did each person discover (16:16-18)? What does this teach you about how frantically you must work or worry about having enough? (See also 2 Corinthians 8:14-15.)**

No one had too much or too little. They all wound up with just what they needed to feed them for the day (v16-18). Frantic work and frantic worry is an unnecessary use of physical and emotional energy when we enjoy a relationship with Jehovah Jireh, our Provider. He may not give us surplus, but he will not leave us in want.

**What happened when the people tried to keep a surplus (16:19-20)?**

**How are you to trust God's future provision to come (Matthew 6:11)?**

Manna hoarded beyond their need rotted and became maggot filled. It was unsuitable for anything! God's provision often comes just one day at a time. This is what Jesus urged us toward in the Lord's prayer. The key words in "*Give us today our daily bread*" are "*today*" and "*daily*." The life of faith is taken day by day in a trust relationship with our Lord.

**6. What did God tell Moses to do with some of the manna in 16:32-34? Why (verse 32b)? How do you remind yourself of God's past provision?**

Some of the manna was to be put in a jar and kept as a reminder for future generations of God's provision. Forgetfulness is easy for man when it comes to God's blessing and provision. Good memory can help us trust God today on the basis of yesterday's provision in our lives. We need to consider ways to visually jumpstart our memory toward the record of God's faithful care over time.

**7. Read Matthew 6:25-34 aloud. Which verse speaks to where you are right now? Read and meditate on God's promise in Psalm 37:25.** This passage from the Jesus' teaching on the mountainside is probably well known by your small group participants. Read it slowly aloud again. Jesus pointed to flowers and birds, but he could have drawn their attention to

anything in creation. All creation points to God's sustaining care and attention. All creation is at rest before Him. God wants us to depend on His care in the same way. And then experience rest, not anxiety.

## DAY 6 – The Man Who Sailed His House

### Summary

Most of us hate to wait. We expect traffic and checkout lanes to flow at our pace. We surround ourselves with gadgets that work at blistering speeds to grant our requests. And we often approach God with similar expectations. If God has the power to act and change my circumstances, we wonder why he does not do so immediately. It often seems that God has put our life on hold. But God is not stringing us along in our wait for him to act. He is preparing all things, most importantly us, to be ready for his next big work or rescue. Our rescue is surely coming. And when we look back we will say along with David: *"I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God"* (Psalm 40:1-2).

### Close Look: God's Waiting Room

**1. What in your life have you waited for God to do? Has there been a point in your life when the timing of his rescue seemed off to you?** Let your participants share their experiences of being in God's waiting room during difficult personal circumstances. Where there a health problem that wasn't healed, a new job that wasn't found, a marriage partner that didn't appear, a legal matter that wasn't resolved, or something else? Looking back, can they see any purpose God may have had in their wait?

**2. What are the circumstances facing David in which he is waiting for God's rescue (Psalm 27:2-3)? What images of rescue and safety does he use for God (27:1, 5)?** David likely wrote this psalm while on the run from King Saul and his men. Verses 2~3 speak of his life being in danger from those who hunted for him. David didn't know if these enemies would make a sudden attack like a wild animal (v2), or lie in

wait like an army in siege (v3). Yet, he declares that God is his *"light"* from the blackness around him, his *"salvation"* and certain rescue, his *"stronghold"* in whose strength his fears were calmed (v1). The Lord was all that that David needed in the middle of mortal uncertainty. David envisions entering the tabernacle where God would keep him *"safe"* and *"sheltered"* in his presence (v5). God would take personal responsibility for David who flees to His house for protection. God would be the *"rock"* (v5) upon whom David is raised to a place of unmoveable surety and unfailing dependability.

***In the midst of his waiting, where does he choose to put his focus (27:4)?*** David's thoughts lead him back to the tabernacle, and to the glory and majesty of God. In the middle of the wilderness he worships. He reflects on God and is caught up in a desire to *"gaze upon the beauty of the Lord."* David does not ignore the reality of his dangerous situation, but he chooses to lift his heart up in worship, and re-center his life around the only real source of comfort and encouragement in life.

**3. Besides David, can you name 3 or 4 other Bible characters who were placed in God's waiting room? From what circumstances did they await God's rescue? What was the final outcome?** God often allows his children to be tested in the *"furnace of affliction"* (Isaiah 48:10), preparing them on the inside during their wait for Him to work in their circumstances. If your group has a hard time coming up with names, nudge their memory from the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. Consider how difficult it might have been for...

- 1) Noah to wait 120 years for rain, and then 40 days for it to stop
- 2) Abraham to wait 25 years for his promised son, Isaac
- 3) Joseph to wait 2 years in an Egyptian prison
- 4) Moses to wait 40 years in the wilderness of Midian
- 5) The Israelites to wait 430 years for their exodus of Egypt
- 6) Gideon to wait 7 years for his people's deliverance from enemies

...and the list could go on. The major work that God was to do through each of them came only after an excruciating wait. The same is true for us. God may orchestrate the most important events in our life after the necessary preparations in our spiritual character are complete. His timetable is perfect. His preparation is based on his incomparable wisdom. Remember that, *"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord"* (Lamentations 3:25-26).

***Are you inclined to be impatient with God's timing? What does Isaiah 30:15-18 urge you to do? How did those above follow that principle?***

God urges the children of Israel, and us, to run to Him in “*repentance and rest*” and trust Him to be their strength. Instead, Israel ran away from Him in their sin and idolatry. They supposed that other gods and nations would be their protection. Even the “*swift horses*” (v16) they imported from Egypt (v2-6) could not save them. Isaiah prophesies concerning their destruction and humility at the hand of their enemies, the Assyrians, who would make a mockery of them (v17). Still, God desires to be gracious to them (v18). Ultimately, we cannot fully trust the promises of anyone or anything in this world. And so our great God urges us to find rest in him as we trust his timing on matters beyond our control.

***4. Waiting is active work. What does David encourage you to do (or not do) in Psalm 37:3-11 as you wait God's timing? What is the result?***

Notice the action verbs in these verses. We are to “*trust*” (v3), “*delight*” (v4), “*commit*” (v5), “*be still*” (v7) and “*hope*” (v9). We are not to “*fret*” (1, 8) or give into “*anger*” (v8), which only steal the emotional energy we should apply to our faith. Notice the positive results, the dependent clauses after the verbs, from each of these actions. God has great blessing in store for those who choose to surrender their plans to his purposes. He already has our vindication and future worked out (v6, 9). He promises peace and rest ahead (v3, 11), if we'll just wait and trust him for it.

***5. How is waiting related to contentment (Philippians 4:11-13)?***

Contentment is quiet trust that God will give us what we need when we need it, and satisfy our desires with what we have. We needn't chase after things in a reckless attempt to be our own provider. Whether in need or plenty, we can discover contentment. We can wait through anything by the strength of the One who lives inside us (v13).

***How is waiting related to faith (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)?*** Faith leads to endurance. Faith gives us eternal perspective in our wait to help us see things properly. Faith realizes that this world is but a temporary place and looks toward what God has for us in all eternity (v18). If placed on a scale, the “*weight*” of our eternal glory far exceeds our cares and problems the now (v17). Moreover, in the middle of our wait, we can expect to be “*renewed day by day*” and step by step in our journey with our Savior.

***6. Believing the truth of Romans 8:28, can God have purposes in the timing of his rescue? What value do you think waiting brings?***

God's “*good*” for us may not always come in a shape or way we might consider to be good. Being conformed into the image of his Son (v29), and being used to reflect His glory (2 Corinthians 3:18) may not always be easy for us. But this is the greater good that God is moving us toward. And we can rest assured that his plans for us, laid out from eternity past, will be understood as *good* in the final analysis of eternity future.

***7. Read Micah 7:7 aloud. What confidence can you always have in your waiting? Can you make this your prayer, too?*** We know that God hears us (v7). The inner groans of our waiting are understood by our loving Heavenly Father. He has not abandoned or ignored us. His ear is open to our cries and prayers. In his time and way, he will answer us. This is our hope in the wait. (See also Romans 8:25-26). Give your small group participants time to silently reflect this verse and its application for their current wait. You might read it aloud as you close your time in prayer.

## **DAY 7 – The Kamaishi Miracle**

### **Summary**

We often make careful plans for emergencies. We buy insurance. We keep some spare cash and contact information on hand. We stock some extra food items. We might even build a storm shelter or buy a generator. We make this preparation to protect life and limb. But we often miss preparation for matters of eternity. The lives of those around us, perhaps we ourselves, are in this mortal danger. Christ is coming soon! Eternity for us or others may begin tomorrow! We have no guarantees of a long life or constant opportunity. Scripture reminds us repeatedly to check on our preparation for eternity, and live in such a way as to invest our time, talent and treasure for things of eternity.

### **Close Look: Spiritual “Tendenko”**

***1. Has there been a time when you found yourself unprepared for an important event, test, meeting or appointment? What was it?*** Allow your participants to share about an incident in their lives when they were

less than prepared for things. Worry, fear, embarrassment, and even anger and self-condemnation can often result. Most of all, when we are caught unprepared, we often miss out on the best that was in store for us.

**2. Read the parable in Luke 12:13-21. What did Jesus warn the crowd about? Why (12:15)?** All kinds of greed. Greed is one of the sin nature's strongest urges. We have a drive to accumulate. But, as Jesus points out in this verse, this misses the purpose of our lives: *"a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions"* (v15).

**What false assumption(s) does the rich man make about his situation? Where was his life centered (12:19)?** He assumed: 1) he had produced these things by his own hand, 2) he had many years to come, 3) his possessions would guarantee his future, 4) his best use of life was to *"eat, drink and be merry."*

**What did he prepare and what did he fail to prepare (12:20)?** He prepared for his physical needs, but he failed to prepare for his spiritual and eternal needs.

**How might he have been "rich toward God?" (See 1 Timothy 6:17-19.) How should eternity change your attitude or use of what you possess?**

Material resources (whether in small or great amounts) are given by God for the purpose of stewardship, not mere enjoyment. What we possess is given as a trust by God, and intended to be put to work for his glory. This includes looking at the needs of our fellow man and considering how God has enabled us to meet those needs. Jesus reminds us that, *"whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me"* (Matthew 25:40). We are to be *"rich in good deeds,"* not worldly possessions. By using what we have for God today, we are storing up blessing for eternity to come. Eternity is much more real than this present world, and will soon be our only reality. As missionary C.T. Studd wrote: *"Only one life t'will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."*

**3. Read Matthew 25:1-13 again. What are the ten maidens waiting for in this parable (25:1)? How did their preparation differ (25:3-4)?** The ten maidens (or virgins) are waiting the coming of the bridegroom. Five wise ones took their lamps and extra oil along with them. Five foolish ones failed to plan and took only their lamps.

**How did all respond to the seeming delay of the Bridegroom (25:5)? What was the tragic result of the foolishness of five (25:10-12)?** All of them fell asleep while waiting for the bridegroom. The five foolish

maidens missed the coming of the bridegroom because of their need to buy more oil. They were shut out of the wedding banquet and not allowed entry nor acknowledged by the bridegroom as belonging there.

**With what warning does Jesus conclude this parable (25:13; cf. 24:42)? What does this parable teach about individual spiritual readiness?** Jesus says, *"Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."* This admonition is repeated twice in this set of teaching. We should prepare for and expect the return of our Savior for us. It would be tragic to be caught unprepared for eternity and miss out on the greatest joy and celebration man can know. Someday it will be too late for us to have a relationship with the Bridegroom. We must live today as if our Savior may come by getting our "lamps" trimmed and filled, that is, by getting spiritually ready for eternity with him.

**How might you lovingly remind those around you of this?** We wouldn't think of watching a house to burn down without warning the occupants of the danger. We must remember that those around us are in a spiritual danger of an even greater magnitude. Eternity can be spent with those we love. But our gentle witness may be needed to encourage them to think beyond this world to spiritual matters of eternity.

**4. Read Matthew 25:14-30 again. Whose property did the Master entrust and in what proportion (25:15)? What did each do?** The Master entrusted his *own* property in proportion to the ability of the servant. They were to use this money to bring in additional revenue for the Master. The servants with five talents and two talents each doubled their amounts. The servant with one talent buried his in the ground.

**What do you suppose motivated the actions of the lazy servant?** The servant's criticism of his master in verses 24 and 25 seems to indicate a lack of love and respect for his master and his estate. The servant was more than simply lazy or careless, he had no desire to see his master receive credit and glory. His actions and words show that he despised his master and resented the work he was expected to do.

**What do you suppose motivated the actions of the faithful servants?** The faithful servants genuinely loved their master and wanted to work hard on his behalf. They exhibit a careful regard for his property entrusted to them. Their actions show they wanted their master to receive more and wanted his estate to prosper and expand.

***What should be your motive? How should the imminent return of your Lord and Master change how or why you use what he's entrusted to you (1 Peter 4:7-10)?*** At the heart of our service should be a deep love for our Lord and Master and a desire to see his kingdom expand and his glory known. Time is short. The task is urgent. Our Lord may return at any moment in the second advent. Eternity for some may begin today. We must use time as one of the precious resources we have been entrusted with to manage wisely.

***5. How do these parables illustrate the principles suggested for spiritual tendenko above? (cf. last paragraph, page 32)*** 1) Don't assume! 2) Take the lead! 3) Do your utmost! Given the reality of heaven and hell, and imminent return of our Lord and Master, we should do a spiritual check of our lives. Have we placed our faith in Christ alone to bring forgiveness from sin and to open the door to eternity after this life? Don't assume! Be prepared! If we have made this spiritual preparation, are we serving our Master joyfully and lovingly by helping others understand the critical nature of this life and death decision for themselves? Take the lead! Do your utmost! Others are waiting for your gentle spiritual leadership. Our Master is worthy of our best effort. It is the wisest investment of time and resources that you can make!

***6. Read Ephesians 5:15-17 aloud. How might you live wisely with a watchful eye on eternity this coming week?*** Give your group some time to reflect on this question silently. The way of using our short time in this world wisely is by understanding the will of God for us (v17) in our day by day life. We can easily be busy in frantic efforts of service to God and be totally out of sync with his desire for our use of that energy. To be effective in the Christian life, we must be Spirit filled to discern the way that God would have us use our time, and to recognize the God-ordained opportunities around us. Encourage your small group participants toward seeking the Spirit's filling and leading of their lives anew.

## DAY 8 – Going to the Rubble

### Summary

One's work for God can only begin when one has first mourned over the conditions of things. What brokenness in your world makes you weep? Do you weep not just because people are being hurt, but because God is being denied rightful glory in this brokenness? Do you say, "Well, this is just the way it is. I have to accept it." Perhaps God has a different plan for your community, for your neighbors, for your family. And perhaps you are intended to be a part of it, even in some small way. Go to the rubble and really look with the eyes of your heart. Then consider how Christ modeled ministry in the rubble of humanity. *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps"* 1 Peter 2:21.

### Close Look: Down into the Rubble

***1. When people would ask Mother Teresa how they might be of help to the work in Calcutta, her response was often simply, "Come and see." Why is going to "see" a critical first step in our work in the "rubble?"*** Helen Keller once said, "The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but not really looking." Really *seeing* is the first step in the heart *understanding*. Just as "a picture is worth a thousand words," a visual experience fills in detail where a verbal explanation never can. To truly "see" is to perceive, to consider, and to know with the heart the circumstances and needs before you. This leads to conviction that something must be done to change the situation, which leads to a passion to personally do something to effect that change.

***2. How did God choose to enter the "rubble" of this world (John 1:1-5, Philippians 2:5-8)?*** Jesus put aside his glory when he entered the dark world of humanity. Jesus did not assert his rights, nor consider the privileges of deity as something selfishly to hold onto. Instead, in the incarnation, he temporarily gave them up for our sakes. Jesus "emptied himself" (the Greek word for this is *kenosis*) of his own heavenly glory, and submitted himself completely to his Father's will. At the same time, he took upon himself the limitations of humanity (but not sin). In the ultimate act of humility, Jesus gave himself to crucifixion on a cross (a symbol of shame) and died for those he created and loved.

**To what extent has Christ experienced our human condition (Hebrews 4:15, Isaiah 53:3)? How does this comfort or encourage you?** Jesus experienced the full extent of what it means to be human (but did not sin). He knew what it was to be rejected, scorned, abandoned and lonely. He knew suffering and pain. He knew grief and sadness and temptation. Jesus was familiar with all the ways of man emotionally and physically. And so he is able to “*sympathize with our weaknesses*” (v15) completely. We can rest in the fact that our Heavenly Father knows and understands both our humanity and our situation. “*He knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust*” Psalm 103:14.

**3. Where did Jesus get into the “messy” lives of this world (Mark 2:15-17)? What does this way that Jesus engaged his world mean to you?** Jesus chose to be around “*sinners and tax collectors,*” the dregs of society considered untouchable by good Jewish men, much less a good rabbi and teacher as Jesus was supposed to be. Jesus prioritized human need over his personal reputation or comfort. He showed that although these people had been rejected by society, they were precious and valuable, and fully accepted by God. How easy it is for us to see others, and miss the seeing them as created in the image of God, and so infused with infinite worth. We are to “*regard no one from a worldly point of view*” because “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation!*” (1 Corinthians 5:16-17)

**What did Jesus understand as his hands-on mission in the rubble (Luke 4:16-21)?** Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:1-2 and states that he has come to bring “*the year of the Lord’s favor*” or “*Year of Jubilee*” described in Leviticus 25. The purpose of the Year of Jubilee was a rebalancing of the economic and political system. Land was returned, slaves could return home, and debtors were released of their obligations. Man and animal rested and enjoyed the blessing of the Lord.

Jesus now applies this Year of Jubilee to his own mission in the world. *Spiritually*, when a person comes to faith in Christ, they enter a spiritual Year of Jubilee. Their spiritual poverty has been replaced by God’s riches, they have been set free from sin, their eyes have been opened, their spiritual debt to God has been paid, they are living in “*the year of the Lord’s favor.*” But Jesus’ mission included more than just preaching these spiritual truths. *Physically*, he touched and healed those rejected, abused and ignored by society. In a holistic way, he got into the “*mud and rubble*”

of hurts and brokenness. *Spiritually* and *physically* he enabled people to get a fresh start in life.

**4. Consider the humility and work of Jesus in the “rubble.” What roles does he take for our sakes?**

- 1) He is the King who becomes (Mark 10:45): the servant
- 2) He is the Shepherd who becomes (1 Peter 1:19 ): the lamb
- 3) He is the Priest who becomes (Hebrews 10:10): the sacrifice
- 4) He is the Judge who becomes (Isaiah 53:5): the punishment

**How does this speak to you about the extent of Jesus’ love in meeting humanity’s need?** Jesus did not count the cost of our need, but was willing to lay it all down that we might made whole, and wholly forgiven, purified, and reunited with God again. “*Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*” (1 John 4:11).

**5. How does Jesus pray concerning our involvement in the “rubble” of this world (John 17:15-18)? How do we put this together with the Bible’s warnings regarding worldliness (1 John 2:15-16)?** Jesus prays that we would be *protected* and *pure*, even as we are *present* in the world. It would be easy for us to swept away into world’s ways of seeing and doing things. We are to be *IN* the world, but not *OF* the world. We must set our minds and hearts apart for Christ, remembering that we are to represent him and reflect his kingdom’s values, and not this world’s.

**6. What might entering the rubble of this world involve for us?**

- |                            |                                      |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 Peter 2:20-23: suffering | Matthew 5:11-12: persecution         |
| Luke 18:29-30: sacrifice   | Luke 9:23: rejection and self-denial |

**7. Read Hebrews 6:10-12 and Galatians 6:9 aloud. How are we encouraged to keep up our work in the rubble?** God sees our work even if it goes largely unnoticed by others. He knows our heart and our love expressed for him in our service to even “*the least of these.*” He will reward and bless us for the sacrifices we have made in His name. Eternity to come will tell the full story of the impact we have made in the lives of others. So be encouraged, although it may be discouraging and difficult at times, to continue on in the work you are doing in the rubble because of Jesus and for Jesus



## DAY 9 – The Heroic “Fukushima Fifty”

### Summary

The great act of self-sacrifice by the Fifty may help us understand why the Bible says there is a love worth knowing. All selflessness human love is but a “dim reflection” of the ultimate work of God in Christ. It is this love that we are encouraged to know, let fill the crevices of our broken hearts, allow to do its work of healing and repair, and then let overflow to the world around us. Love is not simply an attitude or idea, it is an action to be demonstrated to our family, neighbor, friend in need, and even enemy. It shows our understanding of God’s nature. And it reveals God’s nature to others as we model the humility and sacrifice of our Savior.

*“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16).*

### Close Look: Love Worth Sharing

**1. What is the description of love according to the world?** At its core, the motivation for love seen in the world is often self. The result is brokenness and hurt. The description is just as pathetic. We all yearn for a fulfilling love of beauty and richness beyond what we see in the world around us. But such true love is only an elusive dream at best until we encounter the person of Christ.

**2. What are some ways that God’s love and human love are different?**

SCRIPTURE	GOD’S LOVE	HUMAN LOVE
1) Ephesians 2:4-9	Unconditional	Conditional
2) Jeremiah 31:3	Changeless	Changing
3) Philippians 2:6-8	Self-emptying	Self-centered
4) 1 Corinthians 13:1-8	Perfect & complete	Imperfect & incomplete

**3. Reflect on 1 Corinthians 13 again. Think about the life of Christ based on this passage. How does he perfectly fit this description of love? How have you experienced the love of God in this way?** Human love is intended to be but an imperfect glimpse at God’s love. Even at its best, human love is fickle. It changes with the seasons. It is given conditionally. It can disappoint us, or leave us when things get hard. Human love can be a unsatisfying experience. God’s love is different. 1 Corinthians 13 describes what God’s perfect agape love is like: patient, kind, not envious,

not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered, not keeping a record of wrongs...never failing. The picture of love painted in 1 Corinthians 13 is that of Jesus, the perfection of love.

***Where was this love put on display for us (John 13:1, Romans 5:8)?***

Examples of the love of Jesus continue through his life and ministry and take on new clarity in Passion Week leading up to his ultimate display of love on the cross. The washing of the disciples’ feet in John 13 is just another picture of the self-emptying way that Jesus humbled himself to serve the needs of man. His love was one that stooped to wash both the filth from man’s feet, and the filth from man’s heart alike. The complete humility put on display with basin and towel foreshadowed his ultimate love put on display at the cross.

***4. How are you encouraged to know/experience it (Ephesians 3:17-19)?***

We are encouraged to know the full extent of God’s love, letting its breadth, length, depth and height overwhelm us with a sense of gratitude and awe of how God cares for even us, and letting us move our hearts to a response of action in our service to others. Matthew Henry’s commentary reads, “By the breadth of it we may understand the extent of it to all ages, nations, and ranks of men; by the length of it, its continuance from everlasting to everlasting; by the depth of it, its stooping to the lowest condition, with a design to relieve and save those who have sunk into the depths of sin and misery; by its height, its entitling and raising us up to the heavenly happiness and glory.”

***How are you to live in light of it (1 John 3:16-18)?*** Love changes everything about our relationships. Love cannot be contained in mere thoughts or words, it will naturally overflow to our everyday actions toward our fellow man. And we are to allow this overflow to occur. Love in action bubbles up from the spring of God’s never-ending love toward us. Love in action shows that we truly understand the divine grace by which we are saved and by which we live.

***5. How does your idea of what it means to love fall short of what you see in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8? Where do you feel the greatest difference?*** The clearer the reflection, the clearer the imperfections are seen. With the perfect love of our Savior in view, we feel the true imperfection of our own. Let’s face it. Our love is often impatient, unkind, envious, rude, self-seeking, easily angered, keeps a record of wrongs, and fails. Perhaps in one of these areas of weakness our imperfect love comes out most readily. Which would this be for you?

***What kind of person would give “all [he] possesses to the poor” and even “surrender [his] body to the flames” without love? Why does Paul say that such a person gains nothing?*** 1 Corinthians 13 makes it clear that service to God devoid of Christlike love does nothing for us in bringing growth and joy, and merits nothing in the sight of God. We might go through the motions of service without our heart being in the work. We can even make great sacrifices, but do so out of a passionless sense of obligation or duty.

***6. Has there been a time when you “sacrificed” without love and felt like you hadn’t gained anything? What is the result of a life of sacrifice without love (Luke 15:25-32)?***

The elder son in Jesus’ parable of the lost son in Luke 15 characterizes a person of service without love. When the father welcomed him to rejoice together, he saw himself only as a victim who did not receive what he was owed. If he had really understood the true heart of the father, and been serving the father out of a true heart of love, he would not have regarded his service to be sacrifice at all.

We, too, can be busy accomplishing our list of tasks for God’s kingdom, but fail to allow our heart to be in the work we are doing. It becomes a “sacrifice” without joy. Our motivation is skewed. And so we miss out on an opportunity to grow personally and celebrate with others.

***7. Read 1 John 4:7-12 aloud. What happens when we truly love others (4:12)? How might you share this love this week?*** When we truly love others, people see God on display in our lives. As the moon reflects the light of the sun, so we reflect the glory of our Lord. The glory is not our own. It belongs to God. He is pleased to allow us to reveal himself, and his perfect love, through us, imperfect though we may be.

## **DAY 10 – The “Jesus People” of Taro**

### **Summary**

The term “Christian” first used for followers of Christ in Antioch (Acts 11:26) was probably a one of contempt. It means literally “little Christs.” Those who adopted this term were following the example of their teacher, Jesus Christ. Eventually Christians came to see this term as one of honor

(Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Whether people call us “Christians” or “Jesus People”, it must be because Christ Jesus is being revealed in some way in our lives. What a great privilege to bear the name of our Savior! What a joy to know that, regardless of our failings, we are being transformed to be more and more like Him! This transformation is the hope and expectation of the Christian. By the power of the One who lives in us (Galatians 2:20), we are being changed daily to resemble his nature. And we can anticipate that others will see Christ in us and be changed as well.

### **Close Look: Becoming “Jesus People”**

***1. Have you ever felt embarrassed or proud to be called (or to call yourself) a Christian? When and why?*** Guilt by association? At times we may hesitate to identify ourselves as a Christian. Perhaps we feel that the lives of some Christians are a poor “advertisement” for Christianity, or that the term “Christian” itself carries negative baggage in our context. But should it? Maybe God would have us be the one who changes the opinions of those around us. Yes, it is unfortunate that many have brought shame instead of glory to the name of Christ. But there are many positive examples of Christians throughout history (and today) who truly walk as “*children of light*” (Ephesians 5:8), and show that they love and live for Him. These are examples should weigh more heavily in our minds.

***2. What do you consider to be the ultimate goal in a Christian’s life? How did Paul sum up his goal for life in Philippians 3:10-12? Who are you becoming like according to 2 Corinthians 3:18?*** Paul knows that what he “gave up” in his conversion to Christianity (v8) was worthless in comparison to the treasure of Christ and his right standing with God (v9). He now makes it his goal in life to more intimately reach toward the One who reached out to him. “The knowledge of Christ in glory was the supreme desire of Paul’s heart” (C.A. Coates). Paul determines to increasingly identify with his Savior in every way, including suffering, so that Christ and his glory would be revealed in his life. He realizes that he is being transformed daily into the likeness and exalted glory of Christ. This transformation will not happen quickly or easily in our lives. And while our ultimate glorification will be in heaven, we can expect that God will help us to resemble Christ inwardly more and more each day.

**3. To the chagrin or pride of their parents, children will often imitate their mother or father. It's proof they're family and know each other well. Who does Paul urge you to imitate in Ephesians 5:1? Why?** We are to imitate our heavenly Father. Since we have been brought into a loving relationship with Father God and adopted as his children, we should make it our desire to live in a way that reflects and honors Him. This is a part of our expression of love toward Him (5:2).

**Read aloud these Bible passages that urge you to imitate or follow.**  
(Hebrews 6:12, 13:7) Imitate the lives of Bible saints and leaders.  
(1 Cor 11:1, 1 Pe 2:21) Follow Christ. Follow leaders who follow Christ.

**Now look at some areas in which you are urged to imitate/follow Christ:**  
(Ephesians 5:2) in His love  
(Philippians 2:5-8) in His humility  
(John 13:12-15) in His service  
(1 Peter 4:16, 2:21) in His suffering  
(John 20:21) in His mission

**4. Becoming more like Christ requires some work on your part. What are you to put off, renew, and put on according to Ephesians 4:22-24?**  
PUT OFF: your old self, desires and behaviors  
RENEW: the attitude of your minds  
PUT ON: the new self, created to be Godlike

**How are you urged to live or not live in verses 4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, 5:15?**  
DO LIVE: a life worthy of your calling from God (4:1), a life of love that imitates Christ (5:2), as children of light who reflect the True Light (5:8), as wise people (5:15), purposefully *and* worthily *and* accurately (AMP)  
DON'T LIVE: like the Gentiles (those who don't believe in God) (4:17), like unwise people (5:15), purposelessly *and* unworthily *and* inaccurately (AMP).

**Living like this perfectly is impossible in your own strength. What does Paul urge you to do in 5:18b? (See also Colossians 1:27.)** We are to “*be filled with the Spirit.*” This is our secret source of strength for the Christian life. Being filled here means to “be controlled by.” The verb here is in the present tense and might be translated, “keep on being filled.” We can’t live the Christian life by yesterday’s spiritual victories. We need to “keep on” submitting ourselves to the Holy Spirit’s control and guidance of our actions and attitudes. As one Christian has said, “The problem with broken vessels is that they leak.”

As we live by his Spirit, there is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). There is power to live beyond ourselves. Weaknesses can be slowly stripped away. Sins can be overcome. I will transform in Christ.

**6. In what area(s) of your life would you like to more closely resemble Christ? How would things be different for you if that area were to become truly Christlike?** Give your participants time to reflect on this question without coaxing them to answer now. Reassure them that regardless of past failings, there remains the “*hope of glory*” for them. God knows the raw material he is working with. He knows your weaknesses and sins, your personality makeup and experiences, your strengths and dreams...he knows everything there is to know. And through all of this he works patiently until “*Christ formed [is] in you.*” (Galatians 4:19). All of his Son’s goodness can radiate from your life. You will reflect his glory.

## DAY 11 – Temporary Living

### Summary

Eternity changes everything. It changes *what* we live for. It changes *who* we live for. It changes how we are encouraged in trouble. It helps us complain less and live more thankfully and joyfully. It strengthens faith and hope. It gives us right perspective in disaster and sickness. It can give us peace even in death. With our minds firmly fixed on eternal things, we are able to make the most of the time God has given us in this world—a temporary post away from our permanent home. This is why we are encouraged to “*set your minds on things above, not on earthly things*” (Colossians 3:2).

### Close Look: Finding Our True Home

**1. What image do you have of heaven? Has it changed over time? Why?** Many of us have a vague, wispy, ethereal idea of what heaven is like. Let your participants talk freely about their impression of heaven, helping them identify what influences may have caused an earthly, stereotypical understanding, or a more Biblical understanding, of our true homeland.

**2. What metaphors does the Bible use to describe this life in Job 7:6, 8:9, James 4:14, and Psalm 39:5?** The Bible uses various metaphors to describe the ephemeral nature of life. Our days here on earth move “*swifter than a weaver’s shuttle*” (Job 7:6) and “*are but a shadow*” (8:9). We have no certainty over our future, but are like a “*mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*” (James 4:14). We live a delicate, temporary existence where “*each man’s life is but a breath*” (Psalm 39:5).

**Recognizing this brevity of life, what does Moses ask God to help him do in Psalm 90:12? Restate this in your own words.** Realizing life is short, we ask for God’s help in treasuring and using each day from his hand. Today I can worship and enjoy God, and the family he’s given me. Today I can use my talent for his kingdom. I can talk about Christ. Today I can live with purpose, give, help, grow, love, and make a difference. Someday I can’t anymore. We need the “*heart of wisdom*” God gives to maximize our life for his glory.

**3. Where are you to (or not to) fix your heart (Colossians 3:1)? Your mind (3:2)? Your eyes (2 Corinthians 4:18a)? Why (4:18b)?** We are to fix our heart and mind “*on things above, not on earthly things*” (Colossians 3:2). We are to “*fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.*” (2 Corinthians 4:18a) because “*what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal*” (18b).

**Look at two examples of people with a focus fixed on eternity: 1) Paul: 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; 2) Abraham: Hebrews 11:9-16. What longing, attitudes, actions or confidence do both share?** Paul and Abraham realized this world will be a place we “*groan*” and feel like a “*stranger*” out of place. This is because we were made for eternity and heavenly things. We are to look away from this temporary place, and toward that eternal place “*whose architect and builder is God*” (Hebrews 11:10).

**4. The way you see other things can help bring eternity into focus. How does the Bible encourage you to look differently at:**

- 1) Your world (1 Corinthians 7:31)? Realize it is passing away.
- 2) Your ambitions (2 Corinthians 5:9)? Make pleasing Him your goal.
- 3) Your hopes (Philippians 3:20)? Look to heaven for your Hope.
- 4) Your possessions (Matthew 6:19-21)? With an open hand upward.
- 5) Your bodies (2 Corinthians 5:1)? As a temporary dwelling.
- 6) Yourself (1 Peter 1:17)? As a stranger and foreigner on earth.

**5. Read Ephesians 5:15-16 aloud. In light of eternity, what are some wise ways Scripture encourages you to live? Write your observations.** (Luke 12:22-31) Know God will care for your earthly needs; live for above. (Matthew 25:1-13) Be always ready and expectant of Christ’s return. (Matthew 25:14-29) Leverage your God-given resources for his kingdom. (1 Peter 2:11-12) Keep earth at a distance. Live like heaven-bound people. (Luke 16:9-12) Send your investments on ahead to eternity. (2 Corinthians 5:11, 20) Urge others toward spiritual and eternal things.

**6. Read the description of heaven in Revelation 21:1-22:5. What part of this description is particularly meaningful or comforting to you?**

Take a good, thoughtful look at your true homeland described here. Notice the categories of things that will be “*no more*” in a world not under God’s curse, but under his blessing. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says “*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.*” So it’s hard for us to even imagine such a perfect place. Yet the next verse reads, “*but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.*” The Holy Spirit whispers to our heart about what heaven might be like. So let your imagination run as the Spirit talks to you through this description in Revelation.

**7. If you could live each day with a conscious awareness of heaven, how do you think it would change the way you live (how you look at things, people, problems, and so on)? How can you remind yourself of your true home?** Some might say that thinking about all the joys of heaven is foolish. We live on planet earth in reality. Life right now is important. But if you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for this world are the ones who thought the most about heaven. Heaven is not just a *destination*, it is a *motivation*. It changes how we use our time, talent and treasure. Let it be yours, too. his perfect love, through us, imperfect though we may be.

## DAY 12 – *The Tree of Hope*

### Summary

Bitter disappointment. Shattered dreams. Endings come often in a world broken by the curse of sin. And it's easy for us to get caught up in the hopelessness of the situation and become blinded to what God might be doing beyond our current circumstance. Sometimes God must bring things to an apparent end, before he can create a new beginning through which he plans to do a greater work. Sometimes we need a fresh spiritual glimpse of who He is in order to trust him in the thick of it. The cross stands as glimpse of God's heart for us. The cross is our hope that God has a plan and purpose to bring good out of evil, resurrection out of death, and new beginnings out of sad endings. The rubble of our life is never beyond God's power to create something of true beauty.

### Close Look: *Feeling Down? Look up!*

**1. Have you thought “it’s hopeless” lately? What causes you to lose hope? Where do you tend to look for encouragement when this happens?** We might look for hope in things, people, or the next possibility, but those don't always work out according to our expectations and timetable. Unless our hope is anchored in something (or Someone) more substantial and trustworthy, we may be overwhelmed by the waves of disappointment that wash ashore in our lives. Our gaze needs to be upward for encouragement.

**2. What does the psalmist long for that seems difficult now (42:1,2,4)? How do his enemies add to this doubt (42:3,10; 43:2)? What metaphors does he use to describe his sense of abandonment (42:3, 7)? Does discouragement feel like this to you, too?** The writer longs for a sense of intimacy and relationship with God. His worship (v4) of the living God was as essential to him as air (v1), water (v2) and food (v3). Yet God seems aloof. His enemies only add to his doubt by questioning, “Where is your God of yours?” His main course is sorrow. Tears were as regular as meals. It seems as though waves of sadness have both swept over and crushed down upon him. His heart is broken emotionally and spiritually.

**How does he remind himself: 1) that God hasn't abandoned him? (42:8) 2) of where to re-center his life and place his hope? (42:6,11;**

**43:5)** Even in the midst of discouragement and disillusionment, the writer reminds himself that God is right there with him both day and night (v8). He reflects back on times and places when he sensed a spiritual closeness (v6) and encourages himself to “*put your hope in God*” now as he did then, repeating the same phrase of preaching to self (42:11, 43:5).

### **3. How does Jeremiah describe those with misplaced hope and those with properly placed hope? How do they differ?**

Misplaced hope (Jeremiah 17:5-6): In self/man – like a desert bush, in a dry and parched land, standing all alone.

Properly placed hope (Jeremiah 17:7-8): In God – like a well-watered tree, by a stream, with green leaves, that puts out fruit even in drought.

Times of drought will come into the life of any believer. A hope centered in God can help us draw upon the deep spiritual resources we need to withstand those hard times, even flourish in the midst of them.

### **4. Now look at some things Scripture tells us to hope in:**

(Romans 5:1-2) The hope of glory (Christ & our perfection in eternity)  
(Lamentations 3:21-23) The hope of forgiveness  
(Lamentations 3:24-26) The hope of rescue  
(Titus 2:13) The hope of Christ's return  
(Titus 1:2) The hope of eternal life  
(1 Thessalonians 4:13-14) The hope of resurrection  
(Colossians 1:5) The hope of reward

### **5. How does the Christian's hope differ from what the world offers?**

**Write a few words from 1 Timothy 6:17, Isaiah 49:23b, and Romans 8:24-25** The Christian hope is not based on the things of this world which are seen with the human eye (Romans 8:24), but uncertain (1 Timothy 6:17) and lead only to disappointment (Isaiah 49:23b). The Christian hope is based on the promises of God and work of Christ. Though unseen, these are certain to never disappoint.

**6. What is one practical thing you can do to renew your hope in God (See Romans 15:4, Psalm 119:114)? How can you be sure that you can count on this (Hebrews 10:23)?** We have the record of God's dealings with his people (from the beginning of human history up through the birth of the early church) right in our hands. The Bible gives us the beginning, middle, and end of their stories “*so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*” (Romans 15:4).

We can hope in this word of God to us (Psalm 119:114), knowing that these recorded promises are based on the changeless character of God, a promiser who is completely faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

**7. Where has your focus been when discouraged? Read Psalm 39:7 and Isaiah 40:31 aloud. Ask God to help you center your focus in this way.** One source of discouragement come from a tendency for us to look around and look at self, instead of look at God. We need a fresh vision for God (in all of his glorious majesty, power, holiness, and love, goodness and faithfulness) if we are to have any hope in overcoming life's challenges. Encourage your participants to spend a few moments thinking of the greatness of God, and to direct their hope toward him.

## DAY 13 – The Wandering Church

### Summary

Some things are better together. Christians are better together. We are better together because God has made us for each other. God's plan for our lives is that we belong to Him and to each other. Being all that God intends for us to be as the body of Christ requires us to understand our identity in Christ both individually and corporately. A church is not defined by its building, location, or programs, but by a people who live out their true identity in Christ. A spirit of true koinonia will result.

### Close Look: Authentic "Church-ianity"

**1. What journey, difficulty, or event has God worked through to help you understand afresh his purpose for the church in this world?** We often turn to the church for a source of hope, healing and guidance when we experience a life crisis. What a joy it can be to know that we are not spiritual orphans. We are part of the family of God. In addition to his Spirit, God has given us each other to provide the grace and strength to move us along our spiritual journey in life. We are part of a new community. We are here for God and for each other.

**2. In Exodus 19:5-6, the Israelites are about to receive the ten commandments. How does God describe their identity and purpose here?** A treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

**Now read 1 Peter 2:9. How is Peter describing the identity of the church? What is the reason or purpose for this identity (2:9b)?** The parallels (see also Deuteronomy 7:6) with the description of Israel's identity is no coincidence. While rebellious Israel willfully rejected their identity, the church is to live it out! We are "*a chosen people*." In his grace, God has called us to be his own. We are "*royal priesthood*." We are able to come directly to God, offer him spiritual sacrifices, and act as an influence for godliness in the world. We are a "*holy nation*." God has set us apart to belong to him. We are not citizens of some nation in this world, but rather citizens of heaven. We are a "*people belonging to God*." We are not our own. Nor do we belong to Satan or the world. We have been purchased and redeemed by the blood of Christ.

All this is so we might "*declare the praises of him*" who has done this work in our life. We are a living illustration to the world of the marvelous glory of God and the privilege it is to belong to and live for him.

**3. Reread Colossians 3:1-17. What reasons does Paul give to set your minds on things above (3:3-4)? Why should you look forward to Christ's return (3:4)?** We live on earth, but we are no longer of the earth. We died with Christ (v3). Because we are one with Christ by his Spirit, we also died unto sin at the cross. We died to our old self and worldly ways. We died to earthly things. We have also been resurrected with "*Christ, who is your life*" (v4). Our identity is now in Christ. He is both the One who gives spiritual and eternal life, and the One for whom we live this life. We are on the way to our glorification that will be revealed at the coming of Christ. Although everything about us is already changed, those changes will be perfected and revealed when Christ comes again.

**4. What have you taken off (3:9)? How does Paul describe this life (3:7-8)? What have you put on (3:10)? How does Paul describe this life (3:11)?** You have "*taken off your old self*" marked by the ways and values of this world (see list of examples in v7-8). You have "*put on the new self*" marked by transformation into the image of God and his Son, Jesus. This "*taking off*" and "*putting on*" was a once-for-all work that occurred at the moment you placed our faith in Christ (although our ongoing process of "*being renewed*" will take a lifetime). This new self

that you have put on is one without the distinctions of this world (v11). All these differences and divisions belonged to the old self.

***Why should your relationship with others be on the basis of having changed from old “earthly clothes” into new “Christ clothes”?*** Just as Christ slipped out of his grave clothes and into a glorified body, so we, in Christ, have left the old earthly clothes behind for the new clothing of Christ’s resurrection and glory. We now all wear this new Christ clothing: “*Christ is all, and is in all.*” And so the old distinctions no longer apply to those around us. We all are equally dressed in the completeness of Christ. And so we look beyond differences to seek the unity that we already share spiritually in Christ.

***5. In Colossians 3:12, Paul also refers to us as “chosen people” (1 Peter 2:9, cf. Isaiah 43:20-21). Now list some of the behavior/actions that you see in Colossians 3 which God’s chosen people should reflect:***

Clothing styles (3:12): compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness & patience  
Relationships marked by (3:13): forbearance and forgiveness  
Stay together with (3:14): love of Christ  
Rule hearts with (3:15): peace of Christ  
From God’s Word (3:16): teach, admonish and worship  
In God’s name (3:17): do and say everything

***6. Reread 3:13-16. Is this new identity in Christ individual or corporate? What difference does it make either way? If we truly lived out our identity and purpose as church, what do you think would result?*** Notice the repetition of “*each other*” and “*one another.*” This new Christ clothing we put on is intended to change the way we relate to each other and live as a new community. A true koinonia atmosphere can fill our church community as we live out the reality of what we already both individually and corporately wear in Christ.

***7. Read Acts 2:42-47 and Galatians 6:10. Meditate on these verses.*** Allow your participants time to silently reflect on the model of the early church and exhortation of Paul to the Galatian church.

## **DAY 14 – Dragonflies of Change**

### **Summary**

Change is necessary for growth. Growth is necessary for abundant living. Jesus’ promise to us is this: “*I have come that you might live, and live more abundantly*” John 10:10. Knowing Christ and that abundant life is worth any cost. But still, there is a cost. And so you have a choice. You can hold on to what you’ve known, even though it may make you miserable. Or you can say to Christ, “I want to get better. I want more of the abundant life you promised me. I’ll surrender to your change process.” That’s the attitude God looks for in us. When we finally come to Him on that basis, yielding ourselves up to him as clay to the potter’s hands, then he can begin to work with us, shaping us by his Spirit into his Son’s likeness “*with ever increasing glory*” (2 Corinthians 3:18). And we will never be the same again.

### **Close Look: From Glory to Glory**

***1. How have you responded to changes in your life? Do you welcome change, accept it reluctantly, or avoid it at all cost? Why?*** Give your participants time to reflect on their response to changes up until now. Few of us are really fond of change. Even though we may desire change, the risk involved with change can frighten us from putting ourselves out there. We are often more comfortable with a predictable situation that we have more control over, even if we are unhappy with that situation.

***2. What is your potential for change in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17)?*** We have the potential for great change and transformation. We are “*being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory.*” My spiritual position as a person “*in Christ*” is already that of being a “*new creation.*” Gradually, God will help my practices match my position in him. The old habits, attitudes and desires are being, and can be, scraped away from our lives. All things can increasingly become new inwardly and outwardly, although the progress and process may require a lifetime, and will only be completed at the return of Christ.

***What reasons do you think there are for the disparity between your potential and your current reality?*** Discouragement and disillusionment with ourselves in our Christian growth can cause us to stop trying. Perhaps that discouragement is a necessary part of understanding that

trying and effort is the wrong place to focus. Our “*hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27) is only in the person of Christ, and his work in us.

**3. In John 5:1-9, where does Jesus encounter the lame man (5:2)?** In Jerusalem, next to the pool of Bethesda. **Why was he there? (5:3)** He was there with other disabled people hoping to be healed. **How long had he been there (5:5)?** 38 years, perhaps all his life.

**What probing question does Jesus ask in 5:6?** “Do you want to get well?” **What difficult changes might be ahead for the man even when he gets well?** Certainly being crippled was a great burden and sorrow to the man. And yet, it was the only life this man knew. As an invalid and beggar, he at least knew what was expected of him. But once he was healed, his world would be completely changed. All the things others had done for him, he would now have to do for himself. He would have to leave the pool and his disabled friends, find a job, and build a new life. Many difficulties and uncertainties lay before him. These changes would bring him greater joy, but they are still changes.

**How might Jesus’ question in 5:6 be directed to you?** “Do you want to get well?” Think about one thing in yourself that you would like to see changed. Not in your situation, or in another person, but in you. Then ask, “Do I really want to get well from this?” **Why might we be reluctant to make even positive changes?** Your first response might be, “Of course I want to get well!” But there is always a cost involved with change. It may cost some temporary peace. It may cost some pride. Change is not free. But it’s worth it. What you leave behind is nothing compared to what God has waiting for you in Christ.

**What change did Christ bring to this man’s life that rules, religion or personal effort did not?** There was immediate trust and obedience to the word of God: “*he picked up his mat and walked*” (v9). There was immediate desire to give thanks and worship God. Jesus “*found him at the temple*” (v14). There was immediate compulsion to bear witness for God. The man “*told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well*” (v15). The change in his life was not just physical, but spiritual, emotional and social as well. **What does this say about the agent of change in our life and the importance of His role in us (Colossians 1:27)?** The agent of change is the Spirit of Christ in us. God is forming Christ in us; helping us radiate more and more of the Son’s perfect character. Man does not have capacity within himself to effect this real, lasting heart-level change.

**4. Change is a process and direction. Along with the work of Christ in you, what “tools” does God use in the process of changing you? What response is needed for that tool to be useful in changing your life?**

THE “TOOL”

(1 Peter 1:6-7) trials  
(John 17:17) God’s Word  
(Acts 2:42-47) the church  
(1 Cor 10:13) temptation

THE RESPONSE

(1 Peter 1:13) preparation, self-control, hope  
(Matthew 7:24) hear, put into practice  
(Hebrews 10:25) commit to gathering  
(Hebrews 4:15-16) go to God in prayer

**5. What confidence can you have in the change process (Philippians 1:6)?** God is working the soil of our hearts like a patient, tender gardener. He will complete the work he has set out to do in us. He has the power and love to do so. We can trust him in the process. **Where are you to remain focused in the change process (Hebrews 12:2)?** Jesus is the “*author and perfecter*” of our faith. He is the One who is changing us, and into whose image we are being changed. He is our perfect example.

**6. Read John 15:1-5 aloud. In order for a life of change and fruitfulness to become a reality, what challenge is Jesus giving to you here?** The power of change and fruitfulness is not in myself, but in Christ in my life. God does not intend for me try harder to produce change and fruitfulness in my life. Instead he asks that I remain spiritually connected with the Agent of change and fruitfulness. Above all else, we need to focus on that internal dynamic relationship with Christ.