

A PLAN UNHINDERED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God's plan to bless the world continued, even in spite of the sin and dysfunction of His people, a people He was remaking in His image.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Genesis 25–33

+ **SETTING:**

Abraham died, but his legacy miraculously continued with his son Isaac, whose wife faced the same struggle as her mother-in-law, Sarah. Rebekah was barren, but God heard the prayers of Isaac and she had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. These brothers competed from the beginning, and early on, Jacob convinced Esau to give up his birthright. After this, Isaac followed in his father's footsteps and listened to the God of Abraham as he settled in Gerar, yet the descendants of Abraham also followed various paths of sin and dysfunction.

DAY 1

READ:

Genesis 32

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 32:24-32

NOTES

Spring is one of the most remarkable times of the year. If you live somewhere that experiences all four seasons, you know that winter is dreary and full of death with no green grass, no colorful plants, and few creatures out and about. It feels lifeless. Then sometime in March or April, that which seemed dead comes alive again! New leaves sprout, flowers bloom, birds chirp, and a rebirth seems to take place across the land. This is similar to what salvation is like. We were once deceivers, rebels against God, dead in our sins, and unable to breathe new life into ourselves. But God stepped in and claimed us for Himself! His salvation brought new life in us.

Like Jacob, who received a new name once he encountered God, so God makes us a new creation once we encounter the riches of His grace (2 Cor. 5:17). Unlike the trees that begin to sprout new leaves, we are an entirely different kind of tree! We no longer produce rotten branches and withering leaves but fresh and life-giving fruit.

Our transformation is not just for ourselves. We are not part of God's new creation for our own sake. Rather, God has reconciled us to Himself, and because of this, we are now reconciled to one another. All the strife we had with God is gone, and all the strife we have with one another can also be put to death. We are now ministers of the same work of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Our new life in Christ does not just manifest itself in our own hearts and minds but in the way we interact with others. Reconciliation for Christians means that we confess our sins to one another and choose to love others despite any differences we might have because we recognize that we have a common Savior and share the same Spirit.

How does your new life in Christ through faith affect your relationships with God and others?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"During this struggle you are Jacob, but after your faith in the blessing for which you prayed you are Israel."¹

-Hilary of Poitiers (c. 300-368)

DAY 2

READ:

Romans 8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 8:1-11

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #83: NEW IDENTITY OF THE BELIEVER

When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Eph. 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a "new creation" in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

We are all tempted to believe lies about ourselves and others. The massive spread of misinformation across social media and various news sources is an indicator that we are more gullible than we care to admit. Even on the social level, we are tempted to believe anything we hear about our friends or our enemies without going to the source. Many destroyed relationships could have been prevented with a single question.

We also believe lies about ourselves. We are tempted to step into our old skin and believe that we are the person who is condemned. We may even identify with our sins and make them part of who we are. This, however, is not what God calls His people to do. When God determines that we are His, He determines that we are no longer what we used to be.

Consider Romans 8:1, which states that there is zero condemnation for those who belong to Jesus. Not even a little bit. The whole chapter of Romans 8 reminds us that we are not people of the flesh any longer, but we are people of the Spirit (v. 9). Our minds are not ruled by the flesh and our lives do not look like they used to. If we find ourselves believing that we are still the same people we were before, then we have not gone to the right source or asked the right questions.

Imagine if you were a thief before God saved you. You've experienced salvation, but you still think, "I was a thief and still struggle with the desire to steal, so this must just be who I am." You are going to the wrong source. You are believing the lies of Satan that you are still enslaved to the sins of your past. There is only one source who will tell you the truth—God, who is your Father—and it is God who declares that you are His child. The children of God are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus, and that is a verifiable truth (Rom. 8:37).

Are there former sins that you still believe have power over you? If so, how does the fact that you are a child of God change the way you view your past sin?

DAY 3

READ:

2 Peter 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Peter 3:8-9

NOTES

If you grew up celebrating Christmas, you remember the anticipation of opening presents. Some kids hunt for the gifts before Christmas Day. They might sneak into their parents' room and look under the bed or in the closet to see if they can find the gifts. If a child gets caught in the act, the parent might say something like, "You have to wait for December 25th before you can open your presents!" We don't like waiting. Whether it is for Christmas presents or for something much more substantial, such as a spouse, a job, a child, or news about a health condition. Anticipation can cause anxiety and fear; it can even cause us to doubt God.

We tend to get stuck in our own timelines of how long something should take. Because we are not all-knowing, we cannot see all that is ahead of us and why events take place the way they do. The God we serve, though, can see all things. He is all-knowing and all-powerful. We are not God; therefore, we cannot assume we understand His ways and His plans. Often the question may arise, "How long, O Lord? How long must we endure the trials of this world?" The answer is found in 2 Peter 3:9, which teaches us that the Lord doesn't delay in keeping His promises but is patient so that people will repent and find salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. God's "delay" in our lives may seem purposeless, but He is patient and His timing is absolutely perfect.

Like Jacob, we may not understand why God seems to withhold something from us. But we know that our God gives us exactly what we need exactly when we need it. Trusting God is an act of faith, but He has proven Himself throughout all of human history as a patient, loving, forgiving, and perfectly-timed God.

How can you grow in your faith that the Lord has perfect timing and He can be trusted?

DAY 4

READ:

Psalm 105

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 105:5-11

NOTES

Have you ever met someone with a remarkable memory? People who are able to hold massive amounts of information in their heads are always impressive. One of the more fascinating kinds of memory are those who have an eidetic, or photographic, memory. These are people who can look at an image or document once and be able to recite the entire document or describe the entire photo without any aid. Imagine the kind of work one could do as a lawyer, professor, or any other profession with this ability! Most of the world struggles to remember what they did two weeks ago.

Remembering can be a difficult task for those without incredible memories. Yet so much of the struggle we endure in this life is due to our inability to remember. After God wrestled with Jacob, the Israelites set up a way to remember what occurred: they avoided a particular part of animal meat. God provides many signs in the Old Testament to help His people remember all that He did for them. He established the Sabbath to remind them to rest as He did. He required they eat unleavened bread during Passover to remind them of their escape from Egypt. And through Jesus, He established the Lord's Supper to remember what Jesus did for us on the cross.

We see how often the Israelites forgot what God had done for them, but we are not unlike them. We regularly forget that God has saved us and redeemed us. It is certain that we will fail to remember at times for the rest of our lives. The good news, however, is that God is the One who never forgets. He has saved us, and He will not forget us. God remembers His covenant forever, and we can trust that our failure to remember Him will never overwhelm His ability to remember us.

What are some ways you can grow in remembering God's commandments, promises, and work in your life?

DAY 5

READ:

1 John 1

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 John 1:5-10

NOTES

Light is a curious thing. When it is absent, all color, shape, and movement seems to disappear. You lose all ability to know what is near and what is far. All is hidden and unseen. Yet if you light a match in a completely dark room, all of a sudden, what was hidden is now visible. Turn on a light switch and you will be even more overwhelmed with the exposure of color and shapes before you!

God uses light to describe Himself in many ways in the Bible. In 1 John 1:5, we learn that God is light and there is no darkness where He is present. In John 8:12, we learn that the followers of Jesus will have life in His light. And in Revelation 21:23, we see God's throne room described as a place where His glory shines brighter than all other sources of light. Nothing is hidden before God because His light penetrates all darkness and sin.

Why, then, do we hide our sin as if the God of the universe is unable to see our thoughts and our actions? Rather, we should desire that our sins be exposed before God's light so they may be forgiven and erased, never to be seen again. Temptations and sins do not have power over us unless they are hidden in darkness. It is the light of God that allows us to repent and believe the good news about Jesus. Our Savior—Jesus Christ—is the light of the world, and if we walk with Him through this life, we will find forgiveness of our sin through His shed blood and fellowship with all the others who walk in His light (1 John 1:7). Bringing our sins to light gives us fellowship with God, fellowship with others, cleansing from sin, and freedom from sin's power.

What areas of your life are hidden and need to be brought into the light?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"When we meet trials, we do not rejoice in the suffering they bring but in the faithfulness of God to use them to shape us, that we might become like Christ. God is faithful in the midst of trial, and faithful in the aftermath of trial to work all things for our good."²

-Jen Wilkin

POINT 1: God's plan continues despite sin and deception (Gen. 26:7-11).

Isaac, the son of promise, deceived the Philistines to _____ himself above all others. This expressed a _____ faith in God.



How does our faith relate to our actions?

Our sin never just affects us but _____ affects those around us. Yet sin _____ stop God's plan and promises from going forward.

POINT 2: God's plan continues despite family dysfunction (Gen. 29:31-35).

God provided sons for Leah, Jacob's neglected wife. She hoped these children would change her husband's heart toward her, but they did not.



How have you experienced God's comfort in the midst of hardships or afflictions?

Leah's focus changed from her husband to the Lord who loved her. Even through dysfunction, the Lord began creating the great nation of _____ and providing the _____ for her salvation.



Why are God's plans more trustworthy than our own?

POINT 3: God's plan continues through changed people (Gen. 32:24-32).

Jacob wrestled with his brother, Esau, all his life, but here he wrestled with the all-powerful _____ and came away _____.



What experiences has God used to transform you the most?

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MY RESPONSE

Because we too are a broken people, forgiven and declared righteous in Christ, we serve God with humility and gratitude, pointing others not to ourselves but to God and what He has done.

- **HEAD:** What sins are we tempted to believe God cannot redeem?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you will express your praise for God's gift of Jesus?
- **HANDS:** What sins or weaknesses will you confess with others in the church that you may be healed?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"With God, we have power and prevail, when we weep, when we cry, when we're broken, when we're pleading, when we're clinging, when our heads are bowed. The blessing comes when we're crippled, when we're hurt."³

-W. A. Criswell (1909-2002)