



Devotional

June 28 - Oct. 3

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WEEK ONE (JUNE 28–JULY 4)

Day 180: June 28, 2020

Full Plan: Song of Solomon 1:1–4:16

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 1:1–31

Song of Solomon is love poetry, capturing the passion of human love. But it is also filled with metaphors and images of the natural world. It's a reminder that love encompasses all of creation, and care for the planet is an act of love and devotion. How does this change your perspective on caring for the environment?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 181: June 29, 2020

Full Plan: Song of Solomon 5:1–8:14

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 2:1–22

The Bible names and normalizes many emotions: sadness, happiness, fear, anger, joy, etc. But only Song of Solomon names passionate, intimate love. It's one of the soul's great desires, and finding a person to share it with is one of life's greatest gifts. Who might that person be for you? For whom are you that person?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 182: June 30, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 1:1–4:6

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 6:1–13

Isaiah may have been written nearly 2,800 years ago, but its indictments against the world then are just as applicable now: Do right, seek justice, defend the oppressed, care for the orphan and widow (1:17) and turn weapons of war into seeds of peace (2:4). How will you contribute to those efforts?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 183: July 1, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 5:1–7:25

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 7:1–25

The first 5 chapters of Isaiah paint a bleak picture of the world as it is: violence, injustice, evil. Isaiah 6 is what the world can be when filled with God's love: glorious, transformative, celebrative. All God needs is for us to say as Isaiah did: Here am I; send me.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 184: July 2, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 8:1–11:16

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 9:1–21

Isaiah 8-11 contains many Advent texts promising peace. But it also has hard images crisis and pain. It's what the Israelites needed to change their views. It's nicer to be motivated by love, but sometimes crisis and pain are what push us to grow. When have you ever been positively motivated by crisis?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 185: July 3, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 12:1–16:14

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 11:1–16

God pulls down the proud and the oppressor. But God will also pull down the oppressed if they cross the fine line to become the oppressor. It includes anyone who says "I will ascend to heaven, and raise my throne above the stars of God," (Is. 14:13). In what ways are you either the oppressed or the oppressor?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 186: July 4, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 17:1–23:18

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 24:1–23

Isaiah reminds us that no nation is perfect. But Isaiah 19:18-24 envisions pockets of faithfulness seeking God's best, shining as a witness to the world. May the church be that "City of the Sun" (18:18) and may we each play a part in creating it.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

June 28 – July 4, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Gary Uremovich

Solomon was Israel's 3rd king and the most literary of them. He penned over 3,000 proverbs and more than 1,000 songs (1 Kings 4:32). This book is called 'The Song of Solomon' or the 'Song of Songs' which means it is just one of many. One commentator calls this book 'the most difficult and mysterious in the entire Bible'!

You may have felt a somewhat embarrassed while reading this very expressive book. To have it in our Bible is truly remarkable and suggests that physical love is a gift from God. Some have seen this as an allegory (Christ and the Church pursuing each other); others as a metaphor between physical romance and spiritual intimacy (The Bride of Christ in Ephesians 5:22-33); still others view it as 'just' Middle East love poetry with no obvious spiritual application.

Some view this book as the story of Solomon's first love and wife before he became polygamous. The book is divided into the courtship (1:2-3:5), the wedding (3:6-5:1), and the maturation of the marriage (5:2-8:4). There is a constant expressive dialogue between the King, his beloved, and the daughters of Jerusalem.

In a recent group Bible study we discovered many wonderful facets of each of these approaches to understanding this beautiful book. The Shulammitte is the beloved and the King is her lover. She is seen as incredibly beautiful. But that is not her view of herself!

Verse 6 is the only instance of body shaming and personal embarrassment of appearance in the Bible! 'Do not stare at me!' She tells us that the sun has burned her skin because she has had to work outdoors. Her step brothers forced her to work in the vineyards and she had no opportunity to take care of her own vineyard (her appearance). The King does not see her in this way - he sees her as extraordinarily beautiful!

You also may see yourself as unattractive - physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Maybe you have experienced this kind of self-loathing. Sadly, it is so common for us to be our most severe critic. The wonderful reality of the Gospel is that Christ pursues us and sees us as His beloved. He does not see the flaws in our character or behavior. We are robed in His righteousness (I Corinthians 1:30).

You are beautiful - just as you are! You don't need to pretend you are someone different. You are loved unconditionally. The King pursues you! We see the Shulammitte suddenly acknowledge that she is beautiful as reflected in the eyes of her lover. Christ is the lover of our souls. Once we have tasted such deep-seated love we can

never be the same. There is something incredibly transformational about this kind of love.

The hymn 'Jesus, Lover of My Soul' was written by Charles Wesley (in 1738) within several months of his conversion. It is a hymn that still speaks to us today. Please spend a few moments reflecting on it's meaning for us today. Despite our obvious failings, He loves us unconditionally!

Jesus, Lover of My Soul

Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Savior, hide
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide
O receive my soul at last....
Thou, O Christ, art all I want
More than all in Thee I find:
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint
Heal the sick and lead the blind:
Just and holy is Thy name
I am all unrighteousness;
False and full of sin I am
Thou are full of truth and grace.

Charles Wesley (1738)

WEEK TWO (JULY 5–11)

Day 187: July 5, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 24:1–27:13

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 36:1–22

Isaiah describes a world in disarray, an earth that literally quakes with turmoil (Is. 24:19). But he also depicts hope: he faithfully, calmly tends and guards his vineyard (Is. 27) believing that the fruit it bears will make a difference. May it be so for us. What are steady, personal ways that you contribute to hope in the world?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 188: July 6, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 28:1–31:9

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 37:1–38

Isaiah 28-31 reminds us that “self-help doesn’t save.” Forgive us, Lord, for turning to ourselves, our strength, our nationalism, our economic & military might, or anything else we have created, to give us the peace and security that you alone can provide.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 189: July 7, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 32:1–35:10

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 38:1–39:8

Isaiah 32-35 reminds us that when all seems lost, it never is. God is in exile with us, rising to the challenge (32:10), strengthening us (35:3), and creating a way of justice and peace where there seems to be no way (35:5-10).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 190: July 8, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 36:1–39:8

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 42:1–25

In Isaiah 36-39 we read the story of the good king Hezekiah for the third time in the Bible. His story again reminds us that when we are faithful to God during times of relative calm, we will be more prepared to be faithful in times of trouble.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 191: July 9, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 40:1–44:28

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 43:1–28

If you're feeling down, fearful, or broken, read Isaiah 40-44. It not only contains some of the most often quoted words of encouragement in the Bible, it repeats this comforting refrain: "Do not fear."

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 192: July 10, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 45:1–48:22

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 48:1–22

Sin in our lives makes pleasing ourselves a higher priority than pleasing God (Isaiah 46:6). It gives us a false sense of security (47:10) and offers no true, lasting sense of peace (48:22). The better way is to open our eyes and ears to life as God intends it (48:6-7).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 193: July 11, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 49:1–52:12

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 49:1–26

The faithful life isn't always easy. Just ask Isaiah. But God encourages you just like Isaiah. You are chosen (49:2). You are gifted (50:4). Others have gone before you (51:1). God comforts you (51:12) and helps you shake the dust and rise up (52:2).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

July 5–11, 2020: Weekly Devotion by John Dormois

The book of Isaiah is both about a man, a prophet, and a historical account of Israel's history. Scholars often talk of "three Isaiahs", since there is good evidence that chapters 1-39 were written in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE whereas chapters 40-55 came about much later. The book includes oracles, prophetic liturgies, and theology. Isaiah rails at the degradation of Israel and predicts its destruction. Much of the content of chapters 24 to 39 revolves around Isaiah's warnings about the fall of Jerusalem. This occurs in 586 BCE, the beginning of the Babylonian exile.

The so-called "second Isaiah" encompasses chapters 40-66. With the exile over, it is a time of hope. The writings of Isaiah are used to inspire future generations. A key verse is 44.6:

I am the first and I am the last;
Besides me there is no God.

This verse is crucial since for the first time in history it establishes monotheism as central to the theology of the Hebrew people and subsequently for Christianity and Islam. Hope for the future of Israel is mixed with warnings that rebelliousness persists. The prophet continues to warn the people of the necessity to follow God as Israel is rebuilt after the return from exile.

Devotional: Where are the prophetic voices of today? Are they there or drowned out by the din of the relentless 24 hour news cycle? Our prayer must be to listen to church leaders to discern God's call on our lives. May we hold on to the hope expressed by Isaiah, but at the same time be vigilant to the same forces Isaiah warned could lead to division and disintegration.

WEEK THREE (JULY 12–18)

Day 194: July 12, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 52:13–55:13

Abbreviated Plan: Isaiah 50:4–9, Isaiah 52:13–53:12

Isaiah 55 is full of reminders that I need God even when things are well, for that's when I put myself ahead of God (v2) and think I know it all (v9). Listening & looking for God (v3,6) "never returns empty" (v11) and leads to a life bursting with joy (v12)

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 195: July 13, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 56:1–59:21

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 1:1–19

The next time you're tempted to make worship about you, read Isaiah 58. It's not about entertaining you, not about whether it "does it for you." It's not a destination; it's a hub. True worship inspires you to give of yourself to God and others (v.6-14).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 196: July 14, 2020

Full Plan: Isaiah 60:1–66:24

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 2:1–37

Isaiah 61:1-2 is what Jesus read for his first-ever sermon. It's about good news for the down and out. But Richard Rohr reminds us that Jesus stopped reading halfway through verse 2, and chose not to say "the day of vengeance of our God." Jesus was about liberation, not retribution, and we should be, too.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 197: July 15, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 1:1–4:31

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 3:1–25

The two worst things God can say about a person is that they are faithless or fake. (Jeremiah 3:11) The hardest thing God can ask a person to do is challenge both, as God called Jeremiah to do. As difficult as it must have been for Jeremiah to deliver that message, it's still better to be Jeremiah than to be Jeremiah's audience. Don't be faithless or fake.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 198: July 16, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 5:1–8:17

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 4:1–31

Jeremiah is addressing a stubborn and wayward people who are lost and scared, who are longing for a better day. His reminder was this: Do what you know you are supposed to do. Stick to the "ancient rules" and you will find your way (6:16). That's good advice for everyone.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 199: July 17, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 8:18–12:17

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 5:1–31

Jeremiah mourns because the people he loves are hurting themselves and there's nothing he can do to help (Jeremiah 8). He's comforted by the idea that God is greater than anything he can conceive (9:23-10:16). God's holiness is greater than our helplessness.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 200: July 18, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 13:1–16:21

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 7:1–34

Jeremiah makes it very clear: bad actions have bad consequences. Sin will always be found out. We might get hung up on the idea that God punishes the Israelites with trouble, but Jeremiah reminds us that our free will gives us power to avoid bad choices.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

July 12–18, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Ed Cronyn

Sacrifice, humility, service, mercy and salvation join arms with one another in a never-ending battle against greed, selfishness and oppression. The prophesy of the sin-bearing servant and messiah (Isaiah 52:13-53:12), written centuries before Christ's birth, reveals both the depths of our shortcomings before God and His great mercy. On the one hand are the sins that continue to darken our souls today: unrighteousness, lust, perverting justice to oppress the poor and the foreigner, corrupting power and influence to serve our own purposes, and focusing on wealth and comfort more than on God. We are warned that these are the seeds of destruction of any people.

“They know no limits in deeds of wickedness; they do not judge with justice the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy. Shall I not punish them for these things? says the LORD?” (Jeremiah 5:28-29, NRSV)

Fortunately, in our corner covering all these sins is God's mercy as we accept the sacrifice of the messiah who suffered and bore the consequences of our sins and as we follow in His footsteps. Mercy restores and redeems us as we repent, love and serve God with humility, restore justice, and act generously with our neighbors in need. Not only are we forgiven, but God promises to “dwell with” us as we turn towards Him.

“Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. (Isaiah 56:1) . . . For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the

widow, or shed innocent blood in this place . . . then I will dwell with you in this place.” (Jeremiah 7:5-7, NRSV)

Challenge: It can be uncomfortable to think about how our choices affect others, but this is exactly what Isaiah and Jeremiah call us to do. Do we not practice and/or ignore many of the same injustices that these prophets address? Thankfully, we don't need to wallow in our shortcomings. God is merciful as we repent and follow Him.

Prayer focus: God, Your mercy washes me of my shortcomings, preparing me for Your work. Help me to follow You in humility and to spread Your love through service and the pursuit of justice.

WEEK FOUR (JULY 19–26)

Day 201: July 19, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 17:1–20:18

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 25:1–38

The truth often hurts, not just for the one hearing it, but for the one speaking it. Jeremiah had a plot against him (18:18) and was a laughingstock (19:7). Yet he still felt a “fire in his bones” to speak the truth (19:9). May we have the same boldness.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 202: July 20, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 21:1–24:10

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 26:1–24

Jeremiah is clear about God’s problem with the people: they did nothing about injustice (22:3). They did not treat the immigrants with dignity, or honor life, or care for children or those without social status. Much of this indictment can apply today. What do you think can we do about it?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 203: July 21, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 25:1–29:32

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 31:1–40

Today’s Jeremiah reading offers God’s comfort (ch. 29) and judgment (ch. 25-27). We tend to hear only the first and not the second, but we need both. The first brings us up when we are down; the second brings us back down when we see ourselves too highly.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 204: July 22, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 30:1–33:26

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 34:1–22

Change is hard, especially when it involves loss and grief. But God promises through Jeremiah that “the people who survived the sword will find grace in the wilderness,” (31:2). And God turns “mourning into joy and sorrow into gladness,” (31:13).\

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 205: July 23, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 34:1–38:28

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 46:1–28

When someone reveals to us the truth of our sins, we tend to ignore the message and denounce the messenger, like the king did in Jeremiah 36. Instead, we must confess our sins and acknowledge the consequences. Fighting only makes it worse (38:17-23).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 206: July 24, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 39:1–45:5

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 50:1–46

God gave a clear word to the remnant in Judea: Stay. Don't look for greener grass elsewhere. Bloom where you are planted (Jer. 42:10).

They should have listened, but they didn't. Sometimes the best (and hardest) thing to do is sit, watch, and wait for God.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 207: July 25, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 46:1–49:39

Abbreviated Plan: Jeremiah 52:1–34

In Jeremiah 46-49, the prophet casts God's judgment against nine earthly empires over five chapters. No worldly power is stronger than God. It proves that we can't trust earthly systems to provide a sense of security, hope, and prosperity that only God provides.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

July 19–25, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Shannon Hitchcock

As I read Jeremiah Chapters 17-49, I learned of a prophet who was courageous, persistent, and whose message was so unpopular he suffered death threats and was imprisoned.

Jeremiah repeatedly warned the Jewish people to turn away from worshiping Baal, (a fertility God), and Molech, (a Canaanite God associated with child sacrifice). I struggled with what relevance Jeremiah's message has for us today. Then I read Jeremiah 22:3:

...“And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.”

Images came to mind of the situation at our southern border—children housed in cages, separated from their parents, reports of their physical and sexual abuse.

I continued to read. I highlighted Jeremiah 48:29-31:

“We have heard of the pride of Moab—he is very proud—of his loftiness, his pride, and his arrogance, and the haughtiness of his heart. I myself know his insolence, says the Lord; his boasts are false, his deeds are false. Therefore I wail for Moab; I cry out for all Moab; and for the people of Kir-heres I mourn.”

A quick Google search tells me that Moab is an ancient kingdom that was located in Jordan. Yet Jeremiah writes of Moab as if it were both a man and a kingdom. It would be all too easy for me to replace the name Moab with that of the United States, and to admit that I frequently wail for our country.

But Jeremiah also has a message of hope. My favorite passage is Chapter 29: 11-14:

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord...”

May we all call upon the Lord and seek to do his will for the good of the alien, the widow, the orphan, our families, our community, and our country. Amen.

WEEK FIVE (JULY 26–AUGUST 1)

Day 208: July 26, 2020

Full Plan: Jeremiah 50:1–52:34

Abbreviated Plan: Lamentations 3:1–66

Jeremiah closes with his strongest indictment yet, against the mighty Babylonians. (ch 51-52) God’s strongest judgments are against the proud and the powerful, (50:31-32) who do not use their resources for God’s purposes of love and justice.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 209: July 27, 2020

Full Plan: Lamentations 1:1–2:22

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 1:1–28

Lamentations reminds us to be true to our sorrow and grief, and being willing to name the hurt and pain we are feeling in our lives and in the world. For what things do we weep, with our eyes flowing with tears, with no comfort or courage to be found (Lam. 1:16)?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 210: July 28, 2020

Full Plan: Lamentations 3:1–5:22

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 2:1–10

Lamentations 3-5 speak for any who feel like our world has fallen apart and we feel helpless. It also gives us the assurance that God is not mad at us (3:33) and God is with us until the very end (3:22). Mostly, it gives us permission to feel what we feel.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 211: July 29, 2020

Full Plan: Ezekiel 1:1–5:17

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 3:1–27

The Israelites were not hearing God, so God called Ezekiel to be a unique kind of messenger: a performance artist, whose memorable actions (ch 1-5) would speak as loud as his words. In what ways will your actions convey the truths of God's love to others?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 212: July 30, 2020

Full Plan: Ezekiel 6:1–11:25

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 11:1–25

Ezekiel 6-11 shows how it feels like to be in crisis, facing disaster. We feel helpless against pain and harm (ch. 6). We feel like God is against us or absent (ch. 7). We feel like our values have been challenged (ch. 8). But at the end, God can change our hearts (ch. 11).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 213: July 31, 2020

Full Plan: Ezekiel 12:1–16:63

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 18:1–32

Ezekiel 12-16 reminds us that God takes sin seriously. God relentlessly works to remove our sin and make us more like Jesus every day, so that God's love flows freely in and through us. It's our job to work with God to make that happen.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 214: August 1, 2020

Full Plan: Ezekiel 17:1–21:32

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 33:1–33

Ezekiel 18 reminds us that much of the violence and death in the world stems from injustice and the unwillingness of people to treat each other with equity and dignity. God has no pleasure in any death (18:32) and wants us to have a new heart and spirit (18:31).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Ezekiel 18:20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

“The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child; the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own.”

This verse clearly outlines to us that we must be responsible for our actions, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot cling to the righteousness of those around us and rely upon their good deeds to carry us in life. Nor, can we allow the excuse of other’s poor judgement to become our excuse for poor judgement and bad deeds. Depending on your circumstance this may come as a relief or may seem overwhelming. We are surrounded each day with temptations and opportunities to stray from God’s will. We are tested by those around us and sometimes loving our neighbors and enemies becomes very difficult. We can have people around us that continuously fall to sin and therefore tempt us to follow in their footsteps. Still we must remember that we are going to be held accountable for our actions. We must confess our sins to Jesus, spend time in prayer, and remember that he died for our forgiveness of sin.

Prayer: May we feel your spirit lord and go through each day with you guiding our way. May we remember to love all, be selfless, and praise you and you alone. Amen.

Day 215: August 2, 2020

Full Plan: Ezekiel 22:1–26:21

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 34:1–31

As much as we might believe in an all-powerful God, Ezekiel reminds us that there is one important thing that God cannot do: God cannot force us to be faithful. We have the power to choose to obey God or not. When we don’t, we live with the consequences.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 216: August 3, 2020

Full Plan: Ezekiel 27:1–32:32

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 36:1–38

Ezekiel 27-32 contains judgments over two of the greatest economic empires in the ancient near east: Tyre and Egypt. Their downfall is a reminder that economic and military might does not provide the kind of security that only obedience to God can provide.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 217: August 4, 2020

Full Plan: Ezekiel 33:1–37:28

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 37:1–28

Ezekiel 36-37 has three images of hope: 1) God will replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh, 2) God will breathe new life into our dry bones, 3) God will bring unity out of division. This is good news for a people and a world that feels like it is in exile. Which image of hope speaks the most to you today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 218: August 5, 2020

Full Plan: Ezekiel 38:1–42:20

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 40:1–4, Ezekiel 43:1–12

Ezekiel 40-48 is a highly detailed vision of the restored Temple and its worship. It imagines the fulfillment of God's promise in the future that gave courage in the present. We should live today with the assurance that what God promises, God will fulfill.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 219: August 6, 2020

Full Plan: Ezekiel 43:1–48:35

Abbreviated Plan: Ezekiel 44:9–14, Ezekiel 45:9–12

Up until now, Ezekiel was envisioning a brighter future for the Israelites. But 43:10-11 is an important pivot: God says, "Now make it happen." Often, the best word of hope we have is this: God is calling you to act. You are not as helpless as you think. So get busy.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 220: August 7, 2020

Full Plan: Daniel 1:1–3:30

Abbreviated Plan: Daniel 1:1–21; 2:1, 16–19, 24–49

Daniel 1-3 is a call to non-violent resistance against those in power whose paranoia and narcissism incite fear and violence. Daniel and his friends choose holiness instead, and they are not just protected; God uses them to transform the world.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 221: August 8, 2020

Full Plan: Daniel 4:1–6:28

Abbreviated Plan: Daniel 4:1–37

Sometimes faithfulness looks like staring down fear and refusing to compromise God's values, even if walking in integrity means being thrown into the lion's den (Daniel 6). If that's you today, may God "shut the mouths of the lions" around you (6:22).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

August 2–8, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Whitney Smith

Three themes appeared to me in this reading. Three themes that are relevant to modern society as much as they were in antiquity: Humility, Faith and Evangelism.

Daniel trusted in God. He trusted in God to keep him safe as he was taken hostage to a foreign land. He trusted as he served people of a different religion and culture. He trusted God to provide him with the insight needed to interpret the King's dream, even with the threat of death. He trusted God to deliver him from the Lion's Den. And through this trust, God used Daniel to open the eyes of those who didn't believe.

Daniel gave the glory to God. He made sure that the kings knew that his own intellect and power were not responsible for the miraculous events. He not only trusted God, but he made sure

credit was given where credit was due in situations where he could have very easily taken the credit himself.

This humility probably seemed extremely peculiar to these kings who lived exulting themselves and their own power. Daniel's faith and humility seems equally rare and strange today. If I think about society, how many people in power give the credit to anyone besides themselves? Even us regular people tend to think, "I've worked hard for this. I deserve it."

How many times have we thought ourselves as better than other people because we are more educated, have more career success or more exciting experiences? We live in a land of self-promotion and influencers. We all want to take credit for our own success, but what about when we are struggling or we are faced with failure? During these times a lack of humility goes hand and hand with a lack of faith.

Or how many times run with the negative thoughts of "I have to work harder and harder, do more and more" or "What if this happens?". Its easy to worry about the worst possible scenarios. The people around us may even feed the drama. Instead of resting in peace and trust in God, we can scurry around taking in more and more information, start hoarding (our feelings, our money, buying more and more), or make decisions based out of fear instead of led by the spirit. In our more and more world, we can take for granted current blessings and forget all the times that God has seen us through.

Daniel is an example of one of the best ways we can live, both when facing success and adversity. His unwavering faith in God,

not only brought him through personal trials, but his humility through his trust brought an understanding of the power of God to Kings and a nation.

WEEK SEVEN (AUGUST 9–15)

Day 222: August 9, 2020

Full Plan: Daniel 7:1–12:13

Abbreviated Plan: Daniel 6:1–28

Daniel ends with an apocalyptic vision in the style of Revelation. It is written to sound like predictions of the future, but are mostly meant to encourage us in the present: No matter what happens, we must be faithful, and God will triumph. How might these be good words for today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 223: August 10, 2020

Full Plan: Hosea 1:1–5:15

Abbreviated Plan: Hosea 1:11, 2;1–5

Hosea shows us the challenge of having to love a person or persons who are causing harm to themselves and others. But there is encouragement: Hosea 3 offers transformation that comes from tough love, which is what God sometimes has to have with us. What might tough love look like to you?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 224: August 11, 2020

Full Plan: Hosea 6:1–10:15

Abbreviated Plan: Hosea 2:6–23, 3:1–5

Hosea reminds us that religious actions alone aren't enough (9:4), nor are pious hearts. We need both. We need hearts that are true (6:6, 10:2) and actions that are faithful (8:1-3) to live life as God intends it.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 225: August 12, 2020

Full Plan: Hosea 11:1–14:9

Abbreviated Plan: Hosea 4:1–19

Hosea ends on a word of promise and hope. You may feel down and out, and wonder where God is, or if God even cares. But God will heal you. God is not angry at you, and God will bring beauty into your life (Hosea 14:4-7).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 226: August 13, 2020

Full Plan: Joel 1:1–3:21

Abbreviated Plan: Joel 2:1–32

Joel 2 contains two lectionary passages we hear each year: Verses 12-13 (Ash Wednesday) and 28-29 (Pentecost Sunday). Repentance and receiving the Spirit's power are tied together. You can't do the first without the second, and the second fully comes through the first.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 227: August 14, 2020

Full Plan: Amos 1:1–4:13

Abbreviated Plan: Amos 1:1–15; 2:1–16

No nations were perfect in the time of Amos, but the toughest judgments were on the Israelites (2:6-8), for oppressing the poor, dehumanizing the needy, and practicing sexual promiscuity. The bottom line is this: practice compassion and fidelity with one another.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 228: August 15, 2020

Full Plan: Amos 5:1–9:15

Abbreviated Plan: Amos 3:1–15

When everything seems to be in chaos and disarray, get back to the basics. Return to what you know God wants you to do and be. Seek the Lord. Be faithful. Do justice. Making it more complicated than that may just make things worse (Amos 5:14-15, 21-24, 7:8-9, 8:11).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

August 9–15, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Jayne Cabigas

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your hearts, with fasting, with weeping and with sorrow; tear your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, very patient, full of faithful love, and ready to forgive. Joel 2:12-13 (CEB)

Reading the prophets can be a hard slog. The prophets rant about everyone going in the wrong direction and they make God sound so angry and vengeful. God, they say, will bring divine judgement, wrath, and punishment upon his people and their enemies alike. Many of us have trouble reconciling this merciless God with the God of love and forgiveness, so we avoid the prophets (until this year!)

Like the other prophets, Joel presents how we have strayed way off the path. Like a parent who is at her wits' end, God has given us rules and expectations, blessings and promises, but our response is to act like reckless teenagers leaving a wake of destruction and breaking God's heart. Joel invites us to repent--not with a big show, tearing our clothes and beating our chests--but with a torn heart.

Why a torn heart? Because when God mends a broken heart, it is stronger and more resilient. A mended heart can forgive because it has been forgiven. A mended heart can be patient because God was patient and full of faithful love toward us.

So here is God's invitation: Even now, return to me. Even now, it's not too late. Even now, God is merciful and full of love. Even now,

God is ready to forgive. So come with your whole heart, broken by all you have done, because God can mend a broken and repentant heart.

Gracious God, we test you to the limits with our reckless words and actions, cruel intentions and twisted self-righteousness. When we are called out by the prophets all around us, we get defensive and try to justify our intentions. Help us to return with a contrite spirit and broken heart, ready to accept Your mending ways. Amen.

WEEK EIGHT (AUGUST 16–22)

Day 229: August 16, 2020

Full Plan: Obadiah 1–21

Abbreviated Plan: Obadiah 1–21

Obadiah reminds us that even though Jacob and Esau had reconciled thousands of years earlier, their descendants (Israel and Edom) never fully made peace. Sins of racism and nationalism linger; they require constant repentance and reconciliation.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 230: August 17, 2020

Full Plan: Jonah 1:1–2:10

Abbreviated Plan: Jonah 1:1–17

Jonah's three days in the fish were a blessing, not a punishment. In three days, he went through three critical stages of spiritual transformation: 1) Disorientation/distress (2:1-5), 2) prayer, thanksgiving, surrender (2:6-9), 3) release to make a difference (2:10). What might those steps look like in your life?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 231: August 18, 2020

Full Plan: Jonah 3:1–4:11

Abbreviated Plan: Jonah 2:10; Jonah 3:1–10

Jonah was mad that God forgave the enemy. He had come full circle: resistance to God's call at the start, then repulsion at God's grace at the end. God's circle of love is wider than our cycle of sin. It forgives our enemies around us, and it transforms the enemy within us.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 232: August 19, 2020

Full Plan: Micah 1:1–4:13

Abbreviated Plan: Micah 1:1–16

In Micah 2-3, God is like a prosecuting attorney, and God's people are the defendants, accused of injustice, inequality, war-mongering, and religious hypocrisy. But in Micah 4, God turns into a compassionate judge, who offers redemption, not punishment. What difference should that make in you?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 233: August 20, 2020

Full Plan: Micah 5:1–7:20

Abbreviated Plan: Micah 2:1–13

Micah 6:8: There are three things God requires of us: Do Justice. Love Kindness. Walk Humbly. These are not multiple choice. They are not mix-and-match. Fully living out each one is impossible without the other two.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 234: August 21, 2020

Full Plan: Nahum 1:1–3:19

Abbreviated Plan: Nahum 1:1–15

Under Jonah, Ninevah repented and chose to follow God. But it didn't last long. When the prophet Nahum arrived, they had returned to their old ways. Repentance is not a one-time task. It is a daily choice to live as God intends and not to sin.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 235: August 22, 2020

Full Plan: Habakkuk 1:1–3:19

Abbreviated Plan: Habakkuk 1:1–13

Amid all the heartbreak Habakkuk is experiencing, God tells him to stand tall, keep watch, and wait for hope, because the vision awaits the time (2:1-3). The book concludes with his response: Despite all that is going wrong, “yet I will rejoice,” (3:18). How will you hope and rejoice today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

August 16–22, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Mamie Wise

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

As our Bible Project journey so far has shown us, it is easy to become overwhelmed with the historical context in the Bible, the meanings seemingly lost in translation, and the sheer number of stories. We sometimes struggle to distinguish the foreign culture or context that does not directly apply today from the Biblical truths that should be guiding our daily lives. Our lives are worlds away from the Israelites'. Social issues change over time. As society bridges certain divides, new ones open. Political divides grow deeper and deeper. And economic pressures evolve, leaving Christians to wonder how God wants us to respond. Micah 6:8 distills God's teachings into something unchanging: justice, mercy, and humble reliance on God:

God calls us to seek justice – to treat others fairly and strive for social justice in our own community. Although the context may be different, we can all stand up for or reach out to the oppressed and marginalized where we live and where they are.

God asks us to be merciful to our brothers and sisters when they have wronged us. Sometimes even more challenging, we are called to show mercy to ourselves when we fall short of what God requires of us or what we expect of ourselves. We can forgive and reconcile.

Last, and most importantly, God urges us to walk with him, to rely

on his counsel and not our own. We should not charge ahead without consulting God, then inevitably turn to him to pick up the pieces. Nor should we stand back waiting for God to pull us along. Instead, we should build our relationships with him and walk with him. Just as he was with the Israelites, God is with us and will help us to follow his Word. We need only ask and listen humbly for his counsel.

Prayer: God, while our world changes, you stay the same. Help me to hear your word and listen quietly for your voice. Show me the opportunities that I may be an agent for justice and mercy in our world, and walk closer with you. Amen.

WEEK NINE (AUGUST 23–29)

Day 236: August 23, 2020

Full Plan: Zephaniah 1:1–3:20

Abbreviated Plan: Zephaniah 3:1–20

Zephaniah doesn't make many people's lists of favorite Bible books. It promotes faithfulness using fear and anger. Still, with everything wrong in the world today, it's comforting to think that God is as upset by it all as we are, and God refuses to sit still and let it happen.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 237: August 24, 2020

Full Plan: Haggai 1:1–2:23

Abbreviated Plan: Haggai 1:1–7; 2:10–30

Haggai may be an obscure book, but it packs a timely punch: Get your priorities straight. You may seem to live a great life, but if your spiritual life isn't in order, then it's wasted energy. You are sowing much but harvesting little, eating but not being filled.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 238: August 25, 2020

Full Plan: Zechariah 1:1–4:14

Abbreviated Plan: Zechariah 1:1–6; 11:1–17

To anyone who feels like they are living in exile, Zechariah promises that God will return with prosperity and comfort (1:16-17) and a forgiveness of sins (3:4-5). This won't happen because of human might or power, but by God's Spirit alone (4:6).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 239: August 26, 2020

Full Plan: Zechariah 5:1–9:17

Abbreviated Plan: Zechariah 12:1–14

When Matthew and John described the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem, they quoted Zechariah 9:9 (“humble and riding on a donkey”). It’s a reminder that true greatness is not measured by conquests, but by servanthood and humility.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 240: August 27, 2020

Full Plan: Zechariah 10:1–14:21

Abbreviated Plan: Malachi 1:1–14

Zechariah 11 reminds us that we carry two responsibilities: “Favor” and “Unity.” The first is about honoring our commitment to God, the other about our relationships with each other. Unfortunately, the Israelites has broken both. We should not.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 241: August 28, 2020

Full Plan: Malachi 1:1–2:17

Abbreviated Plan: Malachi 2:1–17

Malachi asks, “Have we not all one father? Why then are we faithless to one another?” (2:10a). It is a reminder that faithfulness to God requires treating others with dignity and respect. Doing otherwise is “wearying to the Lord,” (2:17).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 242: August 29, 2020

Full Plan: Malachi 3:1–4:6

Abbreviated Plan: Malachi 3:1–18

The Old Testament closes with the promise of the Messiah (future) and a reminder of Moses and Elijah (past) (Malachi 4:4-5). The faithful life is based on remembering what God has told you in order to claim what God has promised you. Now, on to the New Testament!

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

August 23–29, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Bernie Lieving

Congratulations! You did it! Regardless of whether you read The Bible Project 2020 Full Plan or the Abbreviated Plan you have worked your way from Genesis through Malachi. This week we completed the journey by reading the last four of the “minor prophets,” as Augustine wrote, “...only because of their length not that they were of minor importance.”

There are things that stand out in these four books. One of them is that God is the primary speaker and there is no question as to where God stands on what is happening in the prophets’ world. The prophetic writers do not hesitate to say what God’s response will be to the Judean people who violate the covenant relationship with God and who do not make just and faithful decisions, and show kindness and compassion to each other.

Neither are the prophets reluctant to tell of God’s blessings on God’s people when they are faithful to the covenant, seek the Lord, call on the name of the Lord, and rebuild the temple. “They will be my people, and I will be their God.” (Zech. 8:8)

A recurring theme in our reading this week has been “the day of the Lord” which will be a time of judgment, doom, purification, restoration, deliverance, and reunion. In spite of all Judah’s wrongdoings and failure to keep God’s covenant, “the sun of righteousness will rise on those revering my name; healing will be in its wings.” (Malachi 4:2) Such writing describes for many the beginning of the messianic age; the coming of the king who would fulfill the prophecies.

While these expectations have yet to be fulfilled for the Jewish community, as we begin our New Testament readings, Zechariah’s words echo each Palm Sunday as we Christians announce God’s Son, our Messiah, Jesus’, arrival in Jerusalem:

“Look, your king will come to you...he is humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the offspring of a donkey.” (Zech 9:9)

Prayer: God, thank you for our Old Testament which reveals You as our Creator, our loving, faithful Lord. Amen.

WEEK TEN (AUGUST 30–SEPTEMBER 5)

Day 243: August 30, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 1:1–2:23

Abbreviated Plan: Malachi 4:1–6

Welcome to the New Testament. Out of the gate, Matthew asks, “What will you do with fear?” Will it lead to anger and paranoia? (Herod) Or will you trust God, even when it doesn’t make sense? (Joseph, Magi) When we are afraid, God calls us to trust and go.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 244: August 31, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 3:1–4:25

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 1:1–25

Matthew 3-4, the prophets are quoted 5 times, by John the Baptist, Jesus, and Matthew. The story of Jesus is rooted in a knowledge of the scriptures. May the story of our lives be anchored in the same way, so that we are living out the truth of the Bible.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 245: September 1, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 5:1–48

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 2:1–23

The five most important words in Matthew 5 are “but I say to you.” Each time Jesus says that, he tells us that righteous behavior is not enough, unless it is motivated by a pure heart. Ask yourself: “Is my heart fully in love with God and others today?”

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 246: September 2, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 6:1–34

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 5:1–48

Matthew 6: Your spiritual maturity is gauged by what you do in private, hidden from public view. Surrender your private life to God, and you can surrender your whole life to God. A way to do that is to release your worry about material things (v. 19-34).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 247: September 3, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 7:1–8:34

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 6:1–34

In Matthew 8, Jesus shows mastery over physical illness. But before that, in chapter 7, he shows us how to have mastery over ourselves: don’t judge, seek God’s best, love others, choose the hard way to follow Jesus, bear fruit, and do what he commands.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 248: September 4, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 9:1–10:42

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 7:1–29

Often when Jesus healed someone in Matthew 9, the Pharisees criticized him. In their view, he could do no right. But he wasn't discouraged. He knew his mission wasn't to make everyone happy (10:14, 34), but to give everyone the choice to follow him (10:39). Jesus demonstrates for us how to stay focused on what God wants us to do.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 249: September 5, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 11:1–12:50

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 10:1–42

Matthew 11-12. Jesus goes on offense against the religious hypocrites, using the healing miracles in ch. 12 to call out their lack of compassion (v7), their heartless legalism (v12), their slander (v24), and their lack of belief (v39). Don't be a Pharisee.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

**August 30–September 5, 2020: Weekly Devotional
by Glenn Simpson**

JUDGE: Counsel, please proceed with your case.

ATTORNEY: Thank you, your honor. May it please the court, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I believe there is ample evidence in the book of Matthew to establish Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior for all the world.

You will see, first, that the genealogy in Chapter 1 establishes Jesus' lineage back to Abraham and to David and confirms that Jesus was born to a virgin. The chapter fulfills prophecy that He would be the son of David and born to a virgin. The second chapter confirms the universal understanding of Jesus as Lord through the evidence that King Herod believed Jesus was the King of the Jews and, covertly, wished to be rid of Him. Although Jesus' childhood was antithetical to what is expected of a King, He was destined by God to save us from ourselves. Further, Matthew 2:13 tells us that an angel of the Lord directed Joseph to take Him to Egypt for His safety.

When you read the evidence in Chapter 3, you will see that John the Baptist told witnesses, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. This is He who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah." There is irrefutable evidence in Chapter 4 that confirms Jesus was led into the wilderness and tested by Satan just as you and I are tested. However, Jesus showed He was Lord by saying, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"

WEEK ELEVEN (SEPTEMBER 6–12)

The evidence before you, in Chapter 5 (the Beatitudes) confirms that Jesus' grace extended to all – especially those in need by telling us that Blessed are the Poor in Spirit (5:3), Blessed are those who mourn (5:4), Blessed are the meek (5:5), and Blessed are the merciful (5:7). Now I ask you, has there ever been a better message in your lifetime?

Furthermore, ladies and gentlemen, the evidence before you, following the Beatitudes and continuing through chapter 12, Jesus raises the bar for us by teaching us that not only shall we not commit adultery but shall not look lustfully at a woman (5:27-28), that an eye for an eye is insufficient and that we are to turn the other cheek (5:39), that we are to give to the needy (6:1-4), that we cannot serve God and money (6:24), and that we are not to judge others (7:1).

Prayer: Gracious Father in Heaven, thank you for loving the world so much that you gave us your only Son such that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Questions:

1. Are my actions consistent with the teachings of Jesus?
2. When I fall short, can I humble myself and admit my failings?
3. How can I select my favorite teaching of Jesus and apply it in my life?

Day 250: September 6, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 13:1–58

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 13:3–43

There are seven parables in Matthew 13, with this common idea: God is at work in your life; it may seem small, but it's real. So you have a choice: let that work grow, or choke and hide it. Don't be like those who live their entire life and miss out (v 17).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 251: September 7, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 14:1–15:39

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 14:1–36

Matthew 14 describes what may have been the longest 2 days of his ministry: grief over John's death, feeding the 5,000, walking on water, and arguing with the Pharisees, all in 48 hrs. But here's the model for us: twice in that period, he withdrew to pray.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 252: September 8, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 16:1–18:35

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 17:1–27

Matthew 16-18 is the gospel's pivot. Peter confesses Jesus to be the messiah (16), then the Transfiguration (17), then Jesus teaches reconciliation. (18) It's a reminder that calling Jesus Lord means full surrender to God, and full restoration with others.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 253: September 9, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 19:1–20:34

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 18:1–35

Matthew 19-20 is full of reversals. Children are blessed, the last are first, the materialistic are burdened, early and late laborers are treated the same, and the served become the servant. God's grace contradicts the world's ways. That's good news for us. How might you live more "counter-culturally"?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 254: September 10, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 21:1–46

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 26:1–35

In Matthew 21, Jesus overturned the tables because the temple wasn't being used for its holy purpose. Same for our lives. If we compromise the work that God wants to do in us, we are like a fruitless fig tree, a disobedient child, or a rebellious worker.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 255: September 11, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 22:1–23:39

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 26:36–75

Matthew 22-23 is the last verbal showdown between Jesus and the Pharisees. They test him with four questions about his authority, then he pronounces six woes against them for their hypocrisy. Struggles with doubt are understandable. But hypocrisy is inexcusable.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 256: September 12, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 24:1–25:46

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 27:1–31

The parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 is a reminder that if you're waiting for Jesus to come back, stop waiting. Jesus is already here. You can see him in the faces of the hungry, thirsty, the immigrant, the poor, and the prisoner.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

September 6–12, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Glenn Simpson

This week, as we read the second half of Matthew, we are graced with a series of glorious life lessons from Jesus – lessons that are the heart of God's plan for us through the life of His son, Jesus. Beginning in Chapter 13, Jesus' parables and miracles tell us that obeying God should be foremost in our lives.

If scripture says to obey God, why don't I listen to God's voice rather than focusing on my own instead?

A little more than a decade ago, my wife and I took our first mission trip to Nicaragua. I wasn't sure why we decided to go to a third world country not long after their civil war. In retrospect, we acted upon the recommendation of the previous year's group that had survived the mission. My experience floored me. I found

happiness among the destitute; I witnessed the grace of God; I experienced true joy from serving God.

Better yet, I gained a new perspective of scripture. It was on that trip that Matthew 25 came alive for me and I for the first time saw scripture more than intellectually. We felt the presence of Jesus within the community we served - Leon, Nicaragua. In fact, each evening the group would share where we had seen Jesus during the day.

Scripture says 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ... The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Through my real-world experience, I've heard Jesus' words speak to me today as if He were in my presence. I've experienced the real joy that comes from obeying God – living out Matthew 25 as obedience to God rather than thinking of myself.

Prayer: Gracious God, as we pause from our hectic lives this Labor Day, may we focus more clearly on our relationship with You and seek to make Your love real to others to the best of my ability.

Questions:

1. How does my understanding scripture change throughout my life?
2. How has the Bible Project 2020 affected my obedience to God?
3. How can I more fully live out the lesson of Matthew 25?

WEEK TWELVE (SEPTEMBER 13–19)

Day 257: September 13, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 26:1–75

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 27:32–66

Matthew 26 calls us to choose: Will our faith in Christ be marked more by the expensive perfume used by the woman at Bethany to anoint him, or by the thirty pieces of silver used by Judas to betray him? Choose sacrifice, not betrayal.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 258: September 14, 2020

Full Plan: Matthew 27:1–28:20

Abbreviated Plan: Matthew 28:1–20

Matthew ends with two competing stories: the cover-up and the commission. There's the story that the disciples stole Jesus' body, and there's the command by Jesus to go into the world and make disciples. We are called to disprove the former by being the proof of the latter.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 259: September 15, 2020

Full Plan: Mark 1:1–3:35

Abbreviated Plan: Mark 1:1–45

Mark 1: It's interesting that in Mark and Luke, the first miracle Jesus performs is healing the man with the "unclean spirit," which is how the Bible describes mental illness. From the outset, Jesus cared for people with mental illness. We should, too.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 260: September 16, 2020

Full Plan: Mark 4:1–5:43

Abbreviated Plan: Mark 2:1–28

Until now, Jesus healed many people, but insisted they keep it a secret. Then in Mark 5, he cast a man's demons into swine and healed him, and told him to tell everyone about his healing. Again, Mark emphasizes Jesus' heart for the mentally hurting.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 261: September 17, 2020

Full Plan: Mark 6:1–56

Abbreviated Plan: Mark 3:1–35

Mark 6 captures the gamut of human anxieties: rejection (1-13), grief (14-29), fatigue and hunger (30-44), panic and overwork (45-52), and ill health (53-56). But above it all, Jesus says, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid,” (v. 52). May his words bring encouragement to you.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 262: September 18, 2020

Full Plan: Mark 7:1–8:38

Abbreviated Plan: Mark 4:1–41

The pivot point in Mark 8 is vss 11-13; the other stories before and after run parallel to each other. Here Jesus tells the Pharisees there will be no heavenly sign to prove his authority. If you’re looking for proof, note the transformed lives around you.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 263: September 19, 2020

Full Plan: Mark 9:1–10:45

Abbreviated Plan: Mark 8:1–38

Mark 9-10 has three reminders that true greatness is found through servanthood and humility: Whoever wants to be first will be last (9:35); Those with a child-like faith will enter the Kingdom (10:15); Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve (10:45).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

September 13–19 2020: Weekly Devotion by Shirley Murphy

We can Make God’s Word Real when we personalize what we read in the Bible. Matthew and Mark provide us with an account of the life, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Every aspect of Jesus’ life serves as a mirror for us to reflect, to examine and to ask WHO ARE WE and WHO DO WE HOPE TO BE.

ARE WE Pilate who washed his hands of the matter of Jesus’ crucifixion and allowed injustice to prevail (Matt. 27:24)?

ARE WE James or John who felt more worthy than all the other disciples and asked Jesus “to sit, one on the right hand, and the other on thy left hand...” (Mark 10:35-37)?

ARE WE the disciples on the storm-tossed boat who witnessed

Jesus performing miracles; and they still did not have a sustainable faith in His power to save them from a perilous sea (Mark 4:37-40)?

ARE WE the rich man who asked how he may “inherit eternal life”? When Jesus told the rich man to sell all that he owned, give the money to the poor and “follow me,” the rich man sadly walked away (Mark 10:17-22).

ARE WE Peter who did not heed the warning from Jesus and ended up denying Jesus three times (Matt. 26:33-35; 69-75)?

Praise God that He accepts us as WE ARE. He can mold us into the person that WE HOPE TO BE through our prayers, our supplications and our willingness to surrender to His will.

WE HOPE TO BE Jairus who believed Jesus could heal his daughter or bring her back to life (Mark 5:22-23; 35-42). Jesus said if you believe, all things are possible (Mark 9:23).

WE HOPE TO BE the woman who was healed because she had faith that by simply touching Jesus’ clothes, she would be healed. Jesus confirmed that it was her faith that made her well (Mark 5:25-34).

WE HOPE TO BE Prayer Warriors whose prayers for others will be as effective as the friends who cut a hole in the roof and lowered their friend down to be healed by Jesus (Mark 2:4) The sick man was healed because of his friends’ faith. When we believe and faithfully pray on behalf of others, God hears our prayers.

WE HOPE TO BE the Sower who sows his seeds in a well

cultivated area. We need to plant God’s Word in God-fearing hearts, so that He will be glorified (Mark 4:3-20).

Let Jesus’ lessons, miracles and promises resonate within our hearts. Amen.

WEEK THIRTEEN (SEPTEMBER 20–26)

Day 264: September 20, 2020

Full Plan: Mark 10:46–12:34

Abbreviated Plan: Mark 9:1–50

This is Mark’s odd version of Palm Sunday. After Jesus entered Jerusalem, he left that night and returned the next day to curse the fig tree and cleanse the Temple. That’s grace. We’re never so low that we can’t say Hosanna and never so high that we don’t need our sins cleansed.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 265: September 21, 2020

Full Plan: Mark 12:35–13:37

Abbreviated Plan: Mark 10:1–52

Mark 12-13 is Mark's "little apocalypse," where Jesus forecasts the Roman persecution and the destruction of the temple. But his biggest warning is against the Pharisees, for taking advantage of the poor. Injustice and inequality is in itself destructive. How do we hear and heed that warning for ourselves?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 266: September 22, 2020

Full Plan: Mark 14:1–72

Abbreviated Plan: Mark 15:1–47

Mark 14 is about blind spots. Jesus knew something about the disciples that they didn't acknowledge in themselves: their capacity to betray, deny, and fall away from him. Following Jesus means confessing our tendency to say, "Surely not I?"

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 267: September 23, 2020

Full Plan: Mark 15:1–16:20

Abbreviated Plan: Mark 16:1–20

The gospel that begins with Jesus casting out demons ends with Jesus empowering the disciples to do the same. Yes, there is evil in this broken world. But God is greater, and we are called and equipped to do something about it.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 268: September 24, 2020

Full Plan: Luke 1:1–80

Abbreviated Plan: Luke 1:1–38

Luke begins with a unifying vision of the old (Elizabeth) and the young (Mary) joining together to usher in the Kingdom. All generations are important; they each have value to offer one another. What can you learn today from people older and younger than you?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 269: September 25, 2020

Full Plan: Luke 2:1–51

Abbreviated Plan: Luke 1:39–80

Luke 2. Sometimes the spiritual life is filled with bold, indelible moments of glory to God (angels, shepherds). Sometimes it is filled with quiet, centered “pondering.” (Mary). Regardless of how today goes, find time to praise through pondering.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 270: September 26, 2020

Full Plan: Luke 3:1–4:13

Abbreviated Plan: Luke 2:1–20

Luke 3. It’s interesting that while Matthew puts Jesus’ genealogy at the time of his birth, Luke puts it at the outset of his ministry. We have two ancestries: one that led to the start of our lives, and the one that led to the start of our faith. Both are important.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

September 20–26, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Joanie Mellen

We begin this week by reading Mark’s recording of the last healing act of Jesus, the restoration of Bartimaeus’ sight. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, the place where he knew he would face the Cross. Yet, from a large crowd, he hears Bartimaeus cry for mercy and healing. When Jesus asks “*What do you want me to do for you?*” Bartimaeus leaps up, and asks for restoration of his sight. Jesus says: “*Go your way; your faith has made you well*”.

Immediately his sight is received and ***Bartimaeus followed him on the way*** (read Longfellow’s Poem: “Blind Bartimaeus” at <http://christ-likelife.blogspot.com/2011/08/blind-bartimaeus.html>).

I like to think that Bartimaeus becomes our eyes on the journey to Jerusalem, becoming one of the “Passover pilgrims”. The ending of Mark, Chapters 11-16, tells of the grand entry into the holy city, the fig tree parable, foretelling of the destruction of the Temple, confirming the great commandment, the widow’s offering, the passion narrative, last supper, the denials by Peter, and finally; the crucifixion and death of Jesus. The thing that is different from the other three Gospels is that Mark closes without an account of the Resurrection or any of the subsequent appearances of the risen Christ. Scholars suggest this is intentional. Mark emphasizes that the crucified and risen Jesus is the Messiah and perhaps this forces us to do the same.

St. Luke, a physician, is the author of the Gospel of Luke and of Acts. Luke begins his Gospel with a short preface letting us know he has done his research well and is recording ‘*The Truth in Its Fullness*’. Then he precedes with telling two wonderful birth stories; that of John the Baptist and Jesus, son of God. Luke goes

on to tell of Jesus' boyhood, public ministry, baptism by John, a long listing of Jesus' genealogy, and ends this week's reading with the story of Jesus being tempted by the devil.

Of the three Gospels, Luke's recording of the birth of Jesus is the one I like best. My favorite verse is **2:19** "***But, Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.***" I think there is a message here for all of us parents.

Prayer: Holy Spirit let us ponder in our hearts how best to nurture the souls under our care to become their greatest potential in the sight of God.

WEEK FOURTEEN (SEPTEMBER 27–OCTOBER 3)

Day 271: September 27, 2020

Full Plan: Luke 4:14–5:39

Abbreviated Plan: Luke 2:21–51

Luke 5 contains the beautiful story of the people who lower their friend through the roof to meet Jesus (17-26). Who do you know who needs to be healed by Jesus? What friends reflect Jesus for you? How might you see the "strange things" of God's grace today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 272: September 28, 2020

Full Plan: Luke 6:1–49

Abbreviated Plan: Luke 4:1–44

Just think of how much better this world would be if we all lived out Luke 6:37-42. Don't judge. Don't condemn. Forgive. Don't search for specks in other's eyes when you have a log in your own. Imagine how better our relationships, country, and world would be.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 273: September 29, 2020

Full Plan: Luke 7:1–8:39

Abbreviated Plan: Luke 5:1–39

There are only two people in the gospels who amazed Jesus by their faith. One is the Canaanite woman, the other is the centurion (Luke 7); both were outsiders to the Jews. This calls us to expand our view of God's love to include those that others would exclude.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 274: September 30, 2020

Full Plan: Luke 8:40–9:62

Abbreviated Plan: Luke 6:12–42

Only Luke records the story in 9:51-56, where the disciples want to punish a Samaritan village with fire from heaven because the villagers rejected them. But Jesus rebuked the disciples. The way of violence and revenge is never the way of Jesus.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 275: October 1, 2020

Full Plan: Luke 10:1–11:36

Abbreviated Plan: Luke 8:1–25

The Good Samaritan story (Luke 10:25-37) is placed in the middle of teachings about rejection (1-16), perseverance (11:1-13), and suffering (11:14-32). It's a reminder that no matter how bad life gets, we can always be in service to our neighbor in need.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 276: October 2, 2020

Full Plan: Luke 11:37–12:59

Abbreviated Plan: Luke 9:1–27

Hardly a day goes by when Luke 12:13-34 isn't helpful in some way. Don't be obsessed with possessions. Do not worry. Do not be afraid. Keep your priorities straight. We are more than lilies and sparrows. We are the "little flock" of God (v. 32).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 277: October 3, 2020

Full Plan: Luke 13:1–14:35

Abbreviated Plan: Luke 10:25–42

We typically interpret the mustard seed parable (Luke 13) to suggest that we should have "faith like a mustard seed." But given the story Luke tells before this, it could also mean having "compassion like a mustard seed." Even a little goes a long way.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

September 27 – October 3, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Martha Chamberlain

Spending Time With Jesus, in Awe

Seasoned readers of the Bible will tell you that you can read the same Bible passage many times, at different times, and still discover a new message. I experienced that this week going through the entire week's readings (Luke 4:14 – 14:35) in one sitting. I had planned to read one day at a time, but I just couldn't stop reading.

I am going back to each day's verses for further, more focused reflection. But immersing myself in multiple page-turner chapters of stories, parables, miracles and sermons drew me closer to Jesus as no one passage could.

Here I found Jesus, rejected by his hometown Nazareth, preaching in the synagogues of Judea, calling his first disciples, speaking in parables, and inviting Levi the tax collector to "follow me" (which he did, of course).

Jesus is preaching his way to Jerusalem, and along the way he's healing people. The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the dead raised. And noticing all this are the Pharisees, with growing anger at the one who speaks and acts so boldly.

"They ought to make a movie of this!" I thought to myself at one point (Actually, they already did. The "Jesus" film, based on the Book of Luke, was released in 1979 and has been translated into 1,400 languages. You can still find it online, or in the Bible mobile

app, as I did. It was widely acclaimed for its historical and biblical accuracy, and as an evangelical tool.).

But in the end, for me, The Book is always so much better. Reading Jesus' own words and Luke's narratives, I could imagine myself in the crowd, or in a corner of the room. I witnessed miracles and absorbed profound truths. I heard Jesus' voice. I found myself at his feet in awe.

Immersion is a word we Christians associate with the Sacrament of Baptism. But it can happen also when you read the Gospel of Luke.

"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear," Luke 14:35.

