

# BACK ON TRACK



A 40-DAY JOURNEY  
TO SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

JIMMY ALLEN

## Leaders Packet



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## Sermon Outlines

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### Googling God

#### Sermon #1

##### Introduction

If possible show some pictures or a video of galaxies, planets, solar systems, etc. - Milky Way Galaxy, Sombrero Galaxy, Whirlpool Galaxy, etc.

##### **I. God is immensely, eternally and astronomically huge!**

- A. I have spent the last few days watching internet videos and looking at pictures. I have read about the Hubble Telescope, looked at astronaut photos from space and been blown away by the universe.
- B. Let's start small - 93 million miles away from earth is our star - the sun. It is a raging ball of fire - about 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit. It is like billions of nuclear bombs going off simultaneously on the surface. It is ferocious, powerful, intense, and radiant. Thank God it is 93 million miles away.
- C. From us to sun - 93 million miles away is like stepping out the back door in our universe. We measure things in inches, feet, yards and miles. The universe is measured in light years - 186,000 miles per second! That is 5.88 trillion miles in a year.
- D. The Milky Way Galaxy - our little subdivision - has billions of stars (size of sun).
- E. If I started counting stars at the rate of one per second, it would take 2,500 years to count the Milky Way Galaxy only. The Milky Way Galaxy is 100,000 light years across.
- F. Psalm 147:4 says, "He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name." He probably calls the sun something different than we do.

- G. Isaiah 48:13 - Living Bible: "It was my hand that laid the foundations of the earth; the palm of my right hand spread out the heavens; I spoke and they came into being." God can hold the starry hosts in His palm!
  - H. Every second a new star is being formed. The universe is expanding.
  - I. If an auditorium that seats 5,500 people was filled with frozen peas, that amount of peas would represent the number of galaxies in our solar system.
  - J. The "Known Universe" is about 14 billion to 20 billion light years out in space. Why would God make it so vast? The Sombrero Galaxy, the Whirlpool Galaxy and all the rest . . . they are glorifying God! The universe seems a bit over-sized if it is just a home for you and me. What if it is to show off God?! He holds all this in the palm of His hand. Make a bigger telescope and see more; then a bigger one; it just keeps on going and going!
  - K. Read the scriptures - Wow!! A huge God made it all.
- II. You are really, infinitesimally small, you maggot, you worm.**
- A. Perhaps you are thinking - stop, you are making me feel small and hurting my feelings. No - I am not making you feel small. You ARE small. I am not trying to needlessly hurt your feelings - it is in the Bible.
  - B. Job 25:1-6
  - C. Psalm 8:3-4
  - D. Why would we think the world revolves around me? Why would we think that life is whatever I make it, that I will focus on my job and my family and my career? We are but a speck. In the big picture - we are not even dust.
- III. This life is about God, who fills the universe.**
- A. Jesus came down and died (the One who was a part of creation and sits enthroned in the heavens). Then He left a letter behind.
    1. Help the poor (Matthew 25:31-46) - hungry; thirsty; sick; imprisoned. The voices for the needy are merely saying - "I am

trying to help you get to heaven." This question will be discussed on judgment day.

2. Make sure everyone on the planet knows about me.
  - a. This is not a suggestion or request. It is a commandment. It should be a joy and privilege too! Share some stories.
  - b. There is no greater joy than helping others get to know this amazing God, Creator and Father.

## **Conclusion**

Let's put together this huge God and the worm we are.

One day as the worm oozes around in mud, it eats a dead leaf for supper and then goes to sleep. The next morning the worm awakes. It finds wings, beauty and flies off! God transforms the worm into a butterfly!

Philippians 2:13 - "God works in YOU for His purpose!" You have had family issues, addictions and are scarred by sin. Can the Creator of it all help? Of course he can! God is huge. We are small. It is about HIM! He changes everything! Let's live, serve, share and give for His glory!

# Chasing Character

## Sermon #2

### Introduction

Audience participation (call on some people) . . .

What do you work hardest at? Job; kids; dating relationship; academics; sports.

What are your goals for this year? Find a job; make better grades; lose weight; discover peace/contentment; help someone become a Christian. Most of these tend to fall under the "doing category."

### Text: 2 Peter 1:3-11

Today we are not going to primarily be talking about you converting people or going on a mission team or being excellent at the work place. We are going to talk about character. This is not about what you want to do but who you are and who you want to be. It is easy to pursue positions at work, school and church. This passage says to pursue what is on the inside - character.

- We will mainly focus on verses 5-8, but the passage initially says, "For this very reason . . ." What reason? Because you know Him; you have become a partaker in the divine nature (Holy Spirit in you - partnership); you are God's son or daughter.
- Because of this - change! "I get to" not "I have to."
- You have SO much potential! What if Monet announced today she was quitting the violin (a teen girl in the Hartford Church)? Rebellion! No, you can't! You are so talented! Don't stop now. Keep practicing. It will be worth it. I wonder what God says? You and I can make beautiful music - keep going. Don't just do your basic scales over and over - grow; change; progress! Make every effort!

## Character Areas:

1. Faith - Believe. #1 building block - how do you handle what you consider to be unanswered prayer? Challenges? Tell some stories of perseverance and the victories of God in marriage, overcoming sin, sickness, etc.
2. Goodness - Virtue - Moral excellence. His power will connect with your focus. Would I turn in my recently bought treadmill because I am not losing weight even if I never got on it? God will provide but we have to "make every effort" in the area of moral excellence (not moral slightly below averageness).
3. Knowledge - This is facts from the Bible and life skills. What are you learning about God from His Word, others, nature, etc.? Let's not just go after doubling disciples but quadrupling our wisdom, insight and knowledge in all spiritual areas.
4. Self-control - Master sensual desires (eating; sex; sleep; playing; shopping). This is the #1 area mentioned from this list in every poll I have done as the one which needs to improve most radically. For me, I have to ask the question, "What would Jesus do in health and exercise? In speech (our tongue can be out of control and cause much damage)? In every way!
5. Perseverance - Steadfastness; patient endurance. Graciously holding up under the weight or load. What do we most often say? "God get rid of this load!"
  - A. Is God more interested in your comfort or your character?
  - B. What do you want in the year ahead (two choices)? For it to go smoothly with no challenges in finances, work, school, sports . . . . but you are about the same or further away from God - or - it is a very challenging year with sickness, trials, hardship but you grow closer to God who pulls you thru it.? God wants you to persevere. James 1:2 - Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds . . . !
6. Godliness - Being like God; reverence. This is a very high standard. We can't do this half-heartedly. Make every effort to be just like Jesus!
7. Brotherly kindness/affection - Phileo (Philadelphia). Is there a feel in your church family that you are really brothers and sisters? Most congregations use the title, but how deep does it go? People who pretty much show up for

services only are missing the family bond and not growing in brotherly kindness. Make phone calls. Help others in your small group move. Write a note of encouragement.

8. Love - Agape; self-sacrificing. This is unconditional; in spite of; even for our enemies.
  - And these should all be ever increasing. We can all grow in knowledge; self control and every area.
  - This will keep you from being ineffective! Do you want to see God's church grow or have His desired family vibe, then work on you and that will help!
  - One translation says, "You are so nearsighted that you are blind." This part I know about. Nearsighted people can only see what is right in front of them and miss that which is farther away. Advertisers tell us to buy the flat screen TV with nothing down for a month! They make no mention of the 12 years of payments where interest is higher than your salary on down the road. The devil is great at this one too. Enjoy this 10 minutes on the Internet exploring. Drink this. Smoke that. Check out this guy/girl's party.
  - Let's return to the question we started with - what do you work hardest at? Job; family; dating; okay - but pursue (make every effort) personal character! It will enhance all of these!

## **Conclusion**

If you grow in these, you will never fall. You may slip and stumble but you won't be taken out by the big fall.

# Relentless Reaction

## Sermon #3

### Introduction

Audience Participation . . .

**What would you like God to say to you right now if He had one sentence?**

Well done good and faithful servant . . . Come on home . . . I love you . . .

How about this one, "You have great faith and whatever you request is granted!"

That would be spectacular. We're going to read a story where that is said, but no one focuses on that because the first part of the story is so challenging.

**Text: Matthew 15:21-28**

For three years, Jesus spent 99% of his time in Israel. He came initially for Jewish people and had a plan to spread it from there (in fact, in Matthew 10, he tells his 12 to NOT go to the Gentiles). This 1% of his time is represented in this story. Mark 7 says Jesus wanted to have his presence there kept a secret (maybe he wanted to rest).

- In this passage, Jesus deals with a Canaanite woman. Check out this passage to see how the Jews felt about this group of people from Tyre and Sidon - **Matthew 11:20-22**. The famous Jewish historian, Josephus, said, "The people of Tyre are our bitterest enemies."
- It doesn't get more desperate than having a daughter suffering terribly. I am sadly unmoved by many things, but a mom crying in agony over a child is not one of them. I would stop if I heard a mother shrieking. What did Jesus do?

### **I. What Do You Do When God Is Silent?**

A. Jesus did not answer a word.

1. Have you ever felt like that? I want a child. I want to be effective with others. I would like just a date - forget a husband.

I would like a better husband. I'd like a job. But you seem to be hearing nothing from God?! Share some personal examples.

2. What do most do? They quit on the whole God thing. He didn't help me. He isn't speaking. This seems very rude to this woman, right?
3. Life is a test, not just a celebration (heaven is the eternal celebration). We don't like tests. We like victories and successes.
4. How did this woman respond? With persistent, relentless FAITH!

## **II. What Do You Do When Disciples Hurt You?**

- A. The most spiritual people alive (apostles) say one sentence in this story, "Send her away!" She is annoying. Get rid of her.
- B. Share some personal examples.
- C. What do many do when hurt? They use it as an excuse to drop Jesus. Some say, "You are hypocrites; that is not Christ-like; etc." as they walk away.
- D. How did our Canaanite woman respond? With persistent, relentless faith! She is passing the test.

## **III. What Do You Do When Jesus' Words Seem Too Strong and Overwhelming?**

- A. Jesus - I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. I can't take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.
  1. What intense things does Jesus say? Hate your father, mother, children and even your own life! Forgive 70 X 7. I Peter 3 - non-Christian spouse who doesn't behave well; love them and win them over by power of your life, not just your words. Share some personal examples.
- B. Did Jesus just call me a dog? No he did not!
- C. How did the Canaanite woman respond? With persistent, relentless faith. Even my pet at home gets some crumbs. Will you throw me some crumbs?

## **Conclusion**

He says, "Woman, you have great faith and your request has been granted." It ends perfectly, but it didn't get there the way we like it." Your life - this is how it can end. OK! But I want it to go a certain way too. Sorry - that is not promised.

Jesus with his 12 - He was constantly testing them: "You give them something to eat." "You cast out the demons." "You are in a boat and a violent storm takes place, now what are you going to do?"

We need to be less demanding of God. We can ask but also realize we are not entitled to it our way. We most need persistent, relentless faith in every circumstance.

# Believe in Breakthroughs

## Sermon #4

### Introduction

A boy told his father, "Dad, if three frogs were sitting on a limb that hung over a pool, and one frog decided to jump off into the pool, how many frogs would be left on the limb?" The dad replied, "Two." "No," the son replied. "There are three frogs and one decides to jump, how many are left?" The dad said, "Oh, I get it, if one decides to jump the others would too. So there are none left." The boy said, "No dad, the answer is three. The first frog only DECIDED to jump."

We are not just looking for decisions this morning. We are certain that God still works miracles, and He will move in our lives and church today as we act on God's Word.

### Text: I Chronicles 14

#### I. God Blessed David and God Has Blessed You

##### A. Review David's life after Goliath

1. He spent 10 years as a harpist (Saul wanted to kill him, but what minister hasn't wanted to kill the music ministry leader a few times?).
2. He spent 10 years running for his life away from Saul (at one point he sided with the Philistines; then he acted insane - again, who hasn't been at that point?).
3. Finally there was some peace it seemed (I Chronicles 13 the ark begins its trip back home though Uzzah dies; I Chronicles 15 - the ark arrives home but David's wife, Michal, is critical . . . it is very difficult to get everything going right at the same time with God's people).

B. Hiram not only sent building supplies - like cedar logs - but also sent the builders (stone masons and carpenters).

C. Israel was finally getting united after Saul had been dividing people against David.

- D. What has God done for you/us?
1. There is unity in our church and churches.
  2. There are many physical blessings (name several).
  3. There are a multitude of spiritual blessings (name several).

## **II. God's Victory Requires Battles.**

- A. The Valley of Rephaim is "the valley of the giants (study out its history with Goliath, Caleb, etc.)" where many battles throughout history were fought.
- B. There will always be obstacles to building vibrant lives, families and churches.
1. Lose the excuses: "Oh my leaders . . . Oho my facility . . . Oh my arthritis."
  2. The enemy is relentless (verse 11 finish one battle with Philistines and then in verse 13, "once more the Philistines raided the valley" in battle number two).
  3. Verse 11 says: "God has broken out against my enemies BY MY HAND."
    - a. It is all about God, but God moves when we move; God works when we work; God attacks when we attack.
    - b. God is looking for someone's hand to be used today. Whose will it be?

## **III. God Gives Breakthroughs**

- A. The best part of this story to me is that the place was renamed Baal Perazim, which means "THE LORD WHO BREAKS OUT" or "THE LORD OF THE BREAKTHROUGH."
- B. The Message Translations says (verse 11), "God exploded my enemies as water explodes from a pipe."
- C. This is a God-given certainty (verse 10): "Go and I will hand them over to you." Joshua 1:30: "I will give you every place you set your foot." There are many other similar New Testament promises (Matthew 28:18-20, John 14:12-14, etc.).
- D. There may be different battle strategies (round 1 - straight in attack; round 2 - circle around and attack by the balsam trees).

1. "But I don't know what to do!" Fine, then inquire of the Lord. If you lack wisdom, ask.
  2. Verse 15 sounds like angelic stirrings to me (see also II Kings 6 - open your eyes to the spiritual hosts around us).
- E. The broken places in my life and church can be renamed the breakthrough places.
1. What are these? Men's ministry; married ministry; personal fears; financial challenges; etc.
  2. The Philistines are mentioned 286 times in the Bible. They were the bullies and chief rival of Israel in the Old Testament. However, this is the last mention of giants in Scripture. Why? Possibly because God broke through.
  3. The Israelites chased the Philistines from Gibeon to Gezer (and with the young bucks to the old geezers). Their problems were run out of the country. How about yours?

### **Conclusion**

Share some of God's breakthroughs in your life and church in the past. Discuss what breakthroughs you are looking for in the present and future!

# Powerful Prayers

## Sermon #5

### Introduction

What were your dreams when you were young? To be a pro athlete? To unite all churches? To be the first female president of your country? We thought huge back then!

What are you working on that's big now? What are you living for that is big today? What are you praying for that's big (fervently and consistently)?

- Often we pray very mundane things - I hope the parents will all be there to pick up the kids after teen devo. I hope my sermon goes okay this week. Bless our vacation.
  - This is the minutiae of life and that is fine - God is for this. It is okay to pray about it. However, most of this will work out without prayer.
  - Let's discuss today three Bible passages that call us to live and pray with big and radical hearts to an enormous God just waiting to see someone get stirred up a little.
- I. Matthew 6:31-33** - Don't worry about the little things. Even pagans get this. Jesus is making fun of His followers.
- A. What are you praying for that is big?
  - B. What am I praying for that would not happen unless God was completely around? These are the prayers I would pray emotionally, relentlessly, and faithfully. God is not annoyed by these but honored (Oh, you do believe I am big).
  - C. Will this be a radically different year or same old, same old?
  - D. The size of my prayers will tell my kids the size of my God. The size of my prayers can also tell my friends and brothers and sisters about the size of my God.
  - E. In our church prayer request cards are filled out monthly. I often have to pause and try to think of something . . . If you can't even think

of it, then you probably aren't even praying it. What is something big and scary that would really twist my faith!?

## **II. Luke 11:1-13**

- A. Apostles say "teach us how to pray." They were good Jewish boys and knew. But Jesus did it totally differently than they had ever experienced.
- B. The Lord's Prayer here is only four very short sentences. In essence, Jesus says, "God is great; I am dependent on Him."
- C. The heart of the prayer seems just as important (see the story to follow which we usually don't read in this context).
- D. The setting for this story is a Middle Eastern home. It would have had only one room and the knocking would wake everyone up.
- E. God says "Don't bother me." But after a while, he says "okay" because this man was so passionate, persistent and faithful.

## **III. Luke 18:1-8**

- A. In this passage, God is compared to a wicked, unjust judge. "Don't bother me." Always pray and don't give up.
- B. We pray too tame and polite. People came after God in the Old Testament - for His glory! In the New Testament, there is banging on doors, begging and asking. I wonder if God isn't saying, "Finally someone is asking big."
- C. Everyone who asks receives. That doesn't mean if you ask on Monday that you will be guaranteed to get it on Tuesday. No. In context, it may take months or years.
- D. My two fervent prayers for 17 years - my kids and the Hartford church. Those are clearly the things that have gone best around me. I have not prayed as fervently for many other things that have not moved nearly as miraculously.
- E. Share about your miraculous prayer list and how God has responded over the years and recently.
- F. While I am praying polite and tame prayers, young church planters are praying big ones. I know. I have been there.

## Conclusion

Visual illustration with fish bowl. If you put the little stuff in first, it gets all filled up (sand - representing Facebook and internet time; water representing showers and going to beach; small pebbles representing school or work; etc.). Then you can't fit in the big rocks (save largest two for prayer and Bible study, a relationship with God). Dump out filled up bowl. **Put the big rocks in first** (pray big prayers!). Listen to a big God from His Word. Then you can still work, go to school and check your Facebook page (add back in water, sand and small pebbles)! He promises to answer those huge prayers!

## Bible Talk Outlines

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### THE BANQUET FEAST

#### Bible Talk #1

Question: What does the phrase "a banquet feast" bring to mind?

- All positives: food, friends, dress up, etc.
- Would you want to miss out? Why not?

Luke 14:15-24

This passage compares God's kingdom to what? A banquet feast. Do most people view "church" that way? No. How is it viewed?

Depressing, boring, sad, no fun, restrictive, etc.

- I. In this Biblical parallel, who is the chef for the banquet feast?  
God.
- II. What is on the menu at God's banquet feast?
  - A. Your favorite food (what is it?), like steak, would be compared to what? Love, joy, peace of mind . . . the great stuff!
  - B. Bread - God's Word (Matthew 4:4; John 6:33).
  - C. Vegetables - denial of self; repentance . . . the stuff you need but may not initially taste all that great.
  - D. Dessert - heaven . . . at end.

III. With such a great spread laid out by God, what did the people say to the invitation to His banquet? No. Why??

- Wrong priorities (no one was ultra-negative; they may have even said, "I wish I could but don't have time)!
- Bought land - possessions; business responsibilities
- Oxen - car
- Wife - other people
  - We think, "God understands." Does he? Is this okay?
  - What was the result of these decisions? They missed the banquet feast of God. He was ANGRY.

Matthew 22:10-14 (same story; parallel passage in another gospel)

I. In this conclusion, one who finally attended did not do exactly as God directed in entering the feast. What happened to him? Why? What does that teach us about God?

II. What is the overall point of this parable?

- God must be first.
- When we live out "church" His way - it is exciting, fun, inspiring, adventurous, relational, etc. . . . like a banquet feast!

## PRECONCEIVED IDEAS

### Bible Talk #2

Question: What is a preconceived idea? What are some examples? The world is flat, the sun travels around the earth, if I give a  $\frac{1}{2}$  way effort my teacher will pass me, etc. What are some incorrect, preconceived ideas spiritually? If you are just a good person, God will save you. The preacher is always right. You only have to believe there is a God . . . .

#### II Kings 5:1-14

- I. What were the positives about Naaman?
  - He was a commander of an army (like a five-star general); great man; highly regarded; victorious and valiant soldier; etc.
- II. What was the one negative?
  - But he had leprosy (very big issue).
  - What do you know about the disease, leprosy?
- III. Who was the story's hero?
  - A servant girl
  - What does that teach you about who God can use and how he could possibly even use you too?
- IV. How did Naaman react to God's prophet's message (Elisha didn't even tell him face-to-face) when told to dip in the Jordan River seven times? Why?
  - Very negative reaction
  - He had preconceived ideas of how his healing should be done ("I thought" . . .).

- V. When Naaman ultimately fulfilled God's command, what happened?
- VI. Why do you think God made this specific command?
- VII. What do you think would have happened if Naaman had dipped six times in the Jordan River? How about seven times in the Abana or Pharpar Rivers?
- VIII. What lessons should we learn from this story?

If time, there are several New Testament examples of this same point. See Acts 18:24-28 (Apollos); John 8:37-38 ("no room for my word"); John 7:17 (choose to do God's will); etc.

## ONE BOWL OF STEW

### Bible Talk #3

#### Question

When I say "appetite," what do you think? Food. What are some other appetites? Sex; acceptance; things (clothes, cars, phones, etc.); etc. Are all of these bad? No. The question of the night is, "Will these control us or will we control them?"

Show pictures or video of . . . Tiger Woods; Winona Ryder (shoplifting in store); etc. What do you think of when you see these pictures/videos? What happened? What went wrong?

#### **Genesis 25:29-34; Hebrews 12:16-17**

Who was Esau? In Jewish culture, what did he stand to gain by being the oldest son? The birthright - he was from a very rich family. Also, beyond that - instead of "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" being all through the Bible, it could have been "Abraham, Isaac and Esau!"

When Esau came in one day from hunting, what did he say? I'm famished (starving in New Living Translation)! Sound familiar? Was he really starving? Then he said, "I am about to die." Really? Was he? Esau's desire for satisfaction overcame everything that would happen in his future (financial security; legacy; leadership; etc.). He didn't make this decision for a year's supply of Cheerios or a lifetime of money but for one bowl of stew!

In what ways do you see others or yourself feeding your own satisfaction in ways that long-term don't make any sense? Smoking, eating excessively, pornography, hook ups, critical with the tongue, etc.

Esau justified his actions by thinking "I am about to die" and I'm no good to anyone then. In what ways do we justify our wrong decisions? Everyone needs a little fun; it will only happen this once; it's not as bad as what some others do; etc.

Have you ever thought that "it will never happen to me?" in regards to divorce, being caught stealing or cheating, becoming addicted, etc.? Is that true? How should that make us act?

How should we handle the temptations for the "one bowl of stew" that could destroy our lives? Look at the big picture, not just the immediate one.

- Matthew 26:36-46 - Jesus in Gethsemane went the harder way short term for the greatest good long term (just share story if you don't have time to read it all).
- Hebrews 12:2 - Jesus' example again, and this is in the same chapter as we read as we began about Esau's bad choice.

Advertisers are calling us today to the short term fix, to fulfill all our appetites. God is saying that the "one bowl of stew" now is not worth it. Look long term at the life, family and eternity you want to build.

As one daughter recently told me, "Do you want a Snickers bar now or an all you can eat buffet later?!"

## A TERRIBLE AND APPALLING THING

### Bible Talk #4

#### Question

If you opened up the internet or newspaper and found this headline, "A Terrible and Appalling Thing Has Happened in the Land," what would you think was wrong? Terrorist attack, disease, tornadoes, etc.?

What do you think God would call "terrible and appalling" in our land? Crime spree, drug abuse, adultery, etc.?

God did use this exact term in **Jeremiah 5:30-31**. Let's read it.

What was horrible and appalling to God back in this day with his Jewish people? The religious leaders taught lies and ruled by their own authority. Is that possible today? How? How can we know if lies are taught (versus truth)? We must know God's word ourselves.

What was the people's response to their bad, religious leaders? They loved it!? Why? Because they weren't called to any different standard than anyone else.

Why does Jeremiah close out with this question, "But what will they do in the end?"? What was the implied answer to this question? What do you think the answer will be for religious people and religious leaders today? What should we do about that?

How do you answer this question today, "But what will you do in the end?" What needs to change in your life to confidently answer this in a way that would please God?

# FRIENDSHIP

## Bible Talk #5

Question: Who were your best friends in middle school and why? What was the depth and length of those relationships? Are you still friends today? Why or why not?

Today we want to discuss God's definition of friendship from the book of Proverbs.

- **Proverbs 18:24** - What is the difference in a companion and a friend?
  - It can be what you share, the emotional bonds, frequency of interaction, sacrifice, etc.

Let's look at three characteristics of real friendship . . .

### **I. Proverbs 17:17**

A. What is the characteristic of friendship found in this verse?

B. A friend **LOVES AT ALL TIMES**.

1. What is the challenge with this characteristic?

➤ Similar to marriage vow - sickness & health; better or worse; richer or poorer; etc.

2. What tends to happen with friendships when people gain a lot of money or lose it?

➤ Proverbs 14:20

### **II. Proverbs 27:5-10; 17**

A. What does this teach us about real friendship?

B. A friend SAYS WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID.

1. If you really want to keep an acquaintance, what is the temptation in what you say?
  - To always say what he/she wants to hear.
2. What have been some "wounds from a friend" that you have heard in your life?
3. How did that affect you?

### III. Proverbs 16:28

- A. What characteristic of friendship does this teach us about?
- B. A friend TRUSTS.
- C. This passage deals with gossip, but a real friend has his/her friend's back, decides to live believing in and helping out one another.
- D. What does unconditional love mean to you?
- E. If others trust you, what does that do to you?
  - Causes you to want to be a better man/woman.
- F. Who has been a person in your life who believed in you and what did it bring out in you?

What would it take for you to build this type of relationship with someone else? Are you willing to pursue that? Challenge: Sit down and go after inviting this type of friend into your life this week (be open; look into the scripture; make the time).

## Family Devotionals

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### GOD'S LOVE

#### Family Devotional #1

##### Introduction

Have two pieces of wood & tools nearby.

What is it that makes you question if God loves you? Loved one's sickness or death; difficult teacher or boss; natural disasters in the world; financial challenges; etc.

They had the same challenges in the first century. In the church in Rome, Nero the emperor, was persecuting the Christians intensely.

Read **Romans 8:18-22** - Even the creation was having a hard time (think about our tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, etc.). We live in a fallen, sinful world where bad things happen. We wonder, "Where is God's love now?" Romans 8 answers that question.

##### **Romans 8:31-39**

How does this passage answer our question about God's love? No matter what we feel, God loves us more than anyone else ever could or would.

What will separate us from God's love? Nothing! Not trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, etc. This may not change the way you always feel, but let's change the way we think. As a father or mother,

how do we love our kids? Unconditionally and for the long haul (not dependent on daily behavior, though we would love that to be great!).

Pull out two pieces of wood . . . One of these represents you and one represents God. How tight is God's love for you? Very tight - nail in the two boards together.

But what about during bad times? What if you lose a job or say a curse word? God still loves you. Screw in some screws to the two pieces of wood.

What about when you feel confused because your grandparent has cancer or a tornado hit your state? God still loves you. Put duct tape around the two pieces of wood. You will never understand how tight the love of God is. He is not letting go!

What if you fail a test or argue with your brother/sister or . . . ? God's love is still there. Tie some rope around the two pieces of wood!

Do you get the point? What is it?

**I John 4:19** - We love because he first loved us.

Let's respond to God's love and repent of our sins. But always know - God's love is there. It is constant. It is persistent. Nothing can separate you from that!

## HANDLING THE TOUGH STUFF

### Family Devotional #2

#### Illustration

Look at some birds outside or some birds via pictures, the Internet, etc. What would be tough about being a bird? How do they seem to feel about it? Do you hear them singing in the morning? Write three things you are worried about on an index card.

#### Matthew 26:36-46

How did Jesus handle the tough stuff in front of him (the cross)?

#### I. He Prayed About It.

##### A. Why does this help? How does this help?

- It puts it on the shoulders of the One who can handle everything.
- It connects you deeper relationally with God, your Father.

#### II. He Got Open About It With The Most Spiritual People He Could Find.

##### A. Rehoboam listened to "his buddies" versus wise counsel and it ruined his reign as king and the nation (I Kings 12:1-11).

##### B. How are large corporations in America run? Board of Directors. Why? Because no one thinks one mind is best for every situation.

1. Who is your spiritual board of directors? Why did you choose them? How do they help you?
2. Who should we be best friends with and why?

#### III. He Drank The Cup

- A. He went ahead and did what was hard to get it behind him. Then he didn't have to dread it any longer.
- B. Is there anything you need to do to put it behind you in life or on a daily basis?
  - 1. Homework
  - 2. Have a needed talk with someone
  - 3. What else?

### Conclusion

Birds don't get ulcers. God takes care of them. They look to him for food, protection and life. Matthew 6:25-26 says that he loves you more than birds. He will help you through whatever hard things you are facing just like he helped Jesus through the cross to his resurrection!

# THE TASTE OF REPENTANCE

## Family Devotional #3

### Illustration

Blindfold members of family and give them a taste test. See who guesses correctly. Items can include chocolate chip ice cream, cottage cheese, broccoli, cracker, etc (most good but one that is not).

Psalm 34:8 - "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

When you think of the word "repent," is it a positive or negative thought? Why?

What does the Bible say about repentance?

- I. **Acts 3:19** - It brings refreshment!
  - A. The Greek word literally means "to heal by being exposed to the air."
  - B. It is like a buried coal miner or a drowning child finding air after coming up from underground or under water.
- II. **II Corinthians 7:8-11** - It brings revival!
  - A. What does revival mean? This can be true for a church or an individual.
  - B. This man in the church at Corinth repented. What are some ways we can each change to make God happy and be revived ourselves.
- III. **Matthew 17:11** - It bring restoration!
  - A. How can someone be brought back to his original condition or even better?

- B. What are some benefits you have seen in the past or present from repentance/changing?
- C. Tell someone else in the family how you have seen his/her changes benefit the family or encourage you.

# YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW

## Family Devotional #4

### Introduction

Have several weights or bar bells nearby.

### **Joel 3:1-8**

In the book of Joel, God forgave the Jewish people when they repented of their sins. He gave them grace and blessings (Joel 2:28-29; 3:17-18, 20-21).

However, Israel's enemies would not be so fortunate. How did God say he would deal with them?

There is one way in the Bible we are NOT to be like God. **Romans 12:17-21** says that he alone can take vengeance. Why is that? As a Father, God takes it personal what others do to his children. Listen to these phrases: "Are you repaying me for something I have done to you?" "You took my silver and my gold and my treasures." "I will return on your own heads what you have done."

The New Testament says it like this, "You reap what you sow (**Galatians 6:7-8**)." What does that mean?

Make the two largest family members "God" and "Jesus." Then someone else can be "Sinner." How can we sin? Do you understand that this hurts God? Put weights into God's arms. He is able to handle the load but it is painful to our Father in Heaven when we sin. The Bible says that we reap what we sow. That means if we gossip, curse, are jealous, etc., then it will eventually come back on us. Take weights out of God's hands and put them in Sinner's hands. It will be too heavy to

carry this load through life. Even if you carry it for awhile, it will wear you out eventually. We need Jesus to come to the rescue! Jesus takes weights out of Sinner's hands. He can take the sin away (have him hold weights in red towel representing his blood).

What did we learn today? Let's not sin against God. It hurts him. When we do, the problems and weight comes back upon us. Thankfully, we can humble ourselves, as the Jews did in Joel 2, repent and allow Jesus to take our sins away.

## SALT AND LIGHT

### Family Devotional #5

#### Illustration

- Have a couple of hamburgers cooked. Ask if any family member would like salt on it? For someone who says 'yes,' then dump a huge amount on the burger. "Do you still want it?" No. "Let me try again." Then just put one small sprinkle on a different burger. "Is that okay?" No.
- Turn off lights and turn on flashlight to help family find way around house. Stick flashlight in someone's face. "Does this help you find your way around?" No. Put flashlight under bowl. "Does this help?" No.

#### Matthew 5:13-16

- I. We are called to be salt and light.
  - A. What does too much salt or light do? Doesn't taste good; blinds you; etc.
  - B. What happens if we are overly religious? Turns people off & doesn't attract others to Jesus.
  - C. How can we be this way? Religious lingo; better-than-you attitude; bumper sticker Christianity; etc.
- II. What does the right amount of light do?
  - A. Guides - into truth
  - B. Exposes - what needs to change
  - C. Attracts attention - for God's glory
- III. What does the right amount of salt do?
  - A. Preserves - keeps the world from going totally corrupt

- B. Seasons - gives this world a better taste
- IV. Salt is a little more subtle and light is a little more loud.
  - A. We need to be both.
  - B. In small ways and bold ways - be salt and light!
- V. John 8:12 - Jesus is the light of the world
  - A. In what ways was Jesus the light of the world?
  - B. How can we be like Him today? How can we get out from under our bowl at work, school, etc. (or out of the salt shaker)?