

Growing in Godliness

2 Peter 1:5-11

<u>No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Text</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
1	Oct 02	Introduction	2 Peter 1:5-11	Jeff Lentz
2	Oct 05	Faith	Abraham pts 1, 2, 5	Bobby Thornton
3	Oct 09	Faith	Abraham pts 1, 2, 5	Bobby Thornton
4	Oct 12	Faith	Abraham pts 6, 7, 8	Todd Reynolds
5	Oct 16	Faith	Abraham pts 6, 7, 8	Todd Reynolds
6	Oct 19	Virtue	Ruth pts 1, 2	Jeff Lentz
7	Oct 23	Virtue	Ruth pts 3, 4	Jeff Lentz
8	Oct 26	Knowledge	Ezra pt 1	Brian Simmons
9	Oct 30	Knowledge	Ezra pts 2-3	Brian Simmons
10	Nov 02	Self Control	Daniel pt 1	Matt Jones
11	Nov 06	Self Control	Daniel pt 3	Matt Jones
12	Nov 09	Self Control	Daniel pt 6	Matt Jones
13	Nov 13	Self Control	Daniel pt 7	Matt Jones
14	Nov 16	Perseverance	Job pts 1, 2	Eric Paige
15	Nov 20	Perseverance	Job pts 2, 5	Eric Paige
16	Nov 23	Perseverance	Job pts 5, 6	Eric Paige
17	Nov 27	Godliness	Aaron	Kaleb Keenan
18	Nov 30	Godliness	Aaron	Kaleb Keenan
19	Dec 04	Godliness	Aaron	Kaleb Keenan
20	Dec 07	Brotherly Affection	Jonathan	Todd Reynolds
21	Dec 11	Brotherly Affection	Jonathan	Todd Reynolds
22	Dec 14	Brotherly Affection	Jonathan	Todd Reynolds
23	Dec 18	Love	John	Woody McClendon
24	Dec 21	Love	John	Woody McClendon
25	Dec 25	Love	John	Woody McClendon
26	Dec 28	Summary – Making your Election Sure	2 Pe 1:10-11	Leon Leighton

Character Study: Abraham
Part 1 – The Call
Genesis 12:1-9

What's happening?

- Abraham (seen in these early chapters as “Abram”) was from Ur of the Chaldeans. After his brother died, Abraham, along with his father (Terah), wife (Sarah), and nephew (Lot), moved to Haran. (note 11:27-32)
- God had communicated with Abraham, telling him “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land I will show you.” (12:1)
- God made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised to make him a great nation, bless him and make his name great. He also promised that people would be blessed or cursed based on how they treated him, and that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. (2:2-3)
- Abraham, being obedient to God, journeyed to the land of Canaan with Sarah, Lot, and some people they meet in Haran. Once there, God promised that one day that land would belong to his descendants. Abraham responded by building an altar to the Lord. (12:4-9)

What's God doing?

> Abraham was from a family of idolaters. His father worshiped other gods (Josh. 24:2). Yet God chose this man by whom He would start a new nation, a nation through which blessing would come to the world.

> As descendants of Abraham, Israelites recognize that their nation was founded on God’s promises. Experiencing divine blessing and protection were promises of God, though each generation would need faith in order to experience these things.

What's to learn?

→ Abraham was told to “go,” but he knew nothing about the land to which he was to go. Abraham followed God out of faith, setting an example for us all (note Heb. 11:8-10).

→ Even though the Canaanites were currently living in the land God had promised to Abraham, Abraham still built an altar there to worship and exalt God. He had confidence that God would carry out His promises. Do you have the same confidence in God?

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Character Study: Abraham
Part 2 – A Near Costly Mistake
Genesis 12:10-20

What's happening?

- Abraham had followed God's leading and traveled to Canaan. However, shortly after his arrival, a terrible famine occurred. Abraham decided to leave Canaan and travelled on to Egypt. (12:10)
- Abraham was concerned that the Egyptians would kill him in order to take his beautiful wife, Sarah, so he asked her to tell people that she was his sister. (12:11-13)
- Abraham was correct in that the Egyptians did notice the beauty of Sarah. She was invited by the princes of Egypt to go to the Pharaoh's house. Probably to his surprise, however, Abraham was given animals and servants, and treated very well by the Pharaoh. (12:14-16)
- God was not pleased with Abraham, and did not bless him for his actions. Instead, He sent plagues on the Pharaoh's house, at which time the Pharaoh learned that Abraham had lied about who Sarah was. The Pharaoh knew that the plagues were a result of Abraham's actions, so he quickly removed Abraham and Sarah from his house. (12:17-20)

What's God doing?

- > Abraham had used deception to get out of a situation he should have never gotten himself into. Abraham had traveled to where God wanted him to go, and there is no indication God wanted him to go any further. Regardless of the famine, God desired Abraham's full obedience.
- > What is interesting is the fact that Sarah was Abraham's half-sister (Gen. 20:12), so Abraham was telling half the truth. But by not telling the whole truth, he almost lost his wife (and thus his descendants and God's promises as well). Abraham had acted out of fear in hopes of misleading the Egyptians, and it was only by God's grace that he escaped.

What's to learn?

→ God had big plans for Abraham, yet God needed to strengthen Abraham's faith before He could accomplish the great plans He desired to do through him. How well do you handle the little tests God uses to strengthen your faith? Daily commitment produces strong faith, and strong faith is the key that makes our lives available for the Lord's use!

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Character Study: Abraham
Part 5 – Things Get Complicated
Genesis 16

What's happening?

- After another ten years passed, Abraham and Sarah still had no children. Convinced that she was unable to bear children, Sarah devised a plan. She gave her maidservant (Hagar) to Abraham to be his wife in hopes she would bring a baby into their family. (16:1-3)
- Before long, Hagar was with child, but this did not make things better. Hagar began to despise Sarah, and Sarah blamed this on Abraham. Sarah began mistreating Hagar so badly that Hagar decided to leave. (16:4-6)
- The Angel of the Lord saw Hagar's pain and visited her. He told her to return to Sarah and submit herself to her. He said that she would have a son, and that he should be named Ishmael. She was warned that this son would live in conflict with all the people around him. She was also promised that she would have many descendants one day. (16:7-14)
- Abraham was 68 years old when this son was born to him, and the boy was named Ishmael. (16:15-16)

What's God doing?

> God knew what He was doing, but because of Sarah's doubts, she decided she needed to step in and take matters into her own hands. Though her action was a customary way of adopting a son in that day, it was not what God desired. His plan would be accomplished as He intended and in His timing.

> God had compassion on Hagar since she was thrown into the middle of Sarah's problem and had to face the brunt of Sarah's frustration.

What's to learn?

→ When God asks us to do something, He desires obedience, but when God says He will do something, He desires trust.

→ Sarah could have avoided many problems had she understood that God did not need her manipulating things in order to accomplish what He was going to do. Such efforts to "help" God only complicate things. Rather than taking matters into our own hands, we must learn to surrender our concerns over to His sovereign hand. Only then are we able to witness the full glory of His will unfolding in the circumstances around us.

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Character Study: Abraham
Part 6 – Questioning God
Genesis 17-20

What's happening?

- When Abraham was 99 years old, God emphasized the covenant promises with him by changing his name from Abram to Abraham (as we have been referring to him), which means “Father of a multitude.” Here, Sarai’s name was also changed, to Sarah, meaning “princess.” Circumcision was also started as a sign of the covenant. (17:1-15)
- God promised Abraham that he would soon have a son with Sarah. This son, to be named Isaac, was the son by which the covenant would be carried out. Abraham initially laughed at the idea that he (being 100 years old) or Sarah (being 90 years old) could have a child. Sarah, hearing the news, laughed as well. (17:16-18:15)
- After speaking to Abraham, the Lord, along with two angels, went toward Sodom and Gomorrah to destroy them because of their great wickedness. Abraham pleaded for the Lord to spare the cities if at least ten righteous people could be found there. The Lord agreed. (18:16-33)
- Arriving in Sodom, the two angels stayed in Lot’s home. The men of the city desired to take them in order to know them carnally, which only confirmed their utter wickedness. Lot and his family escaped the town, and then the Lord rained down fire and brimstone which destroyed both cities. Lot’s wife ignored a warning not to look back as they left, and she was instantly turned into a pillar of salt. (19:1-29)

What's God doing?

- > After Sarah laughed at the idea of her bearing a child in her old age, God asked, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” God was showing that He can be trusted even with doing the seemingly impossible.
- > God showed compassion by listening to Abraham’s plea and sparing Lot. But He also showed there is a limit at times to what He will tolerate.

What's to learn?

→ God is all powerful, yet sometimes we question what He can do. God hates sin, yet sometimes we do not want to separate ourselves from it. How well does your life align with a correct understanding of who God is? Living to honor God begins with truly knowing the God you are seeking to honor!

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Character Study: Abraham
Part 7 – Abraham’s Big Test
Genesis 21-22

What’s happening?

- The Lord fulfilled His promise to Abraham when Abraham was 100 years old. Sarah bore a son just as God had said she would. The child was named Isaac. (21:1-7)
- At a large banquet hosted by Abraham, Ishmael was seen mocking Isaac. Sarah became upset and had Abraham make Hagar and her son move away. God assured His protection on Ishmael, but reminded Abraham that Isaac was the son by which the covenant would be fulfilled. Hagar and Ishmael settled in the Wilderness of Paran. (21:8-21)
- After some time passed, God tested Abraham by telling him to take his beloved son up into the mountains of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering. Following in obedience, Abraham took Isaac to the mountains. When Isaac asked about the sacrifice, Abraham simply told him that God would provide it. (22:1-8)
- Abraham prepared the altar, bound his son, and took his knife in order to slay him. Just then, the Angel of the Lord told him not to touch his son, for Abraham had clearly shown a genuine fear of God. Abraham found a ram caught in a thicket, and offered the ram instead of his son. He named that place “The Lord Will Provide.” (22:9-18)

What’s God doing?

- > God gave Abraham his promised son 25 years after establishing the covenant. The name Isaac means “laugh,” and though Sarah laughed in doubt before, she now laughed with joy.
- > God had promised to fulfill certain things through Isaac, yet He was telling Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. God tested Abraham to see if he would trust Him even when His reasons were not always clear.

What’s to learn?

- A true test always requires a sacrifice. Abraham passed his test because nothing was more valuable to him than God Himself. Are there things you hold close to your heart that keep you from fully living for God?
- It is one thing to be obedient to God when we need something; it is another to continue in obedience after God has given it to us. Obeying God during the good times shows our desire to follow God is sincere.

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Character Study: Abraham
Part 8 – Abraham’s Final Days
Genesis 23-25

What’s happening?

- Abraham’s wife Sarah passed away at the age of 127. Abraham purchased land in Machpelah (near Hebron) and buried his wife there in a cave. (23:1-20)
- Abraham chose a bride for his son Isaac. Rebekah was brought to Isaac and he took her as his wife. (24:1-67)
- Abraham took a new wife, Keturah, and they had several children. It was Isaac, though, who inherited Abraham’s possessions. (25:1-6)
- Abraham died at the age of 175. Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave with Sarah. (25:7-11)

What’s God doing?

> God allowed Abraham to die in peace, experiencing God’s blessing and even seeing the promises of God begin to unfold.

What’s to learn?

→ Looking back on the life of Abraham, we find several passages in the New Testament that reveal significant truths from his life. Some of these include:

- Romans 4:13-25 – Abraham’s faith in what God would do brought him salvation, just as faith in what God has done (through Christ) brings us salvation today.
- Galatians 3 – God’s promise to bless all the nations through Abraham is accomplished in Christ (whose family line comes from Abraham). In Christ, Gentiles are able to take part in the blessings promised to Abraham.
- Hebrews 11:8-13 – Abraham’s display of faith has been a lasting testimony of obedience to God and confidence in His promises.

→ Abraham showed that godly fear is not only rooted in a reverence for God, but also an absolute trust in His word and an obedient surrender to His will.

→ Abraham did not hold anything back from God. He willingly did what God wanted and willingly gave what God asked. In this, we see the heart of true worship.

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- Romans 4:13-25 – Abraham’s _____ in what God would do brought him salvation, just as _____ in what God has done (through Christ) brings us salvation today.
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Character Study: Ruth
Part 1 – Ruth’s Devotion to Naomi
Ruth 1

What’s happening?

- Because of a famine in Canaan, Elimelech and his wife Naomi took their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, and moved to Moab. Shortly thereafter, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi a widow. (1:1-3)
- Both of Naomi’s sons married Moabite women. Mahlon married Ruth and Chilion married Orpah. About ten years later, both Mahlon and his brother Chilion died. Ruth and Orpah, along with their mother-in-law Naomi, were all widows. (1:4-5)
- The famine in Canaan came to an end, so Naomi decided to return back home. She told her daughter-in-laws that there would be no point for them to go with her. Orpah decided to remain in Moab, but Ruth insisted on staying with Naomi. (1:6-18)
- Naomi and Ruth travelled to Bethlehem. The people were excited to see Naomi again, but Naomi was very sad because she had lost so much since the last time she was there. (1:19-22)

What’s God doing?

- > God was teaching Naomi that it is easy to overlook blessings when filled with self-pity.
- > Through the love and devotion Ruth had for her mother-in-law, God led Ruth to trust in Him as her God.

What’s to learn?

- Naomi experienced difficult days, as we all do. But in her misery, Naomi failed to see God’s goodness. What blessings are you experiencing in your life that you have failed to recognize?
- Ruth put her own interests aside out of loyalty to her mother-in-law. She willingly abandoned all she knew to go to an unknown and unfamiliar place. Ruth demonstrated devotion to Naomi, just as she expressed devotion to God (v. 16). Are you showing the same level of commitment and devotion to the people whom you love?

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Character Study: Ruth
Part 2 – Ruth’s Heart to Serve
Ruth 2

What’s happening?

- Once settled in Bethlehem, Ruth went to work in the field of a wealthy man named Boaz. As permitted by Jewish law, Ruth was allowed to gather scraps of food left behind in the field by the reapers. (2:1-3)
- Boaz noticed Ruth and invited her to work in the part of the field where only the women worked. He was amazed that she willingly left her homeland on behalf of Naomi. He asked God’s blessing on her. (2:4-13)
- Boaz invited Ruth to a nice meal and then allowed her to keep gathering scraps from the field. Boaz had his workers intentionally leave plenty of grain on the ground for Ruth to find. (2:14-17)
- Ruth showed Naomi the food and told her how she had been working in Boaz’s field. Naomi was thrilled. She told Ruth how Boaz was a close relative of theirs. (2:18-23)

What’s God doing?

> God had led Ruth to Boaz, a person who could be a kinsman redeemer to her. Note the law requirements for someone to be a kinsman redeemer:

1. He must be a near kinsman (Lev. 25:48-49; Ruth 3:12-13).
2. He must be willing to redeem (Lev. 25:25; Gal. 4:4-5).
3. He must be able to redeem - financial able, and not in need of being redeemed himself (Lev. 25:50; Ruth 4:4-6).

What’s to learn?

→ Note the significance and importance of having a kinsman redeemer: When an individual lost his/her freedom (i.e. sold into slavery) or inheritance (land) due to a circumstance such as poverty, the kinsman redeemer was able to buy it back for them. In the absence of a brother-in-law, the kinsman redeemer could also fill the role of taking a widow as his spouse (note Deut. 25:5-10). Through Boaz, Ruth’s life could be changed forever!

→ In Scripture, we see one who functions as a kinsman redeemer for us. Jesus Christ Himself takes this role in order to redeem us from the power of sin (Heb. 2:11-18; 1 Peter 1:18-19; John 10:11-18)!

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1. He must be a near _____ (Lev. 25:48-49; Ruth 3:12-13).
2. He must be _____ to redeem (Lev. 25:25; Gal. 4:4-5).
3. He must be _____ to redeem - financial able, and not in need of being redeemed himself (Lev. 25:50; Ruth 4:4-6).

What’s to learn?

→ Note the significance and importance of having a kinsman redeemer: When an individual lost his/her _____ (i.e. sold into slavery) or _____ (land) due to a circumstance such as poverty, the kinsman redeemer was able to _____ it back for them. In the absence of a brother-in-law, the kinsman redeemer could also fill the role of taking a widow as his spouse (note Deut. 25:5-10). Through Boaz, Ruth’s life could be changed forever!

→ In Scripture, we see one who functions as a kinsman redeemer for us. _____ Himself takes this role in order to _____ us from the power of _____ (Heb. 2:11-18; 1 Peter 1:18-19; John 10:11-18)!

Character Study: Ruth
Part 3 – Ruth’s Rest
Ruth 3

What’s happening?

- Naomi knew that Boaz would be a great husband for Ruth, so she sent her back to visit him. (3:1-5)
- After Boaz went to sleep that night, Ruth came and laid down by his feet after she had uncovering them (this was a ceremonial act). Boaz was surprised when he saw Ruth, but he was encouraged by her virtue and wanted to help her. (3:6-11)
- Boaz was willing to take her as his wife in accordance with the Hebrew custom of becoming a kinsman-redeemer (to carry on her family name). However, Boaz knew that she had a closer relative, who would, according to the law, have first rights to marry her if he so desired. Boaz said that if the closer relative did not want to marry her, then he would gladly marry her. (3:12-13)
- Ruth returned to Naomi. Both women were excited and anxious to see what would happen. (3:14-18)

What’s God doing?

> Despite the fact that Naomi had been depressed by her present situation, and despite the fact that Ruth had been uncertain about her future, both women showed faith in God. As a result, God blessed them by providing Ruth a kinsman redeemer who could give her children and carry on the family name.

What’s to learn?

→ Though Naomi, Ruth and Boaz each had their own perspective of the situation, they each were obedient to God in how they handled it. How big of a priority is it for you to be obedient to God and please Him in the various circumstances that come your way?

→ John 15:12 tells us that living for God involves living for others. Examine your life (your dreams, goals, priorities, etc.). Are you self-centered in what you desire to do with your life or do you put others first? Ruth was not self-focused and God blessed her for that. May God bless us as we strive to live for others as well!

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Character Study: Ruth
Part 4 – Ruth’s Great Reward
Ruth 4

What’s happening?

- Boaz informed Ruth’s closest relative of his right to buy Naomi’s land and marry Ruth. The relative was unable to do both, so he abandoned his rights to Boaz. (4:1-8)
- Boaz gladly filled the role of a kinsman-redeemer. All the people who were present, along with the elders of the city, acted as witnesses and requested God’s blessing on the marriage. (4:9-12)
- Ruth bore a son, Obed, who was not only a blessing to Ruth, but was also a blessing to her mother-in-law, Naomi. (4:13-16)
- Obed would eventually have a son, named Jesse, and Jesse would be the father of King David. Thus, Ruth would be the great-grandmother of King David, Israel’s greatest king! (4:17-22)

What’s God doing?

> Despite the difficult times and apparent setbacks that Ruth experienced, we see in the end that God was working out a plan for her life which resulted in some truly amazing things!

> Because of Ruth’s obedience, she was able to experience God’s great hand of blessing on her life. Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David, placing her in the family line of Jesus Christ!

What’s to learn?

→ Ruth and Naomi finally understood how God was working in their lives by looking at the “big picture.” We must not forget the “big picture” when we look to see what God is doing in our lives as well.

→ Ruth was an ordinary person who experienced ordinary events in life. But through these ordinary things, God brought about awesome results. We may see ourselves and the events of our lives as ordinary, yet we must remember that we serve a great God who accomplishes great things through that which is seemingly ordinary. May we be faithful, like Ruth, to be obedient to God in all aspects of life so that we may see His great purposes fulfilled!

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Character Study: Ezra

Part 1 – Ezra Prepares the People to Return Home

Ezra 7:1-8:23

What's happening?

- Ezra was a priest in the family line of Aaron. He is described as being a “skilled scribe in the Law of Moses,” who had a heart to know, obey and teach God’s Word. (7:1-10)
- Ezra lived at a time when Judah (the Southern Kingdom) was returning home from their exile in Babylon. It was because of sin that God had allowed the Babylonians to take the Israelites captive (586 BC). After the Persians overthrew Babylon under Cyrus the Great (538 BC), the people were allowed to return home.
- Zerubbabel had led the first group of Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple (538 BC; note Ezra 1:1-5). Now, eighty years later, under the reign of Artaxerxes, Ezra was given permission to lead a second group back. (7:11-26)
- As Ezra gathered those interested in returning to their homeland (about 4,000-5,000 people), he had a time of fasting and prayer, requesting God’s protection on the long journey they had ahead. He could have requested additional assistance from the king, but he knew that this trip would show God to be the One who protects His people. (8:1-23)

What's God doing?

> Israel had split into two kingdoms after Solomon’s reign. The Northern Kingdom was taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC and never returned. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin made up the Southern Kingdom, which was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. God used Ezra to lead people from Babylon back to Jerusalem as a means of preserving His people and keeping the promises He made to David (note II Sam. 7:4-16).

What's to learn?

- Ezra had a passion to continually learn more about God, and share with others what he was learning. He also had a trust in God that showed his faith was real. Can people see in your life a faith that is real?
- Although God’s people faced consequences for their sin, God did not forsake them. God’s sovereign hand of protection was over His people at all times, just as it is with us today.

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Character Study: Ezra

Part 2 – Ezra Becomes Broken over the People’s Sin

Ezra 8:24-10:44

What’s happening?

- Ezra organized the people and began the nearly 900 mile journey back to Jerusalem. The Lord watched over His people, and after four months, they arrived safely. Once settled, they presented gifts for the Temple and offered sacrifices to God. (8:24-36)
- The time of celebrating their return quickly ended as Ezra got word of a serious problem. The Israelites living there had disobeyed a command of God that prohibited them from marrying foreign women from the surrounding nations (Ex. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:1-4). The purpose for this was to keep the Israelites from falling into the idol worship that characterized those nations. (9:1-2)
- Ezra was deeply broken over this news and fell before the Lord in prayer. He confessed the sins of the people, admitting that in light of God’s overwhelming goodness, their sin was inexcusable. All he could do was plead for God’s mercy. (9:3-15)
- As Ezra was praying, people came and confessed their sin and decided it would be best to separate from the women they were not supposed to have married. The people carried out their plan for the sake of national purity and then offered a sacrifice to God. (10:1-44)

What’s God doing?

> God had redeemed His people from exile and delivered them back to their homeland. This was a significant event in Israel’s history, and the people could not have been more thrilled to be home.

> God has never given His approval for divorce, but the people knew God’s desire was for holiness among His people, so they decided to carry out these divorces for the sake of their nation. The purpose was solely to keep God’s chosen nation (Israel) faithful to worshiping Him alone. This passage gives no justification for divorce today.

What’s to learn?

→ It is not a coincidence that Ezra was both a student of God’s Word and a person who understood the seriousness of sin. The two go hand in hand. Knowing God’s Word helps us see things from God’s perspective. Only then will we see sin for what it is and have a heart for holiness.

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Character Study: Ezra
Part 3 – Ezra Teaches God’s Word
Nehemiah 8:1-12

What’s happening?

- The people worked hard to complete the restoration of the Temple and even rebuilt the city wall of Jerusalem. When the work was finished, the people desired to have Ezra read God’s Word in the city square. (8:1-2)
- Ezra stood on a platform where all the people could see him. As Ezra opened the Book of the Law, all the people stood out of reverence. Ezra read the Scriptures from morning until midday, while all the people listened attentively. (8:3-5)
- While listening to the reading of the Law, the people shouted “Amen” and raising their hands. They also bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord. Ezra made sure the people understood what was being said in the Law. (8:6-8)
- The people began to get emotional and cried because of what was read. But Ezra, along with Nehemiah and the Levites, ensured the people that it was a good day in which they should celebrate. After the reading was completed, the people went their way, rejoicing in what they had heard. (8:9-12)

What’s God doing?

> God had established His people back in Jerusalem. In doing so, He made sure His Word had a key place in the lives of His people. God had used His Word to convict the people of their sin, and now He used it to teach the people of His goodness and instruct them in what He desired them to do. In the life of His people, God wanted His Word to be central.

What’s to learn?

→ Apart from God’s Word, we cannot know what God desires to tell us. Even the Israelites, who had a rich history of God working in their midst, did not truly grasp what God wanted them to know until they opened His Word and allowed Him to speak to them through it. If we want to hear from God, we need to get into His Word and listen.

→ God’s Word brings about several results. At times it convicts of sin and at times it brings great comfort and peace. As we grow in our knowledge of God, He will use the truth of His Word to fulfill His purpose in our lives, whatever that may be.

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Character Study: Daniel
Part 1 – Daniel Is Selected to Serve the King
Daniel 1:1-21

What's happening?

- Daniel lived during the time in which Nebuchadnezzar (King of Babylon) attacked Jerusalem and took many Jews captive. Daniel found himself growing up in the idolatrous nation of Babylon. (1:1-2)
- King Nebuchadnezzar sought men among the captives who were worthy to serve in his kingdom. He looked specifically for individuals who were good looking, well-educated and intelligent. Anyone selected would be trained for three years in preparation for their work in the palace. (1:3-5)
- Among the men of Judah, four men were selected: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Because their names honored Yahweh (Daniel meant “God is my Judge”), they were given new Babylonian names: Beltshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. (1:6-7)
- The men were given the privilege to eat and drink the same meals that were prepared for the king. Daniel, however, realized that the meals were not appropriate to eat (unclean meat, food offered to idols, etc.) so he requested vegetables and water instead. Because Daniel had developed a good reputation, the four men were granted the request. After ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier than the other men, so the vegetables were allowed to be their permanent diet. (1:8-16)
- When the four men were finally brought before the king, the king was very impressed. He found them to be superior to all the other men, and even concluded that they were ten times greater in wisdom and understanding than the magicians and astrologers who worked in the kingdom. (1:17-21)

What's God doing?

> God's people were in captivity because of their disobedience. Yet God still sought faithful individuals whom He would use to make an impact on the world. God had placed Daniel in a position to do just that.

What's to learn?

→ Even in a pagan society, Daniel's focus remained on living for God. God had placed Daniel where He wanted him, and as Daniel simply remained obedient, he quickly became someone God could use. In the same way, God desires to work through all of us!

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Character Study: Daniel
Part 3 – The Fiery Furnace
Daniel 3:1-30

What's happening?

- King Nebuchadnezzar decided to make an image of gold for the people to worship. He made an image that was ninety feet tall by nine feet wide. He told everyone to bow down and worship the image whenever certain music played, or else they would be thrown into a fiery furnace. (3:1-7)
- Word got back to the king that Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, were not bowing before the image. The men were brought before the king and warned of their fate if they did not bow. The men said that they would not worship the image because they served God, and that God had the power to deliver them. (3:8-18)
- The king was so enraged that he had the furnace turned up seven times hotter than usual and had Daniel's friends thrown into the fire. The heat was so intense it killed the men who threw them in. After a few moments, the king was absolutely amazed to see the men walking around in the fire apparently unharmed. There was even a fourth man with them who appeared to be the Son of God. (3:19-25)
- The king called for the men to come out. He was astonished to find that the three men were not affected by the fire in any way. He blessed their God who had protected them and sent out a decree that anyone who spoke against their God would be killed. Each of the men received a high position of authority in Babylon. (3:26-30)

What's God doing?

> King Nebuchadnezzar had learned of the one true God after Daniel had interpreted his dream, but it had not yet made a lasting impression on him. Now, God used this miracle of delivering Daniel's friends to show the king and the Babylonians that He is truly worthy of all worship.

What's to learn?

→ Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego knew that God could deliver them from the fire, but they did not know if it was necessarily His plan to do so. What they did know was that God cared for them and desired their obedience. They did what was right, even knowing the potential consequences that awaited them. Would you have been so brave? Is your desire to live for God so strong that nothing will stop you from doing His will?

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Character Study: Daniel
Part 6 – Daniel and the Lion’s Den
Daniel 6:1-28

What’s happening?

- Darius made Daniel one of his three governors to help rule within his kingdom. Daniel excelled in this position and the king even considered placing him over all the people. (6:1-3)
- Daniel’s success made the other leaders jealous. Knowing his loyalty to God, they convinced the king to make a decree that no one could pray to any god or person (except the king) for the next thirty days. Anyone breaking the decree would be thrown into a den of lions. (6:4-9)
- Hearing of the decree, Daniel returned to his home and bowed down in prayer to God. He prayed three times that day, as he did every day. It did not take long before someone spotted him through an open window. Word quickly got back to the king. (6:10-13)
- The king urgently pleaded on Daniel’s behalf, but the other leaders insisted the decree had to be upheld and judgment carried out. As a result, Daniel was thrown into the den of lions. (6:14-17)
- The king was unable to sleep that night and quickly went down to the den the next morning to see if Daniel’s God had spared his life. To his relief, Daniel responded, letting him know that God had sent angels to close the mouths of the lions. Daniel was taken out unharmed. (6:18-23)
- The king, now understanding the plot against Daniel, had his accusers and their families thrown into the pit. They were overpowered by the lions immediately. King Darius wrote a new decree that everyone in his kingdom must fear Daniel’s God, for his God is the living God who works wonders, and whose kingdom cannot be destroyed. (6:24-28)

What’s God doing?

> God does not let dishonest men ruin what He has accomplished. In fact, He uses their plotting for good. Through this miracle of delivering Daniel from death, God revealed His great power to the Medes and Persians.

What’s to learn?

→ It was not the obstacles in life that encouraged Daniel to be bold in his walk with the Lord, but rather it was Daniel’s walk with the Lord that encouraged him to be bold in the face of obstacles. Godly people are always characterized by a meaningful and personal walk with the Lord.

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- The king was unable to _____ that night and quickly went down to the den the next morning to see if Daniel’s God had spared his life. To his relief, Daniel responded, letting him know that God had sent _____ to close the mouths of the lions. Daniel was taken out unharmed. (6:18-23)
- The king, now understanding the plot against Daniel, had his accusers and their families thrown into the pit. They were overpowered by the lions immediately. King Darius wrote a _____ that everyone in his kingdom must _____ Daniel’s God, for his God is the living God who works wonders, and whose kingdom cannot be destroyed. (6:24-28)

What’s God doing?

> God does not let dishonest men ruin what He has accomplished. In fact, He uses their plotting for good. Through this miracle of delivering Daniel from death, God revealed His great _____ to the Medes and Persians.

What’s to learn?

→ It was not the obstacles in life that encouraged Daniel to be bold in his walk with the Lord, but rather it was Daniel’s walk with the Lord that encouraged him to be bold in the face of obstacles. Godly people are always characterized by a _____ and _____ walk with the Lord.

Character Study: Daniel
Part 7 – Daniel’s Visions and Prayer
Daniel 7-12

What’s happening?

- Chapters 7-12 of the book of Daniel deal with more prophecy concerning Israel’s future and the time that will come in the last days.
- Daniel shared a few visions he had received concerning kingdoms that would rise through history, as well as the Son of Man who would ultimately come and establish an everlasting kingdom. He mentioned that before all this comes to pass, there would be an individual who would bring much persecution on the saints during a certain time period. God’s judgment would come on this individual and the saints would enjoy God’s coming kingdom. (7:1-8:27)
- Grasping God’s control over the future, Daniel was overwhelmed with God’s faithfulness to His people and had a time of confession of sin. Daniel acknowledged that it was Israel’s rebellion that had caused them to face the trouble they were in (captivity in Babylon), so he pleaded for God’s mercy. (9:1-19)
- Daniel gave other visions and prophecies concerning Israel’s future, concluding with words that anticipated God’s final deliverance of His people. He pointed to the day when God’s people would experience a resurrection and eternal life. (9:20-12:13)

What’s God doing?

> God was giving Daniel a glimpse of the course of human history, as well as the course for His people Israel. God had shown Daniel His power on numerous occasions before, and as a result, Daniel was confident that these predictions would come to pass. Even though the visions revealed some difficult days ahead, God brought a great word of hope and encouragement in His offer of eternal life.

What’s to learn?

→ Daniel was so moved by God’s prophecy that he became broken and humbled. Do the promises of God ever cause you to examine your life and confess sin? The death of Christ on the cross showed us the seriousness of sin, and the anticipation of Christ’s return should cause us to daily examine our lives in order to be sure we are making ourselves ready to be with Him (1 John 3:3).

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Character Study: Job
Part 1 – Job Faces Tragedy
Job 1-2

What's happening?

- Job was “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.” He lived in Uz, and had seven sons and three daughters. He also had many servants and thousands of livestock, making him the greatest man among the people of the East. (1:1-3)
- In a conversation with God, Satan said Job was faithful to God simply because of God’s many blessings toward him. If the blessings were removed, Satan insisted Job would curse God. To prove otherwise, God gave all that Job had into Satan’s hand, with the exception of his life. (1:6-12)
- In a single day, Job’s livestock were stolen, his servants were killed, and all of his children died. Job was devastated, but remained loyal to God, even bowing in worship to Him. (1:13-22)
- Satan spoke again to God, insisting that physical pain would turn Job against God. With God’s permission, Satan made Job’s entire body break out with painful sores. But even with his wife telling him to curse God, Job remained faithful and did not sin. (2:1-10)
- Job’s three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) came to comfort him, though at first they could not even recognize him. They sat in silence and mourned with Job for seven straight days. (2:11-13)

What's God doing?

> God allowed Job to be tested for the purpose of showing that Job’s devotion to Him was truly sincere and genuine. How different people in Job’s day perceived the calamities that occurred, as well as what these tragedies reveal about God, is the focus of the remainder of the book.

What's to learn?

- Would you still live for God if all the good things in your life were taken away? Would you pass such a test? Job’s faith was not based on personal benefits (see 1:21 and 2:10), but on the love of God.
- Genuine faith is unbreakable. It stands unshaken even when trouble comes, no matter how extreme or undeserving it may seem. Our confidence is not in circumstances, but in the Lord (Rom. 8:31-39)!

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Character Study: Job
Part 2 – Job Speaks with His Friends
Job 3-28

What's happening?

- Job had experienced some of the worst tragedies imaginable. Following seven days of morning, his silence was broken as he cursed the day he was born. Job felt it would have been better never to have been born than to experience the suffering he was going through. (3:1-26)
- Job's friends give their thoughts on his situation. Eliphaz insisted the innocent do not suffer like that, so Job must be guilty of sin (4:7-9; 5:17). Bildad claimed God's justice is clearly being carried out, and that Job needed to plead for mercy (8:3-6). Zophar went even further and said that God had taken it easy on Job based on what he probably really deserved (11:4-6).
- Job defended his innocence, which made the conversation with his friends more of a debate. Each person took turns speaking in three separate rounds of conversation (Round 1: chapters 4-14; Round 2: chapters 15-21; Round 3: chapters 22-28). Each round grew more intense as Job's friends felt that Job was stubborn and unwilling to listen to their counsel (15:5-6; 18:3).
- Job exposed the fact that his friends were horrible comforters (13:3-4; 16:2). He was hurting (7:7; 17:1) and confused as to why he was suffering (10:2), but he continued to defend his innocence despite his friend's accusations (13:18; 27:5). He wished so badly that he could just speak to God and get the answers he was looking for (23:3-7).

What's God doing?

> God remained silent through the debate and allowed the men to wrestle through the reasons behind the difficult issues of life. Though God did not provide any answers at this point, the truth Job did have provided him hope (19:23-26; 13:15a).

What's to learn?

- The attitudes of Job's friends remind us that it is easy to be judgmental. Do not make false assumptions about issues you do not understand!
- The whole world may be against you (see 19:13-19) and calamity may befall you, but there is peace when you know you are right with God. Above all, believers can cling to the great truth of Romans 8:1!

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Character Study: Job
Part 5 – Job Hears from God
Job 38-41:6

What's happening?

- Following the speech by Elihu, God broke His silence. However, instead of answering Job's questions, God had some questions of His own through which He exposed the error of Job's pride. He asked where Job was when He laid the foundations of the earth (38:4). He asked if Job could comprehend the expanse of the earth or the complexity of the weather (38:18, 25-27). He asked if Job could control the lightning or care for the animal kingdom (38:35, 39-41; 39:19, 27).
- God showed that the glory of His creation reveals so much about His wisdom and power that there is no one equal to Him. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things; there is no reason to question His wisdom. Job humbly realized his view of God was much too small. (40:1-5)
- God continued by highlighted the majesty of two great animals of that day (the Behemoth and Leviathan). This further emphasized that there is no need to question the works of God (40:15-41:34). God's message that He could be trusted was loud and clear.
- Job acknowledged that God's power and wisdom were infinite, and that he had questioned things that were beyond his understanding. Seeing that doubting God was foolish, Job was brought to repentance. (42:1-6)

What's God doing?

> God spoke, giving multiple reasons why there was no need for Job to doubt Him. God did not directly answer Job's question as to why the innocent suffer, but He showed that Job's question could be replaced by trust. With that, Job was satisfied.

What's to learn?

→ When we have a correct perspective of who God is, we gain a correct perspective of our problems. We may not understand why we go through certain things, but when we are enamored by the majesty of God, such questions are no longer important. (See Isaiah 55:8-9)

→ Are there times you have questioned God or doubted His wisdom for things He has allowed to happen in your life? Are there thoughts or attitudes you need to repent of? Even when things seem to be falling apart, God is worthy to be trusted and more than capable of carrying us through.

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Character Study: Job
Part 6 – Job Receives God’s Blessing
Job 42:7-12

What’s happening?

- After speaking to Job, the Lord turned His attention toward Job’s three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar). He was angry and rebuked them for the counsel they offered to Job. God told them to offer a burnt sacrifice and have Job pray for them. (42:7-9)
- God referred to Job as His “servant Job” four times in this section. Having repented of his pride, Job was commended for his words of faith. Job had questions, but he never cursed God nor abandoned Him throughout his ordeal as Satan had insisted he would.
- After Job prayed for his friends (demonstrating he forgave them, as did the Lord – v. 9), God restored Job’s wealth, giving him twice as much as he had before. His brothers and sisters, as well as some friends, came and comforted Job and gave him gifts. (42:10-11)
- God’s blessing upon Job included tens of thousands of livestock and ten more children. He would live for another 140 years, having a full life and being able to see his great-great-grandchildren. (42:12-17)

What’s God doing?

> God had tremendously restored Job and blessed him. God did not have to do these things (nor does He always), but it was an act of grace and love. God had not forsaken Job, but rather accomplished a purpose that He had set in motion.

What’s to learn?

→ Misfortune is not a sign that God has abandoned us. Rather, as with Job, we see that God does have a plan and that He uses our lives in ways we do not always know. His desire is for us to trust Him and find our confidence in Him regardless of what we may be going through.

→ During the darkest and most painful moments of life, do not give up hope! You may not understand why you are going through certain trials, but God does. He is wise, powerful, and with you every step of the way. The same confidence and hope we put in Christ for salvation (provided by His suffering for us - I Peter 2:21-25) is the same confidence and hope by which we can endure that which is seemingly impossible!

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Character Study: Aaron
Part 1 – The Role of a High Priest
Exodus 28-29, Leviticus 8-9, 16

What's happening?

- Aaron was the older brother of Moses and was Moses' spokesman when Moses was sent by God to ask the Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt (see study on Moses).
- Aaron was selected by God to be the high priest for the Israelites, and his four sons served as priests. They were consecrated ("set apart") by the people for the special work God had for them. They even wore specific articles of clothing to signify their special role in maintaining fellowship between God and the Israelites. (Ex. 28-29; Lev. 8)
- The priests worked in the Tabernacle, carrying out various duties which included presenting sacrifices and offerings on behalf of themselves and the Israelites. As high priest, Aaron oversaw all the work. (Lev. 9)
- The tenth day of the seventh month was the Day of Atonement. This would be a festival each year in which any sins that remained uncleansed would be "atoned for" (covered). This was accomplished when Aaron would go into the room of the Tabernacle called the "Most Holy Place" and make a special offering on behalf of the people. (Lev. 16)

What's God doing?

> God designated Aaron and his sons as priests to represent the Israelites before God (they were from the tribe of Levi, whose descendants would carry on this role). A mediator, as well as sacrifices, played a necessary role in allowing the people to maintain fellowship with God.

What's to learn?

- The Day of Atonement was a significant day each year for Israel, but even this fell short of bringing complete forgiveness ("for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" - Heb. 10:4). However, these sacrifices did picture the perfect, complete sacrifice of Christ, which would bring redemption (1 Peter 1:18-21).
- The work of the high priest in the Old Testament only covered the sins of the people. Christ's work on the cross goes beyond that, completely removing the sin of those who trust in Him (Rom. 3:24-25).

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Character Study: Aaron

Part 2 – The Priesthood of Aaron and Christ Compared Hebrews 4-9

What's happening?

- Aaron served in the Tabernacle as a high priest, having the important role of representing the Israelites before God. In the New Testament, we see Jesus Christ as a High Priest, who represents believers before God (Heb. 4:14).
- In order for a person to become a high priest, they had to meet several qualifications. These are highlighted in Hebrews 5:
 - Must be selected “from among men” (5:1).
 - Must have compassion on people (able to relate to them) (5:2).
 - Must be called by God (5:4).
- Aaron met these qualifications, as does Christ. Note:
 - Christ became a man (Heb. 5:5, 7a).
 - Christ has compassion on people and is able to relate to their temptations (5:7-8; 4:15).
 - Christ was called by God the Father (5:10).

What's God doing?

> Aaron had a significant role in the Old Testament. Yet his role was only a picture of the position Christ has as our High Priest today. Old Testament high priests help us better understand and appreciate the perfect Advocate that God has given us in His Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1).

What's to learn?

- There are similarities in the work of Aaron as high priest and Christ as High Priest. However, Scripture reveals the advantages of having Christ as our High Priest today. Note the points made in Hebrews 7:
- His role on our behalf will continue forever (7:23-25).
 - He does not need to offer sacrifices for His own sins (7:26-27).
 - There is no need now to continually offer sacrifices, since through the shed blood of Christ our guilt has been removed once and for all (7:27).
- With Jesus Christ as our High Priest, we have a permanent High Priest who represents us perfectly before the Father. Through Christ, we can be confident that our forgiveness and salvation are secure (Heb. 9:11-14)!

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Character Study: Jonathan
Part 1 – Jonathan Meets David
I Samuel 13-18

What's happening?

- Jonathan was the son of King Saul. He first appeared on the scene leading a victorious battle over the Philistines. (13:2-3)
- Jonathan and his armor bearer attacked and killed 20 Philistines, causing confusion in the Philistine camp. Saul ordered another attack, pronouncing a curse on anyone who stopped to eat before all the Philistines were killed. Not hearing the order, Jonathan ate some honey. As a result, Saul told him he would have to die, but the people defended Jonathan and made sure he was not killed (note 14:45). (14:1-46)
- Later, after David killed Goliath, Jonathan met David and they instantly developed a close friendship. (18:1-2)
- Jonathan made a covenant with David, even giving him his robe, armor, sword, bow and belt. The covenant essentially made the two friends brothers for life. (18:3-4)
- Jonathan, though in line to be the next king, knew that the Lord had taken the kingdom away from his father and was giving it to David. (13:14; 15:23, 28; 16:1)

What's God doing?

- > God had given Jonathan a great reputation among the Israelites. All of Israel could see that God's blessing was on Jonathan.
- > God had brought Jonathan and David together, establishing a friendship that would greatly impact their lives and the nation as a whole.

What's to learn?

- Jonathan, though the heir to the throne, was willing to take second place to God's man. Jonathan would lose the fame that came with being king, but he wanted what God wanted. Are you willing to take second place and be used behind the scenes by God?
- By viewing his friend David as a brother, Jonathan gives us a picture of the unconditional love we should have for our friends.

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- Jonathan, though in line to be the next king, knew that the Lord had taken the kingdom away from his _____ and was giving it to _____. (13:14; 15:23, 28; 16:1)

What's God doing?

- > God had given Jonathan a great _____ among the Israelites. All of Israel could see that God's _____ was on Jonathan.
- > God had brought Jonathan and David together, establishing a friendship that would greatly impact their lives and the nation as a whole.

What's to learn?

- Jonathan, though the heir to the throne, was willing to take _____ place to God's man. Jonathan would lose the _____ that came with being king, but he wanted what God wanted. Are you willing to take second place and be used _____ by God?
- By viewing his friend David as a brother, Jonathan gives us a picture of the _____ we should have for our friends.

Character Study: Jonathan
Part 2 – Jonathan Protects David
I Samuel 18-31

What's happening?

- Because of David's popularity, Jonathan saw his father (Saul) growing jealous toward David. (18:5-16)
- Jonathan warned David of Saul's desire to kill him and encouraged him to hide. Jonathan then spoke with his father, trying to convince him that there was no reason David should be killed. (19:1-7)
- To see if Saul still wanted to kill David, David hid in a field and missed a couple meals that he normally would have eaten with Saul. Noticing he was gone, Saul became very angry and said that David must die. Jonathan tipped David off and David escaped. (20:1-42)
- Jonathan met up with David, who was hiding in the wilderness. Jonathan encouraged him and made another covenant with him before leaving. This would be the last time the good friends would ever see each other. (23:14-18)
- Shortly later, Jonathan was killed, along with his brothers, during a battle with the Philistines. (31:1-2)

What's God doing?

- > God used Jonathan as a peacemaker, an encourager and a protector of David. God gave Jonathan a loyal and trusted friend.
- > God was preparing David to be the next king over Israel. God used Jonathan in a variety of ways to keep David away from the hand of Saul.

What's to learn?

- When his good friend David was discouraged, Jonathan encouraged him and strengthened him (23:16). How has God used you to encourage or strengthen someone? Who do you know that needs a word of encouragement today?
- Jonathan and David were the perfect examples of friends. They looked out for each other's interests, they went the extra mile for each other, and they were a means of strength for each other. Are these traits seen in how you treat your friends?

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Character Study: John The Apostle of Love Various Bible Passages

What's happening?

- John was a fisherman along with his brother, James (Matt. 4:21-22). As they followed the Lord, He gave them the nickname "Sons of Thunder," which gives insight into their energetic personalities (Mark 3:17). As part of the "inner circle" of Jesus, the brothers were present at some significant events of Jesus' ministry (see "Character Study: James").
- In John's writing, he references himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 20:2; etc.). John had a great love for the Lord as well, coupled with a strong faith. He was the first to arrive at the empty tomb, the first to believe in the resurrection, and the first to recognize the risen Lord (John 20:4-9; 21:7). He was the only Apostle who witnessed the crucifixion firsthand, and was appointed by Jesus to care for His mother, Mary (John 19:26-27).
- Following Christ's ascension, he worked closely with Peter (Acts 3:1; 4:3-21; 8:14). He also wrote three epistles (I, II, III John) that encourage believers to live a life that reflects genuine faith through obedience and a love for others (note I John 4:4-8). The Gospel of John is his account of the life of Jesus, pointing people to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God in whom we must believe (John 20:30-31).
- History reveals that he became the pastor of the church at Ephesus. He was banished to the Island of Patmos during the persecution of Emperor Domitian, at which time he wrote the book of Revelation. He died back in Ephesus around A.D. 98, being the only Apostle to live to old age.

What's God doing?

> John no doubt had a bold personality, but God taught him the importance of trusting God and showing love as well. In his writing, John uses the word "believe" over a hundred times and "love" over eighty times, showing that these should characterize our faith (see I John 3:18).

What's to learn?

→ John had a desire to truly know Christ. He did not simply want to follow the Lord; he wanted to know Him personally. As he watched and listened to Jesus, he learned to think and act just like Him. His closeness to Jesus resulted in obedience, and his love for Jesus resulted in a love for others. Being close to Jesus will impact everything about us!

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