



Stepping into God's Story – Episode Five – Exile and Return

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BIG IDEA – God had to show us, good works don't work!

scripture focus - **Proverbs 4:7-8** Wisdom is supreme—so get wisdom. And whatever else you get, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; if you embrace her, she will honor you.

What's the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Is it deep thinking? Logical processes and consequences? Does it tie in with graciousness, gratitude, and courtesy? Believe it or not, wisdom works! It's a superpower in our gimme-gimme world. Let's dive deeper into what it looks like living and seeking wisdom.

We have spent the last several weeks in this series called, Stepping into God's Story.

This series gives us a broad brushstroke of a foundation, a beginning and an end to help us see who God is and what His plans are for this world. And it's for us to get involved. **As we move towards our mission of disciple: be one, make one, I wanted us to have a helicopter view of the Bible.** We'll take some opportunities to land from time to time and explore some of the details in each book or story, but I wanted to make sure we have some basic understanding of how God's Story began and how He plans to continue it in eternity.

- **Episode One: CREATION AND FALL** – God made everything that exists and did so in perfection, but the first couple, faced with temptation and the promise of self-determined destiny apart from God, failed and broke stuff. Broke our relationship with God, each other and the planet. We still break stuff, but God made a way to fix us and make things right with him.

- **Episode Two: PROMISE AND A PEOPLE** – God makes an extraordinary promise and contract with humanity, through Abraham. God blesses Abraham as promised.
- **Episode Three: RESCUE AND LAW** – Abraham's family becomes a nation, becomes enslaved, rescued and given rules to help them live well and keep their promise.
- **Episode Four: LAND AND KINGDOM** – God kept His promise, gives them the land and provided the nation with everything they needed. They still weren't satisfied and worship the gods of the nations surrounding them, God disciplines them through the attacks of surrounding nations. God raises up judges (or rulers) to rescue His people and call them to repentance. They beg for a king to be like other nations, and God gives them a king (Saul), but it doesn't go well. God raises up another king (David), and the nation becomes super successful, having everything they ever wanted, but they still wanted more.
- **Episode Five: EXILE AND RETURN** – focuses on Solomon and the nation's eventual demise that leads to being corrected by God and led into Babylonian captivity. God brings them back home, but nothing is the same. The people make a final attempt to keep God's rules and their promises, but they just cannot do it.

The story continues with God's pattern of faithfulness:

1. **God rebukes.**
2. **God remembers.**
3. **God restores.**

1. **God rebukes.**

Last week we just got to Israel's first king, Saul. Their second king was David, and he is quite the famous character in the Bible. He was known for being a youngest son shepherd for his father, Jesse. Then became a celebrity by being the Giant Killer, landing Goliath with a one stone hit that embedded into the massive forehead of this 9ft, 9inch Philistine! After a ton of family dysfunctional drama – we get to David's son, Solomon. What a story this guy has!

Let me give us a quick snapshot the covers hundreds of years of individual drama, trauma and amazing real-life stories!

- Solomon takes foreign wives and allows their foreign gods to clutter the land.
- His son (Rehoboam) continues the line of rulers, and the kingdom is divided into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah).
- Prophets confront the people, but they persist in their idolatry.
- The **Northern Kingdom falls to Assyria and the Southern Kingdom** is carried away into Babylonian captivity.
- When they are freed, they return to a nation and kingdom far less glorious than before and are still unable to keep their promises.

Let's land here on Solomon's Story for a moment!

Solomon shows his love for God by offering a 1000 burnt offerings in Gibeon. God appears to Solomon in a dream and says, "ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Solomon admits he is too young to lead and asks God for an understanding heart to so he can govern God's people. 1 Kings 3:1-14.

So, God promises Solomon not just wisdom and understanding, but riches and fame as well! 1 Kings 3:12-13.

1 Kings 4:29-31 God gave Solomon very great wisdom and understanding, and knowledge as vast as the sands of the seashore.

Solomon becomes the wisest person in ancient history! He wrote the book of Proverbs (one of the wisdom books in the Bible). Our verse for today is **Proverbs 4:7-8 Wisdom is supreme—so get wisdom. And whatever else you get, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; if you embrace her, she will honor you.**

Solomon wrote the powerful proverb in chapter 3 – Vs. 19-20:

Proverbs 3:19-20 By wisdom the Lord founded the earth; by understanding he created the heavens. By his knowledge the deep fountains of the earth burst forth, and the dew settles beneath the night sky. In my [Devo Blog](#) I wrote about these verses. Wisdom is a personification of Jesus.

Wisdom is employed to create the earth itself. Wisdom is engaged to run the systems of the earth with perfection. The Apostle Paul wrote to the churches, Jesus IS the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24).

Paul also wrote the “love chapter” in **1 Cor. 13**, **If I could speak all the languages of earth, if I understood all the secret plans of God, if I possessed all knowledge – but didn’t love others, I would be nothing!**

Here is the multi-gazillion dollar question: If Solomon was so wise, why did he cheat on God, living like a hussy, flirting with women and their fake idols and promoting that lifestyle while serving as King?

Solomon was wise, he was super smart, but it could not gain him perfection or according to Ecclesiastes, he could get no satisfaction!

I want wisdom. I need wisdom. However, we must understand **the wisest, most knowledgeable human will not gain perfection outside of the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ!** Sometimes we can be so Bible-wise that we have forgotten love and mercy. **The religious leaders in Jesus’ day KNEW the Word but would not humble themselves to LIVE the Word. Smart in the head, but merciless with a stony heart.**

Solomon, with all his wisdom, power and fame turned away from his creator and followed lies.

And God rebuked him and shredded his legacy.

1 Kings 11:11-12 Then the Lord said to Solomon, "Since you have done this and did not keep my covenant and my statutes, which I commanded you, **I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it**

to your servant. However, I will not do it during your lifetime for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of your son's hand.

Under Rehoboam, the kingdom split into Northern and Southern kingdoms. The North took 10 tribes, the South took 2 tribes. **The Northern kingdom, however, did not have a temple to worship at, so they built their own places of worship. What do you think those places of worship looked like? That's right – idols, they built two calves – idols – completely forbidden by God.**

God brings in other nations to judge the kingdoms. The Northern kingdom never had a godly king the entire time. Their reign lasted 200 years! The Southern Kingdom goes into captivity with Babylon – they lasted 350 years!

God's story takes us through the reign of the kings of Israel, the prophets that warn the kings and the nation as well as God decision to end the kingship method of ruling over Israel and borrowed a superpower neighbor to take the people into captivity.

2 Kings 17:12-15 They served idols, although the LORD had told them, "You must not do this." Still, the Lord warned Israel and Judah through every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commands and statutes according to the whole law I commanded your ancestors and sent to you through my servants the prophets."

2. God remembers.

The prophets, God's spokespersons, were warning, convicting, consoling and comforting with hope all at the same time. There are four major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The major prophets covered the era of the kings as well as Babylonia captivity. The twelve minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The minor prophets covered both the Assyrian invasion, the

destruction of the Northern Kingdom, the Babylonian exile, as well as the years after the return from exile. [Chronology of the Prophets in the Old Testament.](#)

Yet still - God remembered his promise and brought them back to their own land – although it was completely devastated!

3. God restores.

It has been said that after the return from Babylon, the Jews lost all desire for idolatry, after 1,000 years of clinging to it tenaciously and enthusiastically. **The making of idols and the building of physical places to worship idols had finally come to an end.** However, idolatry isn't just a physically made idol – so they moved idolatry into their hearts where no one could see their sin.

There were **3 million people living in Jerusalem** previous to the kingdom dividing, but **now there were only 50,000 people who returned from Babylon and lived in Jerusalem.**

The Old Testament ends with a hopelessness, silence and emptiness.

The Old Testament ended with a sad longing, a cliff hanger for this great Story of God. What a saga!

There's a hopeless ending to the Old Testament, leaving us with a longing for the One to come. Hope is going to arrive, and His name is Jesus.

The last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, writes in his last chapter, Malachi 4:1-2 The Lord of Heaven's Armies says, "The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace. On that day the arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like straw. They will be consumed—roots, branches, and all. **"But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.** And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture.

The entire Old Testament establishes the facts that God is in control. We broke everything, yet God made a plan to rescue and restore us. His promises are true and trustworthy.

We fail, but God never fails. He gave the law to both save Israel and teach Israel that they were incapable of following the rules, because our heart is always wandering.

God gave them everything they needed and many times, everything they wanted, and they were still not satisfied. They wanted more, they wanted to be like everyone else.

Even the wisest, smartest, famously, filthy-rich king could not obtain perfection nor be satisfied with everything at his disposal!

God left his people aching for not only a conclusion to His story, but a happy ending to the long and endless suffering from their choices. Point made God. We are Israel and Israel is us!

Our hope, our anticipation, our longing fulfilled will only be found in one person – Jesus Christ. And that fulfillment with cost God everything, even the death of His only son.

NOTES

Notes on Proverbs 3:19-20

a. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth: In His work of creation, God showed great wisdom. This is remarkably seen in both the large features and small details of creation. The universe around us has the marks of a brilliant Designer whose design shows His wisdom.

i. God's self-revelation through His creation is an important theme of [Romans 1:18-20](#), which also describes the guilt of mankind in ignoring and rejecting God's self-revelation through what He created.

ii. "This section shows that the wisdom that directs life is the same wisdom that created the universe (see discussion on [8:20-31](#)); to surrender to God's wisdom is to put oneself in harmony with creation, the world around one." (Ross)

b. By understanding He established the heavens: God's creative wisdom is seen in the smallest details of the single cell, but also in the expansive majesty of

the heavens. In His great understanding God created a universe that some call "just right." According to physicists and scientists, we live in a just right universe.

- i. Established the heavens: "Or fitted or ordered them; framed them in that exquisite order which now they have." (Poole)
- ii. The universe has a just-right gravitational force. If it were larger, the stars would be too hot and would burn up too quickly and too unevenly to support life. If it was smaller, the stars would remain so cool, nuclear fusion would never ignite, and there would be no heat and light.
- iii. The universe has a just-right speed of light. If it were larger, stars would send out too much light. If it were smaller, stars would not send out enough light.
- iv. The universe has a just-right average distance between the stars. If it were larger, the heavy element density would be too thin for rocky planets to form, and there would only be gaseous planets. If it were smaller, planetary orbits would become destabilized because of the gravitational pull from other stars.

The Apostle Paul makes it clear; **Christ is the power and wisdom of God.**

But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength. 1 Corinthians 1:24-25 NLT

And...Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for **through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.** Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. Colossians 1:15-17 NLT

Barnes

Wisdom has been thought of in relation to men. Now the question comes, What is she in relation to God? and the answer is, that the creative act implies a Divine Wisdom, through which the Divine will acts. This thought, developed in Proverbs 8, is the first link in the chain which connects this "Wisdom" with the Divine Word, the Logos of John's Gospel. Compare Psalm 33:6; John 1:3. The words of the writer of the Proverbs take their place among the proofs of the dogmatic statements of the Nicene Creed.

[Bible Study Tools – Proverbs 3](#)

David Guzik

[Study guide for Proverbs 3](#)

[The demise of idolatry in Judaism.](#)

Did Jews practice Pagan worship after Babylon?

Scriptures

1 Kings 4:29-31 God gave Solomon very great wisdom and understanding, and knowledge as vast as the sands of the seashore. In fact, his wisdom exceeded that of all the wise men of the East and the wise men of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite and the [sons of Mahol](#)—Heman, Calcol, and Darda. His fame spread throughout all the surrounding nations.

Proverbs 4:7-8 Wisdom is supreme—so get wisdom. And whatever else you get, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; if you embrace her, she will honor you.

Proverbs 3:19-20 By wisdom the Lord founded the earth; by understanding he created the heavens. By his knowledge the deep fountains of the earth burst forth, and the dew settles beneath the night sky.

1 Kings 11:1-3 King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women from the nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, and they must not intermarry with you, because **they will turn your heart away to follow their gods.**" **To these women Solomon was deeply attached in love. He had seven hundred wives who were princesses and three hundred who were concubines, and they turned his heart away.**

1 Kings 11:11-12 Then the Lord said to Solomon, "Since you have done this and did not keep my covenant and my statutes, which I commanded you, **I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.** However, I will not do it during your lifetime for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of your son's hand.

2 Kings 17:12-15 They served idols, although the LORD had told them, "**You must not do this.**" Still, the **Lord warned Israel and Judah through every prophet and every seer**, saying, "**Turn from your evil ways** and keep my commands and statutes according to the whole law I commanded your ancestors and sent to you through my servants the prophets."

Malachi 4:1-2 The Lord of Heaven's Armies says, "The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace. On that day the arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like straw. They will be consumed—roots, branches, and all. **“But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.** And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture.

Malachi 4:5-6 Look, I am sending you **the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.** Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse.

Week 4 Teaching Outline

In this week's time together, our final "season" in the Old Testament, we'll see the tragic state of God's people and another heroic of salvation. The kingdom from last week has now been divided and conquered—the people taken into captivity. Once again, the people turn their hearts back to the ever-faithful God after experiencing the consequences of their own unfaithfulness. When they are freed, they return to a nation and kingdom far less glorious than before and are still unable to keep their promises.

The story continues with God's pattern of faithfulness:

1. God rebukes.
2. God remembers.
3. God restores.

Personal Study

In the teaching for Session 4, we covered a lot of ground, from God's people moving into the promised land to the period of the judges. We also covered the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon as kings of Israel. During this latter period in Israel's history, David wrote many of the psalms, and Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, some of Proverbs, and Song of Solomon. This week's personal Bible study will give you a sampling of how this wisdom literature points to Jesus.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN: LAND AND KINGDOM

God brings His people, through their leader Joshua, into the promised land. When God's people worship the gods of the nations surrounding them, God disciplines them through the attacks of surrounding nations. God raises up judges (or rulers) to rescue His people and call them to repentance. They beg for a king to be like other nations, and God gives them Saul. God raises up a new king, David, and promises that his kingdom will never end. The family that turned into a nation is now a kingdom. David's son, Solomon, builds a temple to replace the tabernacle.

WHERE WE'RE HEADED: EXILE AND RETURN

Solomon takes foreign wives and allows their foreign gods to clutter the land. His son continues the line of rulers, and the kingdom is divided into the Northern

Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Prophets confront the people, but they persist in their idolatry. The Northern Kingdom falls to Assyria and the Southern Kingdom is carried away into Babylonian captivity. When they are freed, they return to a nation and kingdom far less glorious than before and are still unable to keep their promises.

DAY ONE: An Imperfect King

The background to Psalm 51 is found in 2 Samuel 11–12. David had been a great leader, a man after God's own heart. He had administered justice and shown compassion. But things went terribly wrong in his life. Second Samuel 11 opens with David staying in Jerusalem alone while his men go off to war. David was restless at night. Instead of "gazing on the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4), David went to the roof and beheld the beauty of a woman—a married woman named Bathsheba. He called for her, slept with her, and she got pregnant.

Instead of coming clean about his sin, David planned an elaborate cover-up. He brought her husband, Uriah, home from war, believing he would sleep with his wife and all would be forgotten (there were not DNA tests in ancient Israel). Uriah came home from war but refused, even after David served him drinks, to go home to his wife because his fellow soldiers were sleeping on battlefields. So David sent instructions—in a sealed envelope that Uriah carried back to the battlefield with him—to Joab, his chief military leader. The instructions were to put Uriah on the field where the fighting was fiercest and remove the troops. Joab did so, and Uriah was killed. David had now committed adultery and murder.

Nathan, the prophet, confronted David in his sin with an epic illustration: Hey David, a rich man has an out-of-town guest and instead of killing one of his many animals for supper, he kills the one lamb of a poor man. David burned with anger and wanted to find this man and administer justice. Nathan responded simply, "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7). David, because he belonged to the Lord, recognized his sin, repented, and sought God for forgiveness. Psalm 51 is his prayer of forgiveness.

Read Psalm 51.

Notice that David did not pray for his eyes in this psalm. He did not pray that God would protect him from looking at women, nor that the Lord would give him friends who would hold him accountable. He did not make bold promises to God that he would never sin again. He knew he was too broken to keep them. Instead, he prayed for God to clean his heart (v. 10). He knew his heart was the problem.

Psalm 51 shows us the depth of sin in our hearts. It reveals to us just how much in need of God's grace we are. In the first two verses, we see three different words that give us a comprehensive view of our sin.

Be gracious to me, God, according to your faithful love; according to your abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion. Completely wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me. Psalm 51:1-3

The three words describing the sinful depth of our own hearts are:

REBELLION (TRANSGRESSION)

In the original language, this word speaks of willful disobedience against the One to whom we owe our allegiance. Rebellion is our declaration to God that we will do things our way, not His. When David knew Bathsheba was married but pursued her anyway, this was rebellion.

GUILT (INIQUITY)

The word for iniquity carries the sense of shifting. Our hearts have shifted out of place. Instead of focusing on Him, we focus on lesser things. David, as he walked around one night, was looking for something other than the glory of God; therefore, he was susceptible to the beauty of a woman.

SIN

Sin means to miss the mark. When we sin, we miss the mark of God's holiness. When David lusted, he missed the mark of God's love. When he lied, he missed the mark of God's truthfulness. When he murdered, he missed the mark of God who is life.

The good news is that God is eager to forgive, blot out our rebellion, wash away our guilt, and cleanse us from our sin. Our sin is great, but God's grace is greater.

David's sin reminds us that, though he was a great king, he was still imperfect and broken. We all are, even the king who unified Israel and conquered their enemies. Thankfully another King came from the line of David—the perfect and conquering King Jesus who secured our forgiveness on the cross.

Q: How can you relate to David's experience? Explain.

If you have unconfessed sin in your life, take time now to confess it to the Lord and ask Him to create in you a clean heart.

DAY TWO: The Joy of Forgiveness

The Psalms were compiled over hundreds of years and are not presented in chronological order. God's people read and sang them to remember God's faithfulness to His people. Even us public school kids can see that the 32nd Psalm comes before Psalm 51 in our Bibles, but scholars believe that Psalm 32 is David's celebration of his forgiveness after he prayed Psalm 51. So the order of these events is:

DAVID'S SIN (2 Sam. 11) →
NATHAN'S CONFRONTATION (2 Sam. 12) →
DAVID'S CONFESSION (Ps. 51) →
DAVID'S CELEBRATION (Ps. 32)

Read Psalm 32.

Yesterday we studied three words in Psalm 51 that show us the depth of our sin. In this psalm, we see three words that show us the greatness of our forgiveness. David was overwhelmed with the awesomeness of God's forgiveness. Of this psalm and the words showing our sin, Charles Spurgeon said:

Note the three words often used to denote our disobedience: transgression, sin, and iniquity are the three-headed dog at the gates of hell, but our glorious Lord has silenced its barkings forever against his own believing ones. The trinity of sin is overcome by the Trinity of heaven.⁸

The three words are found in the first two verses:

***How joyful is the one
whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered!
How joyful is the person whom
the LORD does not charge with iniquity and in whose spirit is no deceit!***
Psalm 32:1-2

FORGIVEN

The word for forgiven in the original Hebrew (the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrews) means "carried away." How joyful is the one whose transgression is carried away! Your sin, if you are His, has been carried away.

If you, in your mind, are still carrying sin from your past—you are carrying a mirage. Your sin is no longer with you; instead, the Lord has carried it away.

COVERED

When we attempt to cover our own sins, we are like the foolish dog that uses the bathroom in your front yard and thinks two kicks with his back legs will cover up the mess. We cannot cover our mess, our sin. But if we uncover it, if we come to God with our sin, He covers it for us.

DOES NOT CHARGE

God's grace is amazing. If we are His, He does not charge us with sin. Instead He charges or credits us with His righteousness and forgiveness. In our place, Jesus was charged with our sin so we could be credited with His perfection.

Of this passage, Martin Luther said something very powerful:

"We are all sinners alike, only that the sins of the holy are not counted but covered; and the sins of the unholy are not covered but counted."⁹

You are no better than anyone else. You have sinned as all people have sinned. But Christ has covered your sins and not charged you with them. Rejoice in that reality today.

Q: How have you experienced the forgiveness and restoration of God?

DAY THREE: Futility!

You have likely seen pictures of Stonehenge, massive rocks on the side of a beautiful hill. Generations of people have wondered how Stonehenge became Stonehenge. How did these massive stones end up where they are? One theory is that the stones were moved from a hill 150 miles away. To learn as much as possible about the stones and life surrounding them, archaeologists have been digging on that hill for 90 years. But in 2013, geologists discovered that the archaeologists have been digging on the wrong hill. The hill they should have been excavating is just over a mile away. For 90 years, they centered their lives on the wrong hill.¹⁰ Imagine the misery of learning you have squandered so much time in pursuit of the wrong thing.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon—David's son and the king the Lord gave wisdom to—wrote that everything in this life, everything under the sun, is absolutely futile. While Solomon walked with the Lord, the Lord gave him great insight, and we have much to learn from him.

Read Ecclesiastes 1 and take note of all that is described as futile.

Q: Which of these futile activities do you struggle with the most? Why?

We see the futility of laboring for accomplishments. Though the streams outlast us, they can never fill the sea. Generations come and go, and the earth remains, but no matter how hard the streams work, they cannot make the sea full. In other words, work done "under the sun" is really futile (v. 7).

We see the futility of laboring for pleasure. Though we have new things to look at and new sounds to hear, the eye and the ear remain unsatisfied. Pleasures never last. They are futile, too (v. 8).

We see the futility of laboring for legacy. OK, if working for accomplishments and working for pleasure are empty, what about working to leave behind a legacy? Futile. Generations from now, no one will remember you (v. 11).

We see the futility of laboring in blessing. Solomon tried to find joy in the blessing the Lord gave him, in his wisdom. But that too is folly and a pursuit of the wind (v. 17).

Laboring for accomplishment, pleasure, and legacy is futile. Even laboring and finding identity in the blessings of God is futility.

Why all this futility? I'm sure you're thinking, Thanks for the motivation, Geiger. Maybe you even said, "This is borderline depressing." It is important for us to understand the pain of a broken and fallen world, but also to know there is hope.

The word futile is used 38 times throughout the Book of Ecclesiastes, and only used one time in the New Testament. The apostle Paul explained why this life is filled with futility in Romans 8:20. He wrote:

For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it—in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children.

Romans 8:20-21

Before sin entered the world, everything was perfect. It was not futile. But humanity sinned and all that humankind was responsible for (we were given responsibility over creation) suffered. Creation was subjected to futility because God judged creation as a result of our sin. But He also gave creation hope that there will be a day when all things will be made new. When Christ returns, He will rescue all of creation from futility.

Creation will one day be rescued from futility, and the same One who will rescue all of creation can rescue us from futility now. You don't have to be a man who lives under the sun, who lives for only this world. You don't have to dig on the wrong hill. Instead of laboring under the sun, we can rest in the One who came here for us—the One who did all the work for us on the cross, Jesus, who gives us rest from futility in this life. Only the King of kings can rescue us from the futility of futilities.

Q: How would you define futile?

Q: In what ways do you get caught up in running after things that are futile?

DAY FOUR: Get Wisdom

When Solomon became king, he prayed for wisdom. God graciously responded:

Since this was in your heart, and you have not requested riches, wealth, or glory, or for the life of those who hate you, and you have not even requested long life, but you have requested for yourself wisdom and knowledge that you may judge my people over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge are given to you. I will also give you riches, wealth, and glory, unlike what was given to the kings who were before you or will be given to those after you.

2 Chronicles 1:11-12

Solomon is the major writer in the Book of Proverbs. The book was essentially the parenting manual for the people of God. Fathers would use the sayings with their sons to instill wisdom in young men. The book is extremely practical because wisdom impacts life today. Wisdom is the art of living life skillfully. You may have been blessed with the shepherding and counsel of a father or mother who parented you well, and these wise sayings sound a lot like the instruction you received. Or you may have heard counsel very different from these wise sayings. Either way, these sayings are for you now.

Reflect on these questions and proverbs today:

HOW IMPORTANT IS WISDOM?

Wisdom is supreme—so get wisdom. And whatever else you get, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; if you embrace her, she will honor you.

Proverbs 4:7-8

WHERE DOES WISDOM COME FROM?

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and discipline.

Proverbs 1:7

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO LOOK FOR AS A SPOUSE?

Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the LORD will be praised.

Proverbs 31:30

SHOULD I DO WHAT THE CULTURE/WORLD ADVISES?

There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.
Proverbs 14:12

DO I NEED BIBLICAL COMMUNITY?

Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another.

Proverbs 27:17

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE PROUD?

Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 16:18

HOW SHOULD I SPEAK TO PEOPLE?

A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath.

Proverbs 15:1

SHOULD I WORK HARD?

Go to the ant, you slacker! Observe its ways and become wise. Without leader, administrator, or ruler, it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest. How long will you stay in bed, you slacker?

When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the arms to rest, and your poverty will come like a robber, your need, like a bandit.

HOW SHOULD I VIEW DEBT?

The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender.

Proverbs 22:7

DOES MY REPUTATION MATTER?

A good name is to be chosen over great wealth; favor is better than silver and gold. Proverbs 22:1

DO MY CLOSE FRIENDS MATTER?

The one who walks with the wise will become wise, but a companion of fools will suffer harm.

Proverbs 13:20

DO THOSE WHO CANNOT DEFEND THEMSELVES MATTER?

Speak up for those who have no voice for the justice of all who are dispossessed. Speak up, judge righteously, and defend the cause of the oppressed and needy. Proverbs 31:8-9

Q: What's the difference between wisdom and knowledge? Explain.

Q: Who is the wisest person you know? Based on what?

Q: Where do you look for wisdom?

Q: Is God and His Word your first choice? Why or why not?

Group Questions

Discussion Guide

1. Share a quick summary of highlights from Weeks 1–4. Why is this week an important point in redemptive history and the unfolding story of God?
2. How did Solomon compromise his devotion to God? Explain.
3. What in your life causes you to compromise your devotion to God? Why?

Read 2 Kings 17:7 aloud.

7 This disaster happened because the people of Israel sinned against the LORD their God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt and because they worshiped other gods.

2 Kings 17:7

4. What were the consequences for both Israel and Judah because of their idolatry?
5. What consequences have you experienced because of your idolatry? Explain.

Read Ezekiel 36:24–27 aloud.

24 For I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. 25 I will also sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.

Ezekiel 36:24–27

6. How has God shown faithful love to you, even when you rebelled against Him?

7. What does it mean that God would replace the people's heart of stone with a heart of flesh? How has God changed your heart?

8. When have you experienced God's restoration? Be specific.

9. Why does the Old Testament end on a seemingly hopeless note? How does the story of God up to this point make you feel?

10. Have you ever experienced a season of silence, where you weren't hearing from God? How does that relate to the story of God so far?

Look back over the personal study.

11. What was especially meaningful or helpful in understanding the story of God and your life with Christ?

- Day 1: An Imperfect King
- Day 2: The Joy of Forgiveness
- Day 3: Futility!
- Day 4: Get Wisdom
- Day 5: Reflection

Look back at the *Break the Cycle* discipleship experience (p. 72–73).

12. Has God revealed any more to you about patterns or strongholds in your life—especially in relation to this week's devotionals on sin, forgiveness, futility, and wisdom?

13. How does the takeaway affect your view of Scripture? How will you respond to this part of the story?

8-week overview

CREATION AND FALL

The self-sufficient and eternal God lovingly creates a perfect creation with humanity as His crowning work. Falling for Satan's temptation, humanity rebels and sin enters the world bringing death, pain, and strife. Instead of giving up on humanity, God promises that from the womb of a woman will come the One who will crush Satan's head.

PROMISE AND A PEOPLE

God pursues Abraham, a man from an idol-worshiping family who has no children with his wife and promises that he will be the father of many nations. God promises land to Abraham and assures him that all nations will be blessed

through his offspring. God continues to be faithful to this family. He restates the promise to Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob (who is renamed Israel). A famine strikes the promised land, so Jacob and the family move to Egypt where one of Jacob's sons, Joseph, is already there to provide for the family.

RESCUE AND LAW

The family becomes a nation while living in Egypt, but also becomes enslaved to the Egyptians. God raises up Moses to lead His people to freedom. During a tenth plague, God strikes dead the firstborn son of everyone living in Egypt, but "passes over" Israel as they put the blood of lambs on their doorposts. After miraculously rescuing His people, God gives His people the law. He also instructs them to build a tabernacle and offer sacrifices so He may dwell among them.

LAND AND KINGDOM

God brings His people, through their leader Joshua, into the promised land. When God's people worship the gods of the nation's surrounding them, God disciplines them through the attacks of surrounding nations. God raises up judges (or rulers) to rescue His people and call them to repentance. They beg for a king to be like other nations, and God gives them Saul. God raises up a new king, David, and promises that his kingdom will never end. The family that turned into a nation is now a kingdom. David's son, Solomon, builds a temple to replace the tabernacle.

EXILE AND RETURN

Solomon takes foreign wives and allows their foreign gods to clutter the land. His son continues the line of rulers, and the kingdom is divided into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Prophets confront the people, but they persist in their idolatry. The Northern Kingdom falls to Assyria and the Southern Kingdom is carried away into Babylonian captivity. When they are freed, they return to a nation and kingdom far less glorious than before and are still unable to keep their promises.

JESUS

A descendant of Adam, Abraham, and David, Jesus is the One who crushes the head of Satan, will bless all nations, and reigns forever. Jesus, the God-Man, enters humanity through the womb of a virgin, perfectly obeys the law that we could never obey, dies as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins, and rises from the dead, conquering Satan, sin, and death. He inaugurates His eternal kingdom and secures salvation for His people.

A NEW PEOPLE

After His ascension to heaven, Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit and His disciples turn the world upside down preaching the good news of Jesus. In the midst of intense persecution, the gospel spreads, and Gentiles and Jews form a new people. Churches are planted in cities, and apostles write letters

encouraging and instructing the people in the grace of Christ and their response to His grace.

A BETTER BEGINNING

A time is coming where God's people—people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who have been rescued by Christ—will enjoy Him and His rule forever in perfect harmony. Satan will be crushed, the effects of sin will be reversed, and all things will be made new.

This first week will ease you into the story with just four scriptures setting the stage for our epic journey. Weeks 2–8 will dive deeper into each day's personal study. Ideally, you'll have time to read one passage of Scripture each day for four days leading up to the first group session, plus one day of personal reflection. If you don't have the full week or you didn't receive your book in advance, that's OK—read what you can before your first discussion begins.