HSM WEEKLY JOURNAL

SEMESTER 1: YEAR 4



THIS BOOK BELONGS TO:

Creation by Word | Week 1

One of my absolute favorite places to talk to God is while I'm hiking - trees surrounding me, trail guiding me and maybe some glimpses of a running river or ripples of a lake. When God's creation surrounds me, it's hard not to be in awe of the little details from the veins on a changing leaf to the relief of a slight breeze on a hot summer day.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." - Psalm 19:1

Has a sunset ever stopped you in your tracks, just to take it in? Or maybe you've appreciated the serene waters of a lake after a long day in the sun. Creation reminds us of how powerful and intentional God is. From the very beginning, He spoke the world into existence, shaping everything with a purpose–including you!

Background Genesis was written in a time when many cultures had different creation stories. Genesis is traditionally attributed to Moses and is part of the first five books of the Bible (the Torah/Pentateuch). It was written to help the Israelites understand their origins and their relationship with God.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read Dear God, thank You for this time in Your Word and for revealing Yourself to us through creation. As we reflect on the beauty, order, and purpose You spoke into existence, help us to see Your hand in our own lives. Let these scriptures take root in our hearts, reminding us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in Your image. Shape our thoughts and actions so that we may reflect Your love, creativity, and care for the world around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Read: Genesis 1:1-2:4

- 1.ICEBREAKER: If you could create anything new in the world, what would it be and why?
- **2.** Read Genesis 1:1-3. It says, God created everything by speaking. What does this tell us about God's power?
- **3.** How does knowing that God created everything "good" affect the way you see the world?
- **4.** Read Genesis 1:26-28. What does it mean to be made in God's image? What does this say about your value and the value of others?
- **5.** God created everything and called it "good," how should we treat His creation (people, animals, nature, etc.)?

PRAY together, thanking God for His creation and asking for His help in living with purpose.

Weekly Challenge

Pick one way to reflect God's image this week. Share with your group!

Character Trait - Stewardship: Taking care of what God has entrusted to us

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?

Promises: Binding of Isaac | Week 2

Have you ever had to trust someone when you didn't know the full plan? Maybe a coach told you to follow a game strategy that seemed weird, or a teacher assigned a group project with people you didn't know well. Trusting can be hard —especially when we can't see the outcome.

"The Lord will provide." - Genesis 22:14

In today's text, God tested Abraham's faith and trust. This story isn't just about Abraham and Isaac–it's about us too. Sometimes, God asks us to trust Him when life doesn't make sense. Maybe you're in a tough season, waiting for something, or struggling to understand God's plan. This passage reminds us that God always provides, even when we don't see the answer yet.

Background Abraham and Sarah were very old and had no children, but God promised that Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5). Even though they doubted at times, God remained faithful to His promise and gave them a son, Isaac, in their old age (Genesis 21:1-3). This story shows how God keeps His promises, even when things don't make sense. This story also foreshadows Jesus—just as God provided a ram in place of Isaac, He later provided Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read Dear God, as we open Your Word today, help us to focus our hearts and minds on You. Give us understanding as we read these stories of faith, trust, and Your perfect provision. Help us to see how Your truth applies to our lives and how we can grow in our relationship with You. May Your Spirit guide our discussion and shape us to be more like You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Read: Genesis 21:1-13; 22:1-14

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: What's something you've had to wait a long time for? Was it worth the wait?
- 2. How do you see God's faithfulness in the birth of Isaac?
- **3.** Why do you think Abraham and Sarah had to wait so long for God's promise? How do you handle waiting on God?
- **4.** Have you ever felt like God was asking you to do something difficult? How did you respond?
- 5. Where in your life do you need to trust God more right now? How can you practice patience and faith when you feel like God's promises are taking too long?

PRAY together, asking God to strengthen your trust in Him.

Weekly Challenge

Identify one thing you're struggling to trust God with & pray about it daily.

Character Trait -Obedience: following God's command, even when it is difficult and unclear

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?

Promises: Jacob's Dream | Week 3

Have you ever been on a road trip where the driver tried to take a shortcut, but it actually made the trip longer? Or maybe you've taken a shortcut on a school assignment, only to lose points because you skipped an important step? Shortcuts can seem like the fastest way to get what we want, but they often come with a cost. They might bring quick results, but something important is lost or missing along the way.

Sometimes, we try to take shortcuts in life instead of trusting God's timing and plan. In today's Scripture, we see Jacob deceiving his father, Isaac, to get a blessing that was meant for his brother, Esau. He got what he wanted-but at a cost. His deception led to broken relationships, consequences, and fear. But here's the incredible part: God didn't give up on Jacob. Even after his deception, God reminded him that His promise still stood. And that's true for us, too-God is a promise keeper and never gives up on us.

Background Isaac, Son of Abraham, now old and nearly blind; intends to bless his eldest son, Esau. Jacob & Esau (twins) were rivals from even before they were born – In Genesis 25:23, God told Rebekah that they would become two nations and that the older (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). Jacob had already taken Esau's birthright. In Genesis 25:29-34, Esau traded his birthright (inheritance) to Jacob for a bowl of stew, showing how little he valued it.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read Dear God, thank You for Your faithfulness, even when we make mistakes. Teach us to trust You instead of trying to control things on our own. Help us to live with integrity and rely on Your plan. Open our hearts to hear Your truth today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Read: Genesis 27:1-4, 15-23; 28:10-17

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: Have you ever tried to take a shortcut to get something you wanted? How did it turn out?
- 2. Isaac was suspicious that something wasn't right (Gen. 27:22). Why do you think he still went ahead and blessed Jacob?
- **3.** What do you think Jacob was feeling as he tricked his father? Have you ever done something you knew was wrong but did it anyway?
- **4.**God reaffirms His promise to Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15), despite all his mistakes. What does this show us about God's character?
- 5. What's one area in your life where you need to trust God's timing and plan instead of taking matters into your own hands?

PRAY together, asking God to strengthen your trust and obedience in Him.

Weekly Challenge

This week, take time to talk to God about an area where you need to trust Him more.

Character Trait - Integrity: doing what's right, even when no one is watching

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?

Promises: God's Name is Revealed | Week 4

Think about a time when you were asked to do something that felt way out of your comfort zone—maybe to speak in front of the class, lead a group, or step into a situation where you weren't sure you had what it took. How did you feel? Nervous? Unsure? Maybe even like you weren't good enough for the task? Today's text follows the story of Moses, who God asked to do a task he didn't quite feel qualified for. But here's the thing—God wasn't asking Moses to do it on his own.

This speaks to us, too. God doesn't call us because we're already perfect or have everything figured out. Instead, He calls us to be a light in the world, even when we don't feel ready. God wants to use us, with all our flaws and imperfections, to show others His love and truth. When we step out in faith, even with doubts, we shine as lights for God's glory.

Background The Israelites had been living in Egypt for several generations. Initially, they were favored because of Joseph's relationship with the Pharaoh, but over time, a new Pharaoh arose who didn't know Joseph and enslaved the Israelites. This sets the stage for God's action to deliver His people, showing His faithfulness to His promises.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read Dear God, thank You for Your unwavering faithfulness, even when we doubt or try to take control. Help us to trust You and follow Your lead, knowing that You will equip us for the task. Teach us to live with integrity, reflecting Your light in everything we do. Open our hearts to hear Your truth and be courageous in living out Your plan, even when it feels uncertain. May we shine Your light in our world today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Read: Exodus 2:23-25; 3:10-15; 4:10-17

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: Have you ever felt unqualified or nervous to do something important? What happened?
- **2.** Read Exodus 2:23-25. What does this passage tell us about how God sees and responds to His people's suffering?
- 3. In Exodus 3:11, Moses questions God, saying, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" Why do you think Moses doubted himself? Have you ever felt like you weren't good enough for something God was calling you to do?
- 4. What does this passage teach us about how God equips those He calls?
- **5.** In verse 3:14, God tells Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." What do you think that means? What does it tell us about who God is?

PRAY together, asking God to strengthen your trust in Him.

Weekly Challenge

Identify one area where you've been hesitant to obey God, and take one step toward trusting Him.

Character Trait -Obedience: following God's command, even when it is difficult and unclear

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?

Promises: God Provides Manna | Week 5

Have you ever felt like life just isn't going the way you thought it would? Maybe you were hoping for a job, a certain outcome in a game, or even just some clarity about the future, but things seem to be dragging on. You start to wonder if God sees you or if He's really going to come through for you.

The Israelites felt the same way. They had just been freed from slavery in Egypt, and now they were wandering in the desert, unsure of what lied ahead. With no food, they started to grumble. It's easy to forget God's goodness when things aren't going the way we expect, right? But, God keeps His promises and provides what we need -sometimes in ways we wouldn't expect.

Background Exodus 16 occurs shortly after the Israelites' escape from Egypt, where they were enslaved for over 400 years. God had parted the Red Sea to allow them to escape Pharaoh's army and had already shown His power and faithfulness in bringing them out of bondage. The Israelites are now in the wilderness (the desert region), traveling toward the Promised Land. This is a harsh environment where food and water are scarce, and the Israelites are facing the challenges of survival. The journey will take 40 years, and during this time, God will test and teach His people.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read Thank You for Your faithful provision, just as You provided for the Israelites in the wilderness. Help us to trust You daily and rely on Your wisdom, knowing You will give us what we need. Teach us to be content with Your provision and live with integrity, following Your lead. May we shine Your light in our world today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Read: Exodus 16:1-18

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be? Why?
- **2.** How did God respond to the Israelites' complaints in Exodus? What does this tell us about God's character?
- **3.** In Exodus 16:17-18, we see that the amount of manna collected was different for each person. What do you think this teaches us about God's provision in our lives?
- **4.** Manna is often described as "bread from heaven." In John 6:32-35, Jesus calls Himself the "bread of life." What connections can you make between the manna in Exodus and Jesus' words in the New Testament?
- 5. How can you trust God's provision and be content with what He gives you each day?

PRAY together, asking God to strengthen your trust in His provision.

Weekly Challenge

Continue to pray and look to God for ways you can trust in Him.

Character Trait - Contentment: trusting in God's provision

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?

Hearing God in Every Season: God Calls Samuel | Week 6

Think about a time when someone was trying to get your attention, but you didn't realize it at first-maybe a teacher calling on you in class or a friend trying to talk while you were distracted. How long did it take before you finally tuned in?

Sometimes, God is speaking to us, but we don't recognize it-maybe because we're too distracted, too busy, or just not expecting it. But just like today's text on Samuel, we can learn to tune in and be ready when He calls. God doesn't always wait until we're "ready" to speak to us-He calls us as we are, and He prepares us as we follow Him.

Background Israel was experiencing spiritual corruption and was in desperate need of a new leader. Samuel, the son of Hannah, was an answer to prayer—she had dedicated him to God before his birth. Samuel was serving in the temple under the guidance of Eli, the priest, preparing for the role God had planned for him.

"Heavenly Father, as we open Your Word today, help us to quiet our hearts and listen for Your voice. Give us wisdom to understand, faith to trust, and courage to respond to Your call. Help us to recognize Your presence and be attentive to what You are teaching us. In Your Name, Amen."

Read: 1 Samuel 3:1-21

- 1.ICEBREAKER: What's the hardest part about listening—to a teacher, a friend, or even God?
- 1. How does Samuel respond when he first hears his name being called? (V. 4-5)
- 2. Why do you think it takes Samuel three times before realizing it was God speaking to him? What does this tell us about recognizing God's voice?
- **3.** What can we learn from Eli's response in verse 18? What does it show about trusting God?
- **4.** Samuel says, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." How can we make that our attitude when we pray?

PRAY together, asking God to help us be attentive to His voice.

Weekly Challenge

Find a quiet moment each day to simply listen to God-whether through prayer, reading Scripture, or just sitting in stillness.

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?	

Hearing God in Every Season: God Calls David | Week 7

Have you ever been overlooked or underestimated–maybe in sports, at school, or even among friends? Maybe someone assumed you weren't capable because of your age, experience, or appearance. How did that make you feel?

In today's passage, we see Samuel sent to find the next king, and everyone assumes it will be the strongest or most impressive son of Jesse. But God doesn't choose based on outward appearance. Instead, He looks at the heart. This reminds us that God's calling isn't about how others see us (or how we see others)—it's about how He sees us. No matter where we come from, what we've done, or what we think we lack, God chooses and equips us as our hearts are pointed toward Him.

Background Israel needed a new king because Saul had turned away from God. God sent Samuel to find the next king from Jesse's family. Samuel assumed God would choose the strongest or most impressive son-but God had a different plan. Instead of looking at outward appearance, God chose David, a humble shepherd boy, because God saw his heart.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read "Lord, as we open Your Word today, help us to see ourselves the way You see us. Teach us that what matters most is not our achievements, appearance, or status, but our hearts before You. Shape us into people who seek after You first. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Read: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 51:10-14

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: Have you ever felt like you didn't measure up in comparison to others? How do you think that thought or feeling has shaped you?
- 2. Read 1 Samuel 16:7. What do you think it means to have a heart after God?
- **3.** Psalm 51:10-12 is David's prayer. How does David's response show why he was still a man after God's heart, even after sinning?
- **4.** What are some ways we focus too much on what people think instead of what God sees in us? P.S. Do we know what other people think of us, or is it what we think they think of us?
- 5. How can we develop a heart that seeks after God daily? What does that look like practically?

PRAY together, asking God to renew your heart to seek Him more.

Weekly Challenge

Take one step this week to shift your focus from outward things to your heart before God.

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?	

Hearing God in Every Season: Solomon's Temple | Week 8

Have you ever experienced a moment where you felt a deep sense of awe or reverence—maybe in nature, during a special moment of worship, or when you were in the presence of someone you look up to? That feeling of being in the presence of something or someone greater than yourself can be overwhelming. In today's passage, we see Solomon completing the temple and bringing the Ark of the Covenant into it. As he does, God's glory fills the temple, and His presence becomes tangible to everyone there.

For the Israelites, this was a powerful moment of experiencing God's closeness. For us today, God continues to be present in our lives—whether we see His glory in the world around us, in His Word, or in our hearts.

Background David's desire to build a temple for God was fulfilled through his son, Solomon, who started the project. Solomon worked with King Hiram of Tyre to gather resources for the building. After the temple was completed, Solomon dedicated it in a grand ceremony. The glory of the Lord filled the temple, a sign that God's presence was with His people.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read "Lord, as we read Your Word today, help us to understand the significance of Your dwelling place among us and to reflect Your glory in our own lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Read: 1 Kings 5:1-5; 8:1-13

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: Have you ever been part of a project that took a lot of preparation? What was the most fulfilling part of seeing it come to completion?
- 2. What does this text teach us about the importance of working together for God's purposes?
- **3.**1 Kings 8:10-11 describes the moment when God's glory filled the temple. Why do you think God's glory overwhelmed the priests?
- **4.** Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. In 1 Kings 8:12, Solomon acknowledges that God cannot be contained in a building. What does this teach us about God's presence today?
- 5. What does it mean for God's glory to be present in your life? How can we seek to reflect God's glory in practical ways?

PRAY together, asking God to help glorify Him through your words and actions.

Weekly Challenge

Reflect on your life as a "temple" for God's presence. How can you make room for His glory in your thoughts, actions, and relationships?

Character Trait - Reverence: Honoring God's presence in our lives and recognizing His greatness

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?	

Hearing God in Every Season: God Speaks to Elijah | Week 9

Have you ever experienced a moment where despite being surrounded by chaos or noise, you felt a deep sense of peace? Maybe it was a quiet moment in nature, or perhaps a stillness in the midst of a busy day. In today's passage, we see Elijah, worn out and discouraged after a great victory, fleeing for his life and seeking God in a place of isolation. Knowing Elijah's exhaustion, God doesn't speak to him through the grand events of nature—wind, earthquake, or fire—but through a gentle whisper.

This passage reminds us that God often speaks in quiet and unexpected ways, even when we are weary. It invites us to seek His voice in the stillness, even when everything around us seems overwhelming.

Background After Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Queen Jezebel threatened his life. Fearful and discouraged, Elijah fled to the wilderness. There, God provided for him, and Elijah eventually finds himself on Mount Horeb, where he seeks God's guidance.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read "Lord, thank You for Your constant presence in our lives, even when we feel overwhelmed or uncertain. Help us to hear Your voice, not just in the big moments but also in the quiet whispers. Open our hearts to receive Your guidance today. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Read: 1 Kings 19:1-18

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: Have you ever felt exhausted or overwhelmed by life? How did you cope with those feelings in that moment?
- 2.1 Kings 19:3-5 shows Elijah running away in fear, even after his great victory. Why do you think Elijah felt so overwhelmed and discouraged, despite seeing God's power so recently?
- **3.** Why do you think God chose to speak this way to Elijah? How does this shape our understanding of how God communicates with us today?
- **4.**God provides for Elijah physically and spiritually in this passage. Describe a time when God provided for you in a time of weariness or discouragement.
- **5.** How might God be inviting you to seek His voice in the quiet moments instead of waiting for big signs?

PRAY together, asking God to help you seek Him in quiet moments.

Weekly Challenge

This week, take time to be still and listen for God's voice. Whether in a quiet moment of prayer or through reading Scripture, ask God to guide you.

Character Trait - Patience: Waiting on and trusting God's timing

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?	

Light in the Darkness: A Child is Born | Week 10

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." - Isaiah 9:2

Have you ever been in complete darkness—maybe during a power outage or walking through a dark forest? But were relieved when light appeared? Light changes everything. It helps us see clearly, comforts us and can even help guide us. In today's passage, Isaiah speaks to a people walking in deep darkness. They were surrounded by fear, uncertainty, and brokenness. But into that darkness, God promises a great light—a child who would bring peace, justice, and hope to the world.

Isaiah gave this prophecy during a dark time in Israel's history. The northern tribes had suffered under invasion, and the people were spiritually lost and politically oppressed. But God promised hope: a future ruler who would bring light, healing, and peace. This prophecy points to Jesus–the child born to bring God's kingdom into the world.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read "God, thank You for being our light when life feels dark. As we read this passage, help us to understand Your promises and see how Jesus brings hope into our lives. Let Your light shine in us and through us. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Read: Isaiah 9:1-7

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: What's something that brings you comfort or helps you feel safe when you're afraid or in the dark-literally or emotionally?
- 2. Verse 2 says, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light." What do you think the "darkness" represents for the people? How may that relate today?
- **3.** Isaiah describes the coming Savior with powerful names like "Wonderful Counselor," "Mighty God," "Everlasting Father," and "Prince of Peace." Which one of these names means the most to you right now, and why?
- **4.** This promise was given hundreds of years before Jesus was born. What does this teach us about God's faithfulness, even when we're waiting?
- **5.** What does it look like to carry hope and be a light for others in a world that can feel dark or uncertain?

PRAY together, asking God to be the guiding light in your life.

Weekly Challenge

This week, bring hope to someone who might be going through a hard time-through a kind word, a prayer, or simply by showing up and listening.

Character Trait - Hope: Trusting God and His plans

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?	

Light in the Darkness: Jeremiah's Letter to Exiles | Week 11

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." – Jeremiah 29:11

Have you ever picked someone up from the airport? Maybe a friend or a family member? Along the side of the road, there are signs indicating departures and arrivals. When picking someone up, you park near the arrivals and wait. The word Advent means arrival. During Advent, we join God's people in the Old Testament waiting for Jesus to arrive. In Jeremiah's day, God's people were waiting in exile. Even in our darkest moments, God has plans to give us hope and a future. Sometimes, we just have to wait for it.

Background After the death of King Solomon, Israel was divided into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom was called Israel, and the southern kingdom was called Judah. In 722 BCE, the Assyrians conquered Israel. One hundred years later, the Assyrian capital of Nineveh fell to the Babylonians. To help keep the country safe, the kings of Judah began to pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king. However, two kings of Judah rebelled, and Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in 586 BCE, destroyed the temple, and sent God's people away into exile. The people have lost their homeland and their temple, They feel alone and desperate, but God promises the people that God will never leave them hopeless.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read "God, thank You that you always have good plans for us, plans to give us hope and a future. Help us to trust you even in our darkest moments. Help us to wait for You with patience and perseverance. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Read: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14

- 1.ICEBREAKER: What's one time that you had to wait for someone or something important to arrive? Who/what were you waiting for, and how did you feel while you were waiting?
- 2. Do you think that most teenagers today have hope for the future? Why or why not?
- 3. Verse 11 says that God has "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Do you have hope for the future? Why or why not?
- 4. What can we do while we wait for God to show us His plans?
- 5. How can we help others as they wait for God to show them His plans?

PRAY together, asking God to bring hope to the hopeless.

Weekly Challenge

This week, do something kind for one person you know who you think might feel hopeless, and tell them that God has hope and a future for them.

Character Trait - Hopefulness: bringing hope to others through your words and actions

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?	

Light in the Darkness: Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego | Week 12

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand." – Daniel 3:17

Imagine living in a time and place where Christianity is illegal. You have been accused of the "crime" of following Jesus, arrested by police officers, and dragged before a court. The prosecution has been spying on you for weeks without your knowledge, so they've had plenty of time to gather evidence. They examine your worship attendance, your prayer life, your good deeds, and other outward signs of inward faith. What would be worse—if the jury found you guilty of following Jesus, or if they found you innocent?

Background During a time when kings dictated who their subjects worshipped and Jews were held in captivity, all of Babylon was required to worship a golden statue. However, Shadrach (SHAD-rack), Meshach (ME-shack), and Abednego (A-BED-ne-go) worshipped God alone. These three young Jews, who were in service to the king, obeyed the First Commandment and worshipped only God, which put them in grave danger.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read "God, thank you for being with us, even in the fiery furnaces of life. Give us the courage to stand for you, even when it costs us. Remind us that our relationship with You is more important than anything else this world can offer. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Read: Daniel 3:1, 8-30

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: Have you ever been in a situation where you felt pressure to go along with the crowd? What happened?
- 2. What stands out to you about how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego responded to the king's threat?
- 3. Do you think it's worth it to follow Jesus even if it costs you something? Why or why not?
- **4.** What helps you stay faithful to God when it's hard?
- **5.** What's a situation where you might need to stand up for your faith—even if it's unpopular?

PRAY together, asking God to give you courage to stand up for Jesus.

Weekly Challenge

This week, talk about your Christian faith with someone who doesn't go to your church.

Character Trait - Courage: standing up for what you believe even when it costs something

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?						

Light in the Darkness: Valley of Dry Bones | Week 13

"I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord." - Ezekiel 37:14

Have you ever walked through a valley-like, an actual one?

In a real valley, you're at the lowest point in the landscape. Everything else rises up around you. It can feel isolating, heavy, even overwhelming.

We experience spiritual valleys like that, too–seasons where life feels hopeless, lifeless, and everything is an uphill battle. You feel stuck at the bottom, unsure if anything good can come from where you are. But valleys aren't the end of the story–and God isn't absent in them.

After a series of wars and changes in rulers, the Jews in exile were finally permitted to return to their homeland in the sixth century BCE. The temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem. Not all of Israel returned to the land, however. Only two of the original twelve tribes survived exile: Judah and Benjamin (along with some Levites). The "dry bones" symbolize the future promise that God will one day resurrect the dead, restore His people, and make all things new.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read "God, thank You for mourning with those who mourn. Help us also to mourn with those who mourn, but also to grieve with hope. Help us to trust in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting found in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Read: Ezekiel 37:1-14

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: How do you think life was different for your grandparents when they were your age?
- 2. What part of this story gives you the most hope?
- **3.** In the Apostles' Creed, we say we believe in the "resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." What do you think that will be like?
- **4.** Where do you see "dry bones" in your life-or in the world around you(areas that feel hopeless/broken)?
- **5.** How could you invite God's Spirit to breathe new life into those areas?

PRAY together, asking God to breathe new life into the dead places of your lives.

Weekly Challenge

This week, seek out someone who could use some encouragement and speak God's promises and truth into their life.

Character Trait - Comfort: Bringing hope and peace to others by pointing them to God's presence, power, and promises—especially in hard or hopeless times.

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?						

Light in the Darkness: Invitation to the Thirsty | Week 14

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." – Isaiah 55:1

Imagine you've been wandering lost in a scorching desert for hours, sand in your shoes, sunburn on your face. You're out of water and dying of thirst. Your mouth is so dry that you can't even speak. Suddenly, a stranger drives up in a rescue truck. He hands you pretzels, but you're not hungry—you're thirsty! He plays a song on the stereo, but you're not bored—you're thirsty! Finally, he opens his cooler and hands you an ice-cold bottle of water. Just what you needed! We all thirst for more than just water, too - our souls thirst for something only God can satisfy.

Background The Book of Isaiah tells a three-part story of Israel before, during, and after exile. Chapters 1-39 (sometimes called First Isaiah) contain the prophecies of Isaiah from the 8th century BC. Isaiah warns that Israel will fall to Babylon. Chapters 40-54 (sometimes called Second Isaiah) fast-forward two hundred years. Israel has fallen, just as Isaiah prophesied. Enslaved in Babylon, Israel cries out for God to rescue her. Chapters 55-66 (sometimes called Third Isaiah) fast-forward fifty more years. God answers Israel's prayer and rescues her from Babylon. Still, a future Messiah is coming who will rescue Israel once-and-for-all. Spoiler: that's Jesus.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read "God, you rescued Israel from Babylon, and you rescue me time and time again. Your love endures forever. Remind me to come to you when I am in need, so that I drink from the Living Water of your love. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Read: Isaiah 55:1-11

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: How much water do you drink on a typical day? Do you have a favorite water bottle or way to drink water?
- 2. Isaiah 55:1 says, "Come, all you who are thirsty..." What are some things we try to satisfy that thirst with instead of God?
- 3. How do you think God wants to rescue us and satisfy our thirsts?
- **4.** What do you think it means that God's love is "without money and without cost"? Why do people sometimes feel like they have to "earn" God's love?
- 5. How can we invite others to come to the waters of God's love?

PRAY together, asking God to satisfy the thirsts of your heart.

Weekly Challenge

This week, talk about your Christian faith with someone who doesn't go to your church.

Character Trait - Hospitality: welcoming others with God's love

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?						

Light in the Darkness: Word Made Flesh | Week 15

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." – John 1:1

Every great story has a hero. From the very first page, John introduces us to his hero-not with a birth announcement, but with a declaration: Jesus has always existed. He is the Word of God, present at creation, one with God, and fully God. This isn't just a beginning-it's THE beginning. Jesus is not a new character who shows up partway through the story. He's been there from the start, shaping everything. And He doesn't change.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." - Hebrews 13:8

Background At the beginning of the Gospel of John, we encounter a different take on the Christmas story. Instead of focusing on a baby in a manger, John zooms out to a cosmic view—connecting Jesus' arrival to the very beginning of creation in Genesis. In this telling, Jesus isn't just born into the world; He is the Word, one with God, present from the very beginning. Through Jesus, we see that God hasn't just entered the world—He has always been deeply connected to it, in relationship with His creation from the start.

Prepare your heart - pray before you read "God, thank You for coming down to earth as a baby, so that we could know you in a fuller and deeper way. Help us, as we prepare our hearts for Christmas, to prepare our hearts for You to live in us and through us. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Read: John 1:1-18

- **1.**ICEBREAKER: If someone wrote a biography of your life, what would the first sentence be?
- 2. Compare Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1. What do you think John is trying to tell us by their similarity?
- **3.** John 1:5 says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Where do you see darkness in the world today?
- 4. How did God's light shine through the darkness at Christmas?
- 5. What are some ways God's light still shines through the darkness today?
- **6.** How can you let your light shine so that others may see your good works and glorify God?

PRAY together, asking God to let His light shine around us, in us, and through us.

Weekly Challenge

This week, share the joy of Jesus with someone!

Character Trait - Joy: a deep gladness rooted in the Good News of Jesus

What is standing out to you from today's text? What can you take with you?						