

FAITH IN THE MESSIAH

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Faith in Christ is the only means of salvation and relationship with God.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Romans 5; Hebrews 11; James 2

+ **SETTING:**

True discipleship in action involves obedience to Jesus Christ, confession of our sinfulness, and a desire to follow Jesus, leaving all else behind. Simon and the other disciples did just that. They demonstrated true faith in the person of Jesus. We are still on the topic of faith, but now we move to some of the letters of Jesus's disciples to learn more about what faith truly is as taught to the early church.

DAY 1

READ:

Romans 5:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 5:1

NOTES

There are many who thrive on physical order and cleanliness. If their house, yard, or office is in disarray, they find it hard to function. They may be out at work, running errands, or at a birthday party with friends, but all they can think about is how they need to calm the chaos. Others find themselves distressed when there is disorder when it comes to people. Perhaps they recently had an argument with a friend or family member. Maybe they find themselves in the middle of a relational storm in which they can't see a way out. This discord disturbs their souls terribly.

We all seek peace. Whether it be relationally, physically, or intellectually, there is something innate within us that knows that things are not as they should be. Though humankind tries to find peace through serene spaces, calm communication, and mystical meditation, peace ultimately and only comes from God. We can take a trip to calming coasts, but there are always storms on the horizon. For a time, we may enjoy healthy relationships and fruitful fellowship, but eventually, the selfishness of our hearts will come to crash the party. There is no amount of soul-searching that can save us from distress. Only God can provide a permeating peace.

When we admit our need for a Savior, confess our sins to God, and make Him Lord of our lives, He replaces our sin-stained, offending hearts of stone with righteous hearts of flesh. It is through this grace we can find peace. Then as we live out our time on earth and await our forever home in ultimate serenity, the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

How can you better rely on the peace of God amidst chaotic surroundings, relational discord, and internal turmoil?

DAY 2

READ:

Romans 8:1-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 8:12-17

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“A Christian who walks by faith accepts all circumstances from God. He thanks God when everything goes good, when everything goes bad, and for the ‘blues’ somewhere in-between. He thanks God whether he feels like it or not.”¹

—Erwin W. Lutzer

Etiquette varies from each region, culture, and time. In the Deep South, you’ll find rules about what women are to wear and when, how children are to address their elders, and the right amount of grip in a man’s handshake. Head west, and that which is a social blunder in Alabama, a Californian will not notice. Showing up on time (or a bit early) is a great American habit. But if you show up to church in Haiti, the start time is more of a suggestion—be prepared to wait hours before everyone gets there.

In many Asian cultures, it is expected to refuse a gift several times before accepting it with both palms turned upward. Whether it is a thank-you note with the item specifically named, waiting later to open the goodies (or not), as well as the reciprocation of giving later on, most hold to certain expectations around both the offering of and receiving gifts.

As Christians, we have received the greatest gift of all, and there is a biblical expectation of action to be taken in response to that bestowal of salvation. God’s grace accepted permanently changes a soul. Thus, we ought to show off our salvation, and according to the new life and identity God has granted us, we are obligated to. This is not to say that God is expecting us to pay Him back. (We never could!) But it does imply that there is a right response to the One to whom we owe everything: to put to death the deeds of the body, to be led by the Spirit of God and not by the spirit of slavery to sin, to name a few. In short, we say, “Thank you,” to Christ with obedient worship.

What can you do to say, “Thank you,” to God today?

DAY 3

READ:

Hebrews 11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 11:1-6

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #68:

FAITH

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Most of us have probably encountered a friend or acquaintance with the tendency to exaggerate. It could be the amount of weight he can benchpress, the elite company she keeps, the vacation home he supposedly owns in Mexico, or the story of a day she spent with a superstar. If it were only one epic tale, the benefit of the doubt would be more easily applied. But when each saga has an even more fabulous sequel, it takes a gigantic leap of faith for the listener to believe all of them. Over time, the ridiculousness of each claim casts more and more doubt on the validity of the stories. This also leads to doubting anything the person says, since his or her word cannot be trusted.

In the Word of God, with each story of God's faithfulness, we have the opposite effect. The Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11) in particular provides tale after tale of God's people drawing near and depending on the trustworthiness of God. Through each story, we get a clearer portrait of what faith in God looks like and how God blesses those who exhibit faith with His presence and provision. Hope rises through each account of an individual who chose to trust in God's way instead of their own. Some stories ended in great rejoicing. Others die gruesome deaths. All were commended for their faith, regardless of the outcome they experienced on earth as a result of their obedience. They understood that "God had provided something better" (Hebrews 11:40) for each of us who place our faith in God.

What are some other stories of faith from Scripture we can meditate on that point to the reality of God's trustworthiness?

DAY 4

READ:

Jeremiah 17:5-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Jeremiah 17:5-8

NOTES

Decades ago, after a hard, deep freeze in central Florida, many farmers of orange groves lost much of their crops and had to close up shop. There are numerous towns that have taken over those old orange groves, but today a few trees remain scattered throughout. Homeowners have planted other citrus trees alongside the existing orange trees in hopes of obtaining their own small crop from the Florida sunshine. Most of these citrus trees look identical. Their leaves, branches, and general shape are the same. It's not until they produce fruit that one can tell if the topiary is a lemon, orange, or grapefruit tree. If the trees are unhealthy, they don't put out fruit, which makes it difficult to know what type of tree it is. But the thriving citrus tree will put out fragrant blooms in the spring, followed by the fruit it was destined to produce. Only then can one identify the tree.

We too can be identified by our fruit. Scripture often uses trees as a symbol of the life of God's people. The thriving, healthy Christian will be a resilient, fruit-bearing soul—no matter the season she finds herself in. This fruit is proof of a life saved by Jesus. Worship-fueled works bring an assurance of salvation, both to the Christian and the watching world around her. The actions that can only be explained by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us are the evidence of our true identity as children of God. Just as a citrus tree without fruit simply takes up space, so faith apart from works is useless. True faith in Jesus always leads to fruit. James so rightly stated that just as how the body without the spirit is dead, so is faith without works (James 2:26).

What are some examples of faith-fueled fruit that can only be explained by the work of God in your life?

DAY 5

READ:

James 2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

James 2:5-14

NOTES

Many a teacher, parent, and grandparent can identify with the reality that some kids are fantastic at hearing but not listening. Though the eardrum receives the vibrations of sound, amplifies them, and sends them on to the nervous system to process the hearing, there are times when actual listening does not occur. Children are not the only ones who present this lack of listening. Adults often tune out in noisy situations. Amidst a cacophony of a family with young children, a mother may hear many words while she cooks dinner and her thoughts are elsewhere, until she is brought back by the “Mom, Mom, Mom, MOMMY!” of her children. Even in a one-on-one conversation, we’ve each found the attention of our minds drifting to other subjects than that which we were hearing.

Hearing is passive. It is a physiological phenomenon that happens automatically, without thought. Listening, however, is intentional. The same is true for our spiritual ears. How many sermons have we heard of which we could not retell one detail about over Sunday lunch? How many verses have we read that we’ve simply skimmed over so we can check off a box on a reading plan? God is speaking. If we are not hearing His voice, it isn’t because He’s not loud enough—it is because we are not listening. Earlier in his letter, James made this connection: “be doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22). A faith that listens is a faith that responds. A mere claim of faith proves nothing. A simple hearing of the gospel changes nothing. It is spiritual listening that leads to a faith that works.

How can you go beyond mere hearing and better listen to the Word of God this week?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"We can picture faith as a connection between the work of the Holy Spirit and the power at work in our new nature. Faith is a wire that conducts a current called grace that flows from the Spirit so that the new nature receives power."²

—Tony Evans

POINT 1: Faith in Christ changes a person's standing before God (Rom. 5:1-2).

KEY DOCTRINE #68: FAITH

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in _____ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and _____ of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as _____ and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

? What are some signs we might be leaning toward a works-based salvation instead of justification by faith?

Because of Jesus and the grace we are given, we have a _____ standing before God, and we rejoice looking forward to the day when God's glory is Christ is _____ for all to see.

? How can our lives reflect the joy we have in the hope of the glory of God?

POINT 2: Faith in Christ changes a person's relationship with God (Heb. 11:1-6).

The Bible gives us many examples of _____ people with whom God was pleased to be in relationship because of their _____ .

? Why might we try to prove ourselves to God by means other than faith?

Faith involves believing that God is _____ that He says He is—sovereign, powerful, good, and faithful. Without faith in this God, it is impossible to _____ Him.

POINT 3: Faith in Christ changes a person's actions for God (Jas. 2:14-26).

Saving faith is displayed through active _____ and _____ done for the Lord.



How is saving faith different from the belief the demons have in God?

Those who have proven faithful in the past were those who trusted in the _____ and _____ of God and acted in response to that trust.

MY RESPONSE

Because God has provided salvation from sin through our faith in Christ, we seek to live out that faith, showing the watching world the difference the gospel makes.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you can continue to learn more about God as an act of faith rather than simply gathering facts?
- **HEART:** What are some practices you can add to your time with God that will help you respond in faith and worship?
- **HANDS:** What specific faith-filled works are you being called to do this week by God as acts of worship and evangelism?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Faith gives us peace with God, not the law. For it reconciles us to God by taking away those sins which had made us God’s enemies. And because the Lord Jesus is the minister of this grace, it is through him that we have peace with God. Faith is greater than the law because the law is our work, whereas faith belongs to God.”³

—Ambrosiaster (c. 4th century)

PURPOSE MATTERS

by Daniel Davis

Knowing the purpose of something makes a big difference in the way we view and interact with that thing. This is certainly true of objects as a whole—it would be foolish to rent a motorcycle for the purpose of moving all your possessions from one home to another, just as it would be foolish to rent a moving truck for the purpose of going on a joyride.

Purpose becomes even more important as you examine the parts of a whole. Doctors and surgeons must know the reason for the individual parts of the human body in order to treat and heal a patient without causing further damage. Auto mechanics without an understanding of the purpose of parts risk more extensive, and expensive, repairs in the course of a simple tune-up.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE?

The Bible as a whole has one grand storyline and purpose—to reveal the person and work of God to the people He has created for their joy and His glory. Without this understanding, we are prone to mistake its meaning and misuse its words.

Yet the Bible is not just a whole but also the sum of its parts—66 books of the Bible, each with its own purpose to support the one grand purpose intended by the Author who inspired every word to tell His story.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPELS?

Perhaps the best examples of unique purposes for books of the Bible are the Gospels. These books focus on the same Person and period of history yet with different emphases. The Gospel writers sought to communicate the truth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, but they did so in unique ways because of different audiences and their own unique style, experiences, and theological intents.

- Matthew wrote to display for Jewish Christians the redemption God brought about through Jesus as the promised Messiah of God (see Matthew 1:1-17, which provides a genealogy to connect Jesus with the pinnacles of Jewish history in King David and Father Abraham).

The words of Scripture are filled with meaning and purpose to reveal God, and especially Jesus, for our joy and His glory.

- Mark wrote to display for Gentile Christians the redemption God brought about through Jesus as the perfect Servant of the Lord (see Mark 7:3-4, in which Mark explained a Jewish custom for the understanding of a Gentile audience).
- Luke wrote to Theophilus, a Gentile Christian likely of high social standing, to provide an orderly account of the beginnings of Christianity so the reader would have reliable information about Jesus Christ (see Luke 1:1-4).
- John wrote for both Jews and Gentiles to provide an account of Jesus's life and the signs He performed so people would believe in Him as the Messiah, the Son of God, and experience eternal life (see John 20:30-31).

The varied purposes of the biblical authors and the singular purpose of the Author of the Bible inform how we read and understand their message. These aren't random verses and chapters thrown together; these aren't random books compiled on a whim. This is a story carefully crafted by God through history,

through historical accounts, and through prophetic and poetic writings. The words of Scripture are filled with meaning and purpose that the God of all the universe might be revealed and that we might know Him as He has revealed Himself ultimately in these last days through His Son, who is Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3).

HOW CAN WE DISCERN THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE?

In addition to reading and studying the Scriptures on our own and in community with the church, here are some resources that can aid in understanding the uniqueness of each biblical book and how it contributes to the Bible's story as a whole and points to Jesus Christ:

- A study Bible that provides brief introductions about the time period, context, audience, and themes for each book of the Bible;
- Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding the Bible: A Book-by-Book Overview, by Kendell H. Easley;
- A Bible dictionary, such as Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary;
- An introduction to the Bible, Old Testament, or New Testament;
- A theology of the Bible, Old Testament, or New Testament;
- Bible book volumes from the Christ-Centered Exposition commentary series.

Reading the Bible with its purpose in mind helps us to discover ours.

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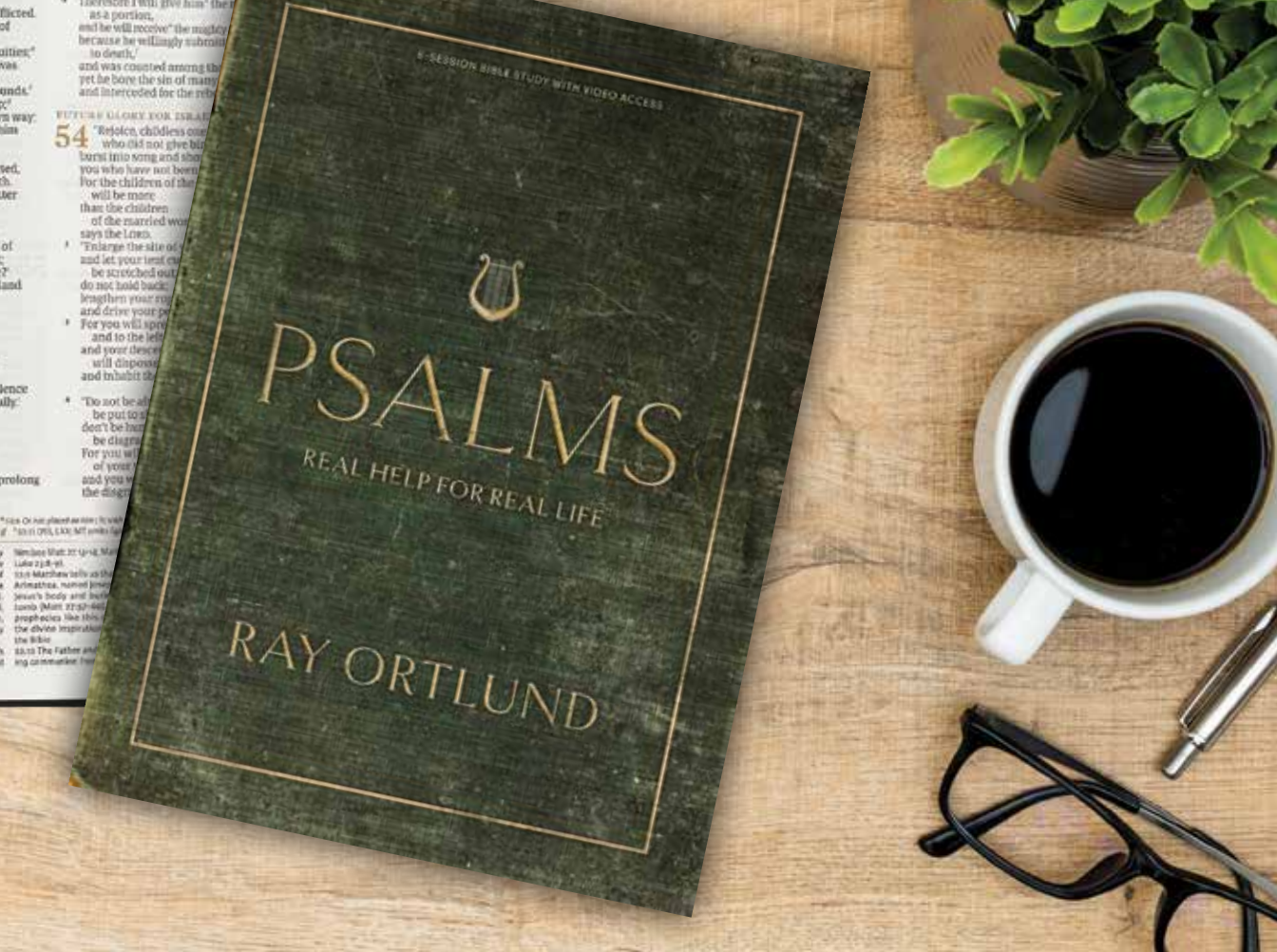
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