

FAITH · COURAGE · HOPE · TRANSFORMATION · WORSHIP · INCLUSION · VISION



SERIES DEVOTIONAL

Hope
House

MY HOUSE

Scripture is a collection of stories about different, and sometimes, rather surprising people – people just like us who, in some way or another, encountered the living God. They were ordinary people, struggling with the same realities of daily life as we do today, but what shaped and made their stories significant was that they became part of the larger story of what God was doing in the world, and because of that, they left a legacy – a legacy that spans the centuries and today, still speaks of the timeless truths of the Kingdom of God.

The *My House* Series will examine different “houses” in Scripture and the different legacies that certain individuals left, with the view to challenge us to consider what kind of legacy we are leaving. What will the story of your house be? What kind of legacy will you leave – and can we leave together – in our world that tells the story of God and changes the world?

With hope & expectation,
Sam, Deline & Crae
The Hope House Team

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”
– Joshua 24:15

Week 1

**RAHAB'S HOUSE:
A LEGACY OF FAITH**

Unlikely faith

Rahab is a really interesting character because, quite frankly, we don't expect to find her in the story of God. She was a pagan resident of a wicked city and she had more than a slightly checked history. She was a prostitute, or perhaps a brothel manager, but either way, it is rather surprising that she appears in the pages of Scripture. Her story is one of great and unlikely faith that is born out of a desperate situation. We meet her when her city is under threat from the invading Israelites and she has the courage to hide and assist the spies they sent to scout out Jericho. She makes this incredible declaration, considering her lack of exposure to the things of God or knowledge about Him: *"I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below (Joshua 2:9-11)."*

It is always interesting to me that Rahab, who never witnessed a miracle of God first-hand or experienced His faithfulness – and in fact, was positioned as His people's enemy – could see and acknowledge God's sovereignty and power, when the Israelites, who had been at the parting of the Red Sea and walked through its waters, who had followed God's pillar of fire and cloud in the desert and eaten His manna day after day, kept wavering and failing to trust God or acknowledge His greatness. This woman had incredible faith. She threw herself at the mercy of a God she barely knew because something in her resonated with Him and realised that He was really God.

Rahab's courageous and unlikely faith saved not just her, but her whole family. She took a leap and decided to trust God rather than earthly powers, big city walls or self-made plans.

Rahab's story and legacy of faith challenge us to consider whether we will take the leap and really trust God. So often, we, like the Israelites, have seen many of God's miracles and experienced His faithfulness, and yet we still struggle to have faith. We are reminded that the just live by faith (Galatians 3:11) and that we, who follow Jesus, walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), because without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” – Hebrews 11:6

For Further Reading / Study

Joshua 2:1-24

Hebrews 11:1-6

Tuesday

A scarlet thread

In order to save herself and her family when Jericho was attacked, Rahab hung a scarlet cord in her window so that she could be identified as the one who had assisted the spies and had been granted mercy.

That scarlet cord is an image of the blood of Christ who would ultimately be the sign of deliverance for all people. That day in Jericho, the scarlet cord

represented redemption for Rahab's house, and thousands of years later at Calvary, the scarlet blood of Christ bought the redemption from destruction for all the houses of humanity.

Rahab's story reminds us that it is because of grace that we can have faith in a faithful God, Who is at work reconciling the world to Himself. It is because of the blood of Christ, shed for us, that we can trust in God's goodness and faithfulness... because He died for us before we had chosen Him.

“The scarlet cord is a symbol that’s often used when speaking of how Christ is hidden in the Old Testament, woven into the familiar stories, hinted at in symbols and types and shadows. The whole Bible, both Old and New Testaments together, speaks of Christ. From the first promise of a coming Messiah in Genesis 3:16 to the Passover Lamb and the Manna from heaven, and the rock smitten to provide water for the people of Israel, to the bronze serpent on the pole, to the sign of Jonah in the depths for three days; He is there, until he appears in the New Testament in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. He is the Scarlet Cord that saves those who believe what He says...” – Pia Thompson¹

For Further Reading / Study

Romans 5:6-21

1 John 1:7

Living faith

Rahab stands out in Scripture as a figure of faith in the midst of a faithless environment, but the faithless are not just those in the city of Jericho. Her faith stands in contrast to the wavering faith of the Israelites. They had just spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness because they had failed to believe God, and here as they finally cross over the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land, they find someone with such great faith that she has simply heard of all the things God has done for His people and yet, is completely convinced that He is real. The people of Israel were in the midst of God's miracles – the parting of the Red Sea, the escape from Egypt, God's faithfulness in the desert – and yet, they failed to believe God when they first came to the Promised Land. Rahab had heard the stories about God and her heart believed.

Sometimes, it is really hard to have faith like Rahab. No matter how many times we've seen God's hand at work in our lives, it is still difficult to believe Him for the next thing, in the next difficult circumstance, for the next promise. But Jesus gives us the incredible promise that if we have just a tiny measure of faith, great things will still be possible. Even the disciples who walked and talked with Jesus every day for three years and saw Him perform miracles, struggled with issues of faith, and Jesus said to them: *"Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you"* (Matthew 17:20)

This verse is very helpfully extrapolated in the *Amplified* Translation of the Bible. Why does a mustard seed kind of faith have significance? Mustard seeds are really small, but the key thing about them is that they contain the potential for great growth. The Amplified translation reads:

“...for I assure you and most solemnly say to you, if you have [living] faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and [if it is God’s will] it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20, AMP).

“I’m not where I need to be, but thank God, I’m not where I used to be.”
– Joyce Meyer

When it comes to faith, we’re all on a journey and what matters is not necessarily how big your faith is right now, but that it is a growing faith that will continue to step outside your comfort zones to follow God where He leads.

For Further Reading / Study

Matthew 17:14-21

Matthew 21:18-22

James 1:1-12

Thursday

Active faith

Rahab’s faith was put to the test right off the bat. Here she was, hiding enemy spies on her ceiling, lying to the king’s delegation about what she had seen and helping the spies escape to safety, all before she really had a chance to think about what was happening or what it meant. She committed treason and risked her life because she believed that God was real.

The author of James reminds us that it is not just faith that saved Rahab, but it is faith expressed in action that won the day (James 2:25). He argues throughout James chapter 2 that faith without works to back it up is empty,

and he uses Rahab as an example of someone whose faith was made concrete because of what she *did* and was willing to lay on the line. Her legacy of faith is not just of a faith that believes, but a faith that acts.

“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” - James 2:17

We are not saved by our works because salvation comes by grace alone and not because of anything we can do (Ephesians 2:9), but James asks the important question: What good is it really if we have faith but no deeds? If our faith is not manifested in practical ways in our lives, is it real? If our trust in God does not lead us to live any differently, do we really trust Him?

Rahab’s legacy is one that challenges us to consider how our faith is being worked out in our day to day lives and what we are willing to risk because of it.

For Further Reading / Study

James 2:14-26

Friday

A lineage of faith

Rahab has the distinguished honour of being mentioned as one of the heroes of faith in the “hall of faith” in Hebrews 11. The author says of her: *“By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient” (Hebrews 11:31).*

This list of faith heroes is populated by interesting and unlikely people, and Rahab is no exception. It is strange that a former Gentile prostitute would make it onto this list, but Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that faith pleases God

and although Rahab didn't have any of the other right credentials, she had faith. What is almost more amazing than her inclusion in Hebrews 11 is that God chose to include her in the lineage of Jesus. Rahab married an Israelite named Salmon and bore a son named Boaz, who married Ruth, who had Jesse, who was the father of King David.

Throughout Scripture we see the pattern of God choosing to use unlikely and unqualified people. He does not choose those the world would choose and He does not disqualify people with questionable backgrounds or baggage from His service. Rahab reminds us that *anyone* can be used by God if they will simply believe and open themselves up to Him.

God does not disqualify people with questionable backgrounds or baggage from His service.

“Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was abused, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was codependent, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair and all kinds of family problems, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was reluctant, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health and Timothy was timid. That is quite a variety of misfits, but God used each of them in His service. He will use you, too, if you stop making excuses.” – Rick Warrenⁱⁱ

For Further Reading / Study

Matthew 1:5-16

Hebrews 11

Help my unbelief...

One of the people in Scripture who give me great hope and encouragement is the unnamed father we read about in Mark 9 (17-29) who seeks out healing for his son. He comes to the disciples, but they cannot heal the boy and eventually the man pleads with Jesus for mercy and assistance. "If you can do anything", he cries, "take pity on us and help us." This statement doesn't exactly ooze faith, does it? "If you can do anything, please would you?" That's not exactly a declaration of trust.

Jesus replied, *"If you can?... Everything is possible for the one who believes."* The question was not of God's ability, but of the man's faith... as it so often is in our own lives. God is able, but do we trust?

I love the man's response to Jesus. It is so honest, raw and human. He says, *"I believe; help my unbelief."* He didn't profess to have great faith, but rather, just enough to cling to hope that Jesus would help him. What is beautiful about the story, is that Jesus does. He does help his unbelief by performing a miracle, by healing his child and demonstrating His power.

"I believe; help my unbelief." – Mark 9:24

Sometimes when we read the Scriptures and reflect on the stories of heroes of faith like Rahab, Joshua, Abraham and many others, we feel like they had a supernatural kind of faith that just isn't possible for us. God used the most ordinary and unlikely people to ensure that we would know that the life of faith is possible for all, but even so, this man with fragile faith sends a crystal clear message that even those whose unbelief sometimes wins out and those who hold faith and doubt closely together, find mercy in Christ. Our faithful God helps us, even with our faithlessness.

For Further Reading / Study

Mark 9:14-29

Hebrews 12:1-3

2 Timothy 2:10-13

Questions for personal reflection or group discussion

1. What does Rahab's story teach you about God and faith?
2. How much faith do you feel like you have at present?
3. How do you think you can ensure that you have a *living* faith – i.e. a faith that is alive and has the continued potential for growth? (See Matthew 17:20)
4. How do you think you can ensure that you have an *active* faith that is manifested in practical ways in your life? (See James 2)
5. Why do you think it's significant that Rahab is included in the lineage of Jesus?

Week 2

JOSHUA'S HOUSE: A LEGACY OF COURAGE

The courage to believe

In the midst of a story of great unfaithfulness, unbelief and fear stand two lonely figures with a different heart. Joshua and Caleb stood apart from the crowd as the Israelites stood on the edge of the Promised Land. Twelve spies were sent in to survey the land God had given them, but ten of them came back with a bad report. The land was good, just as God had promised, but it was filled with giants and walled cities that were much too strong for the Israelites to face. The other two spies, Joshua and Caleb, tore their clothes and mourned when they heard this report. They said, *“The land we passed through is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid”* (Numbers 14:7-9).

Joshua and Caleb saw beyond the circumstances around them – the giants and the walls – because they believed in the promises of God. Their reality was based on God’s promises and power rather than on their actual circumstances. They knew that success or failure is determined, not by our own ability, but by God’s ability and favour. These two men had a spirit of courage, but their opinions were not popular. When they stood up to the other spies the community turned on them suddenly and violently, threatening to stone them (Numbers 6:10).

Their reality was based on God’s promises and power, rather than on their actual circumstances.

We have to decide for ourselves whether we, like Joshua and Caleb, will have the courage to believe in God’s promises and ability in the midst of

difficult circumstances. Will our reality be defined by our fear and our current situation, or will it be defined by the promises of God and the unlimited ability of the One who calls us? We also have to stand with courage in the face of opposition, knowing that faith may not always be the popular way. In fact, faith that flies in the face of “logic” is often treated with contempt and disdain.

Out of that entire unbelieving generation, only Joshua and Caleb were permitted to enter the Promised Land. Only they had the courage to believe and therefore, only they received the promise (Numbers 6:30).

For Further Reading / Study

Numbers 13-14

Tuesday

The courage go

It is interesting to note God’s commissioning when He called Joshua. Moses died, leaving Joshua with the heavy mantle of leadership of a desert-weary, anxious nation, ready to enter the Promised Land, but with a nasty propensity for complaining and changing their minds. God commissioned Joshua with these words:

“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night,

so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:6-9).

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid.” Joshua 1:9

Do you notice how many times God tells Joshua to be courageous? His calling was all about courage, and it was because He was willing to go – to step into the unknown with God – that he ultimately lived a life and left a legacy of courage. He had seen first-hand the devastating consequences of living in fear rather than trusting in God’s promises. He and Caleb had wandered through the wilderness, waiting, for forty years to enter into the promise they had within their grasp before. Joshua’s leadership of Israel marks the beginning of a new season – a fresh start and a new opportunity to step forward in courage. It was a chance to move boldly forward instead of going around in circles again, and Joshua grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

You and I are also commissioned to be courageous enough to move forward to with God; to step out of the places where we are suck and trapped, and to go boldly where He leads and enter into His promises. There will be giants, rivers, walls and enemies in our way, but if we, like Joshua will have the courage to go, trusting in God, and holding fast to His Word, we too can leave a legacy of courage in world.

For Further Reading / Study

Joshua 1

Isaiah 35:1-4

Hebrews 4

Ephesians 6:10-24

The courage to obey

You've just crossed into enemy territory (with women, children, livestock and a lot of baggage – both physical and spiritual / emotional), and before you stands the daunting walled fortress city of Jericho. What do you do next? How do you approach your advance? I am no military strategist, but one thing I can tell you for certain, is that I would *not* advise incapacitating all your fighting men right about then... but that is exactly what Joshua did.

Following God's instructions, Joshua and the people of Israel crossed the Jordan River (that parted for them as a sign of God's faithfulness and power) and finally entered the Promised Land. They honoured God, making memorial altars and set up camp at a place called Gilgal. Here, it was time to celebrate the Passover and God commanded Joshua to do something important, and yet, very risky from a military perspective. He told Joshua to circumcise all the men. This had been the sign of God's covenant with his people for hundreds of years, but it was not put into practice in the desert. So, Joshua obeyed God and circumcised all the men, basically incapacitating his army for a little while. It was a brave thing to do – to obey God and do what was spiritually important, rather than being "safe" from a physical worldly perspective. The place where all this happened was called "Gilgal" which means "*to roll / rolling*" which is significant because God told Joshua that here, in this place, He had "rolled the reproach of Egypt away from them." (Joshua 5:9). It was a new chapter in the story of the nation of Israel. They no longer had the mantle of slavery on them but were renewed people of the covenant of God.

The story continues with the taking of Jericho. Again, God does not give Joshua a military strategy anyone would've expected. God's solution for the walled city is for the people of Israel to walk around it, without saying anything, for 6 days. I always wonder what the soldiers and the people thought about Joshua's crazy tactics. An angel appeared and explained

them to him, but how did he manage to convince everyone else it was a good idea. The plan makes no earthly sense and it was probably pretty humiliating and degrading for the army to do nothing but march silently around the city – not once, but every day for six days. God was teaching them the all-important lesson yet again that obedience trumps self-effort every time, even and perhaps especially, when it doesn't make any sense.

Finally, on the seventh day, the Israelites were instructed to march around the city seven times and finally, to shout and blow their trumpets and when they did, the walls came crashing down and the fortress city was at their mercy.

Joshua and the Israelites won an unexpected and unlikely victory that day because they had the courage to obey and to do things God's way instead of trying to take things into their own hands. Sometimes we may feel like obeying God, in big or small things, is illogical, frightening, or downright irresponsible, but there is no safety in our own efforts. Having the courage to obey God will always result in victory.

Having the courage to obey God will always result in victory.

For Further Reading / Study

Joshua 3-6

1 Samuel 15:22

Exodus 19:5

John 14:15-21

The courage to cry out

In Joshua 10 we read about perhaps one of the boldest prayers ever prayed. Joshua had graduated from obedient courage to audacious courage! The Israelite army was engaged in a battle against the Amorites and God had been fighting for His people, hurling hailstones from the heavens that killed more soldiers than the Israelite army, but night was falling and Joshua knew that they needed the sunlight in the unfamiliar terrain in order to secure their victory. He needed the sun to stand still and so, in an incredible moment in history, a courageous heart that knew what God could do and knew that God was for His people, simply asked... and God obliged. The sun stood still until Israel had won the battle.

“I despaired at the thought that my life might slip by without seeing God show himself mightily on our behalf.” – Jim Cymbala

I see in Joshua a courageous heart I strive, with everything in me, to be able to emulate. What courage and faith he had... audacious faith that dared to ask, and therefore, received! It is so easy for us to fall into a routine, mundane kind of

Christianity that forgets the power of God and the possibilities that exist with Him. It is easy to forget, as Steven Furtickⁱⁱⁱ puts it, “that we’re praying to a God whose capabilities always exceeds our audacity.” So are you willing to pray big, audacious, sun-stand-still kind of prayers? Will you have the courage, in the midst of your battle, to cry out to God, believing Him for the impossible because He is good, and faithful and BIG?

“If you’re not daring to believe God for the impossible, you’re sleeping through some of the best parts of your Christian life. And further still: if the size of your vision for your life isn’t intimidating to you, there’s a good chance it’s insulting to God.” – Steven Furtick

For Further Reading / Study

Joshua 10:1-15

Luke 11:9-13

Friday

The courage to carry on

The other faithful spy in the story deserves another mention. We read earlier in the week about Joshua and Caleb and how they had a different spirit than the other ten spies who were afraid to enter into the Promised Land and trust that God would go before them. Caleb and Joshua were therefore the only two men of that generation that got to enter the Promised Land. Caleb appears again in the story, after great battles have been fought and the land had been settled, in Joshua 14 (6-15), we read that Caleb comes to Joshua with a request as the land is being divided. At this point, Caleb is 85 years old and we wouldn't blame him if, after all those years roaming in the desert and then fighting battle after battle to finally claim the land, he just wanted to sit in the sun on his well-deserved spot of earth and live peacefully off its bounty. But that is not what Caleb wants. We read in Joshua 14:10-12 that he says this:

"I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I am just as vigorous to go out to the battle now as I was then. Now give me the hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."

Caleb was ready to take the land according to God's promise 45 years before and he was ready to take it then. He had clung to that promise throughout his life and *nothing* was going to stand in his way of seeing it fulfilled. There

were still fortified cities. There were still giants (the Anakites were scarily large individuals), but Caleb had a dream in his heart from God that was not going to die. He had the courage to carry on, after all those years, after all the battles, no matter what.

I sometimes wonder how many dreams we don't see realised because we give up before we even really get going. Throughout Scripture, God gave people dreams that did not materialise overnight. Many of them waited years, or even decades, to see God's promises fulfilled. Caleb was no exception. 45 years later he was still holding on, still ready to fight for all God had promised him.

What dream has God given you? What promise are you clinging to for all you're worth? Will you have the courage to carry on?

Will you have the courage to carry on?

For Further Reading / Study

Joshua 14:6-15

Luke 11:5-8

Hebrews 10:34-39

Romans 5:1-5

Saturday

The courage decide

The story of Joshua's life turned out to be a chronicle of courageous feats of faith, but perhaps one of the most important moments that defined him and his legacy was not a sun-stand-still kind of moment. It was not a miracle or an amazing victory. It was not an outwardly significant event, but rather, a quiet inward decision. Sometimes the most courageous things we do are not performing outward actions, but making inward decisions... drawing a

line in the sand and deciding what kind of lives we will live and what kind of people we will be. These are the moments that define who we really are and determine the course of our destinies.

Sometimes the most courageous things we do are not performing outward actions, but making inward decisions..."

At the end of Joshua's life, after many feats of faithfulness and courage, we see that he makes a clear stand and reveals the secret of his courageous heart. He summoned the people together and reminded them of God's faithfulness and the miracles He had performed on their behalf. He knew that they had the propensity to waver and doubt and he had seen them drifting into a quiet kind of apathy, settling for some of the Promised Land instead of fighting for all God wanted to give them, and so, he states things in no uncertain terms:

"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the River Euphrates and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the LORD does not seem desirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:14-15).

This is a statement that defined Joshua's life and his legacy. There are many choices we all have make and the most significant one is which God we will serve. There are many vying for our love and attention... the gods of status, power, wealth, materialism, pride, acceptance... but we must decide who we will serve, and that will define our legacies too.

The fact that Joshua stated that he and his house would serve God was quite a statement considering he was already an old man. He must've felt that he had instilled in his family and his children the right principles and taught them the secret of having courageous, determined hearts that sought God above all else. Indeed, we read in Joshua 24:31 that Israel served God

faithfully throughout his lifetime and after his death, in the lifetimes of the elders who had experienced all God had done for Israel.

Will you, have the courage, like Joshua did, to make a decision for God that will define your life and your legacy?

For Further Reading / Study

Joshua 23-24

Questions for personal reflection or group discussion

1. What stands out for your most about Joshua's life and story?
2. How courageous do you think your faith is at present? Why?
3. Is there something God is asking you do that requires obedience that doesn't necessarily make sense? How do you think you can cultivate a heart in your life that is obedient, even when this requires great courage?
4. How do you think Joshua got to a place of being courageous enough to ask God to make the sun stand still?
5. Read Joshua 14:6-15. What does Caleb's story, and his tenacity reveal to you about faith and about the kind of faith you should cultivate?
6. How does Joshua's decision – "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD..." translate for you and your family today? What does it look like for you to serve the Lord?

Week 3

DAVID'S HOUSE: A LEGACY OF HOPE

Hope in being chosen

The account of David's anointing is one of the more interesting passages in Scripture. I always wonder, when the prophet Samuel asked Jesse to bring his sons because one of them had been chosen as the new king of Israel, whether he didn't bring David along because he kind of forgot about him (maybe it's possible when you have 8 sons to miscount or forget about one?), or whether the thought never entered his mind that David could possibly be the one God had chosen. Either way, Samuel sees the other 7 sons and thinks one or two of them look like kingly material, but God says to him, *"Do not look at his face, nor his height, because I have refused him. For I do not see as man sees. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart"* (1 Samuel 6:17).

Finally, there's that awkward moment when the prophet has to ask Jesse if he doesn't perhaps have another son somewhere and Jesse has to send for David who is in the fields with his sheep. He finally arrives and God says to Samuel, "Yes, this is the one," and David is anointed.

When we consider David's beginnings, and his life, it is not immediately clear why God would choose David as the king of His people, nor why He would make him the central point of Israelite history and send the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, in his line. Why would this boy, who was so insignificant that he was rejected or forgotten by his own family, be used by God in such a powerful way?

We can ask the same question of our own lives. Why would God use me? Why should my story and my legacy matter? As with David, the answer does not lie in our achievements, status or position, but within our hearts. God is

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro across the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is true to Him.” – 2 Chronicles 16:9

longing to use those whose hearts are turned towards Him. In fact, Scripture tells us that His eyes scour the earth, looking for the righteous that He may reveal His power to them and His love for Him. The real reason God chooses to use any of us, is grace and the love of a Father that delights in His children, but it is the condition of our hearts that will determine whether or not we are open to His call.

For Further Reading / Study

1 Samuel 16:1-23

John 15:14-21

Tuesday

Eternal songs

One of David’s most profound and lasting legacies is that of the Psalms he wrote. Millennia later, they are still used in worship services and by individuals as they seek God. David’s poems and songs still stir people’s hearts and help us connect with God. They help us to catch a glimpse of David’s heart – a heart that pleased God – and to be encouraged and challenged to develop a heart like that. His Psalms speak of God’s mercy, goodness and power. They celebrate the wonder of Who God is, but are also honest as David struggled, like we all do, with the ups and downs of life,

with the raw emotions of pain, rejection, fear and anger, and with the struggles of holding onto faith when things weren't going his way.

He knew that whatever happened, his certainty could only be found in God.

It is clear, throughout David's Psalms, that he understood the very important truth that his life, his certainty and his hope were not found in the fickle circumstances of life, despite his important position and impressive calling. He knew that whatever happened, his certainty could only be found

in God, the only safe refuge and eternal Rock. He had a sure hope that was rooted in His God – and you can too.

*“Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from Him. Truly He is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I shall never be shaken.” –
Psalm 62:1-2*

For Further Reading / Study

Psalm 16

Psalm 18

Psalm 27

Psalm 63

Wednesday

Hope in patient struggle

David's hope in God was evident in the good times and the bad. Even in the darkest days of His life, David held to the certainty and eternal truth of God's love and faithfulness. His journey was not always an easy one. He was anointed by Samuel as the new king of Israel, but King Saul was not going to relinquish the kingdom without a fight. David spent many years on the run, hiding out and fleeing for his life as Saul hunted him down, seeking to kill him. On more than one occasion he had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he

did not dare lay a hand on God's anointed. We see in him a kind of courage and hope that knew that his destiny was in God's hands and that God was faithful to His promises. He knew that taking things into his own

David knew that his destiny was in God's hands and that God was faithful to His promises.

hands would not improve matters and so, despite his uncertain circumstances and daily struggle, he didn't do what was easy, but what was right, waiting patiently on God and His timing.

Throughout David's life we see a theme of trusting and hoping in God, rather than trusting in his own ability and strength. In fact, it is interesting to note that David always enquired of God about which battles he should fight and how he should go about governing, until just before his sin with Bathsheba. As soon as self-reliance crept in, pride and selfishness followed suite. When he relied on God, his kingdom prospered and he was blessed, but when he trusted in himself and failed to seek God, it ended in disaster. In the end, despite his failings and lapses in judgement, David's ultimate legacy was one of holding onto God in the good times and the bad – coming back and repenting when he had failed, rejoicing in God when things were going well and persevering through trials and pain, trusting in God's faithfulness.

Paul reminds us, as he writes to the Romans, that it is in patient endurance that hope – an eternal hope that cannot disappoint – is found.

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” – Romans 5:3-5

For Further Reading / Study

1 Samuel 24:1-22

Saul tried to kill David

Psalm 40

Thursday

Hope in an undignified life

David was a very important person – the most respected and significant leader in Israel at the time and an icon in Jewish history – but we see a glimpse of his heart and his priorities in a story in which he is not behaving in a very important or dignified manner... in fact, quite the opposite. In 2 Samuel 6 we read about how the Israelites are bringing back the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. This incredibly sacred object had been taken as plunder in battle by the Philistines but the Israelites had managed to get it back and were returning it to its rightful place. We read that David wasn't just bringing back the Ark, he was bringing it back *in style*. There was a celebration of note with food and drinks and sacrifices. I can't imagine it was a very orderly day. They had to stop and offer sacrifices every six steps. This was not a parade for the impatient...

David was dressed in priestly clothing, but not in respectable king-like attire, and in all the celebration and joy about bringing back this really significant item and what this meant for him and for his nation, he danced – as the Scripture puts it – with all his might. Perhaps if the author had a little bit more artistic licence and wasn't talking about the king, he might have written, "danced like a crazy person..." Assuming David at least had some rhythm, which is possible because we know he was a good musician, he obviously still looked ridiculous because when he got home he was lambasted by his wife, Michal, for being an embarrassing spectacle and

making a fool of himself – and I guess the real problem for her – was that he also made a fool of her in the process. It was not fitting behaviour for a king to dance around like a lunatic without the proper thought about his position and responsibility. Michal really lets David have it, but his response is incredibly simple and yet profound: “I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this and I will be humiliated in my own eyes” (2 Samuel 6:21-22).

The lesson we learn from David here is one about priorities. He was committed to living a life that honoured God no matter how undignified it made Him. He would worship God freely and authentically with everything in Him, no matter how stupid it made Him look because God was His primary priority. He was much less concerned about what other people thought or about protecting his own image than about what God thought or what would bring delight and joy to God’s heart.

Many of us live our lives with incredibly skewed priorities because it doesn’t really matter at the end of the day what people think about us, but it deeply matters how we relate to God and whether or not we live authentically towards Him. When David said he’d become “more undignified than this”, he wasn’t

“... at the end of the day, it really doesn’t matter what people think about us, but it deeply matters how we relate to God and whether or not we live authentically towards Him.”

just talking about the way in which He would worship God at special occasions or worship gatherings. He was talking about the way He prioritised His life. That’s why I believe that in the book of Acts we read, that despite all the stuff David did wrong and messed up really badly later on, we are told that he was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). It’s because he had his priorities right – granted, not all the time – but the intention of his heart was that he put God first, and despite the fact that he was a king and had a country to lead and an image to uphold – his primary concern was not how people perceived him but rather, that He lived

authentically towards God and gave Him all the glory of which He was due. His legacy, despite all His failings, was one of hope in living an undignified life that wasn't about him or about others, but was all about God and His glory.

For Further Reading / Study

2 Samuel 6:-7

1 Corinthians 4:10-16

Friday

Hope in restoration

Despite all the good things about David and his heart that sought God, he made his fair share of mistakes – maybe more than his fair share. He didn't get it right all the time, but even in his failures, his legacy is one that speaks of the restoration and grace of God. To his credit, when David was confronted by his sin (sometimes it took him a while to get there, but when he eventually acknowledged it – see 2 Samuel 12) he took it seriously and earnestly mourned for the ways in which he had sinned against God and others. We see a poignant example of this in Psalm 51 after David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed. He understood that sometimes, the most profound offering we can bring to God is a broken spirit and a contrite heart when we have failed. It is the kind of offering God never turns away and in that, there is always hope. Grace brings hope alive.

David had failed miserably, but that was not the end of his story. His sin had terrible consequences, but God forgave him and showed him mercy. He still used him for great things and blessed him with favour. He still became a great, prosperous king and he is still remembered as a man after God's own

heart. He reminds us, that even in our worst failings, there is hope because God's grace doesn't give up on us or let us go.

Even in our worst failings there is hope because God's grace doesn't give up on us or let us go.

Reflect on Psalm 51 today and repent of any way in which you have disobeyed God or failed...

Psalm 51:

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

- ² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
- ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- ⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence

or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Saviour,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

¹⁸ May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

For Further Reading / Study

2 Samuel 12

Psalm 103

Saturday

The hope of an eternal promise

David's legacy is quite a paradoxical one. On the one hand, things didn't end up going very well. His children fought amongst themselves and tried to grab and divide up the Kingdom shedding much blood, including their own. The reign of Solomon was still a prosperous and peaceful time for Israel, but

after that, things fell spectacularly apart. Partly, it was the consequence of David's sin. The prophet Nathan told David, "... *the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me [God] and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife*" (2 Samuel 12:10). From that perspective, it may seem as though David's legacy was one of failure and destruction.

But there is more to the story. David's earthly kingdom may not have remained intact very long, but God was building a different kind of kingdom through him. Through the same prophet, Nathan, God promised David that He would establish his heir on an eternal throne and that He would set him over His house and kingdom forever (1 Chronicles 17:14). In some ways this promise pointed to Solomon, but it found its ultimate fulfilment in Christ. David became an important central point in the lineage of Jesus Christ, who was referred to as the "Son of David" (Luke 18:39, 20:41).

David's ultimate story and legacy is one of great hope because it is really God's story in which David is simply a vessel who was willing to be used by God. His life – and your life – are about so much more than just the here and the now. They are about the eternal Kingdom of God and the story of redemption and hope He is telling.

For Further Reading / Study

1 Chronicles 17
Romans 1:1-6

Luke 1:30-37
Revelation 22:16-17

Questions for personal reflection or group discussion

1. How does David's story teach us about hope? How do you think he left a legacy of hope?
2. When we see how David was called, we are reminded that God can use anyone – even the most unlikely candidates. How do you think you can be open to being used by God?
3. How do you think we can learn to be patient and trust in God through the difficulties we face? (Reflect on Romans 5:1-5)
4. The story of David bringing the ark to Jerusalem speaks about David's heart that believed God was more important than everyone or everything else. How do you think we can cultivate those same priorities?
5. David's failures remind us of God's mercy and forgiveness and that he restores, even when we mess up. Read Psalm 51 together and talk about what repentance really is. Do you think we mourn appropriately for our sin? What does it mean to have a contrite heart?
6. Why do you think God chose David's line as the lineage of Jesus? What does that reveal to you about God?

Week 4

**ZACCHAEUS' HOUSE:
A LEGACY OF TRANSFORMATION**

The power of an encounter

Zacchaeus' story begins with an unexpected encounter with Jesus. He had obviously heard about the great Teacher who was passing through his town and he was curious to see Him. He didn't necessarily want to get close – he just wanted to see from a distance – and so he climbed a tree to try and catch a glimpse of Jesus as He went by. But Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was in that tree, and what's more, Jesus knew Zacchaeus. He knew his heart and his struggles. He knew his sin and his potential. And so, Jesus stopped and made his way through the crowd to the tree where Zacchaeus was and said, *"Zacchaeus! Hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house."*

I am quite certain that when Zacchaeus climbed that tree that day, this invitation was the last thing he expected. Tax collectors were considered traitors who had sold out their own people to collect taxes on behalf of the oppressor, Rome. Zacchaeus also knew that he was not just a traitor, but a dishonest, thieving one at that. Why on earth would Jesus, this Man who taught about love, mercy and justice, invite Himself to his house? Part of the reason was because Jesus loved Zacchaeus and because He knew that a simple encounter with Him could change the hardest and most crooked heart. He came to seek and save the lost and to show love to those who deserved it least.

That encounter with Jesus changed the trajectory of Zacchaeus' life. He was on his way to leaving one kind of legacy – one of extortion, corruption and greed – and it turned into one of transformation, reconciliation and restitution. We don't know what he and Jesus discussed as they ate together, but seemingly of his own accord, without Jesus telling him to do so, Zacchaeus declares that he will repay all those he has robbed and will restore more than he has stolen. He went from having a corrupt heart to a repentant one.

Whatever path you're on, a genuine encounter with Jesus has the potential to change your life, and in fact, every time we encounter Him in a deep and meaningful way, we are transformed more and more into His likeness.

Some questions to consider in light of the power of an encounter to transform our lives and the lives of those around us are:

1. What are you doing to ensure that you continually encounter Jesus in an authentic and meaningful way?
2. What are you doing to help others encounter Jesus?

A genuine encounter with Jesus has the potential to change your life.

For Further Reading / Study

Luke 19:1-10

Tuesday

The power of a changed life

We don't know what it is about being with Jesus that transformed Zacchaeus' heart and mind, but in short space of time, he had a complete change of heart that was followed up by very concrete action – giving away half of what he had to the poor and restoring fourfold anything he had extorted from anyone. This kind of encounter is not unique to Zacchaeus. We see it throughout Scripture in people from Isaiah, to David, to Saul / Paul, to an unnamed Ethiopian in a chariot.

Jesus told His disciples that the Spirit He gives us will “guide us into all truth” (John 16:13), and often, that truth is about ourselves and ways in which we don’t measure up to the perfect standards of God. The Spirit of God never condemns us, but He will convict our hearts if we are open to His loving correction. When we encounter Jesus and spend time in His presence, we learn more about Him and also about ourselves. If we allow God to work in us, and if we are willing to acknowledge the ways we are not like Him, He will transform and change us.

Zacchaeus’ story is one of encouragement and hope that real transformation is possible because the Gospel of Jesus has life-changing power.

For Further Reading / Study

John 15-16

Isaiah 6:1-13

Acts 9:1-20

James 1:22-27

Wednesday

The power of an invitation

The thing that started the transformation of Zacchaeus’ life and legacy, the thing that brought salvation to him and his house, was an invitation. Jesus extended an invitation to him to relationship. Throughout the Scriptures, and particularly in the accounts the writer of Luke records, we see a powerful theme of inclusion and invitation in the life of Jesus. He continually invited in the outsiders, spending time with those society didn’t think He should, eating with “sinners”, touching lepers and engaging with those others avoided. He issued many invitations – some to fishermen, some to

tax collectors, some to Pharisees... and all of them were invitations to relationship and to a deeper journey with Him.

He issues an invitation to us today too. That same offer stands for us today, as it did for His first disciples, as Jesus calls us and says, "Come follow me." At the end of the day, how we respond to His invitation will define our destinies.

As we consider this, we are also reminded that those of us who have encountered and come to know Jesus are called to extend His invitation to others. We are the agents of His invitation in the world and it is through our love and extending grace to others, that Jesus will be known.

For Further Reading / Study

Mark 4:18-22

Mark 10:17-22

Thursday

The power a renewed mind

Romans 12:1-2 has a powerful message about renewal. Paul pleads with the Roman Christians, and with us, not to be conformed to the patterns of the world, but rather, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. It is easy, and brainless in a way, to simply be swept along in the current of the prevailing culture, but God calls us to live differently... to pattern our lives on the model of Christ, not the model of the world. The way we do this, Paul tells us, is to be transformed by allowing God to renew our minds. We have to let Him change and shape our way of thinking, our worldview and our understanding. We have to allow Him to deal with cognitive schemas and

thinking patterns that may have developed throughout our lives that give us a skewed perception about Him, about the world and about ourselves. He wants to teach us a new way of thinking and being, based on the Truth – the Truth that is Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

Paul wrote the letter to the Romans who were already Christians. They had already come to know Jesus Christ and were walking in relationship with Him, and yet, their minds still needed renewal... and so do ours, regardless of how long you may have been a Christian (or not). It is very easy to be conformed to the pattern of the world without even realising it because we are influenced by all the opinions and events of the prevailing culture.

Romans 12 carries on to speak about how we are one interconnected body made up of interdependent parts. True transformation does not happen in isolation, but is worked out when we find our place to belong, to serve and to use our gifts in the Body of Christ. It happens as we are challenged and encouraged by one another, and as we seek God together, learning from the wisdom, mistakes, victories and experiences of those around us.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.” – Romans 12:2

For Further Reading / Study

Romans 12

Ephesians 4:20-32

The power of a renewed heart

A renewed mind is a critical first step in being transformed, but in order to really be made new and to become all that God intends for us to be, what needs to follow is a renewal of the heart.

There is a beautiful passage in Ezekiel that speaks about this heart-renewal that God does in the lives of those who love Him. The context of the passage is that the nation of Israel had been taken captive by the Babylonians. They had disobeyed God over and over again, despite warnings and intervention. They had allowed their hearts to be led astray to worshipping idols and other gods and they had broken God's covenant of love with them, but yet, even in their oppression and pain, despite the hardness of their hearts, God spoke this to them through the prophet Ezekiel (11:16-20):

"This is what the Sovereign Lord says: although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone." "Therefore say: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again." "They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God." (Ezekiel 11:16-20 NIVUK)

This such a beautiful image of God's mercy and goodness because sometimes, we can't restore our own hearts that are full of deception, betrayal, lies and idolatry, but God doesn't ask us to fix ourselves. He says that He will give His people new hearts. He will renew and restore our hearts

if we let Him, but our role in this process – in being made new and being transformed by His love – is mapped out for us in three steps in this passage.

Firstly, we have to come back. Ezekiel speak about how God with gather the nation from the places they have been scattered. We have to come back to God. Sometimes, without even knowing it, we can slowly drift away from Him. Sometimes the distance between us is created by more jarring, deliberate kinds of things, but whatever the reason, God calls us to come back.

Next, we have to destroy our idols. In order to have really renewed hearts and to experience God’s transformation, we have to acknowledge the things we have put in the place of God in our lives. We have to get rid of things or reorder our priorities so that nothing but God takes the primary position in our hearts.

1. Come back

2. Destroy your idols

3. Be filled with the Spirit

Finally, we have to be filled with the Spirit of God. He wants to give us a new heart and He wants to put a new spirit in us – His Holy Spirit who is powerfully at work in us. We simply need to make ourselves receptive and open to receiving the Spirit of God. We have to

decide to fill our lives, our minds and our hearts with the things of God and influences that lead us towards God and the Truth of His Word. When we do, we are making more room for His Spirit in our life and therefore, we will be made new and empowered in ways we have not yet even imagined.

For Further Reading / Study

Ezekiel 11:1-25

Jeremiah 24:7

The ministry of transformation

From the beginning of the story of Scripture, all the way to the end, God is writing a narrative of renewal. He creates the world and it is good, but just a few pages in, things start to go downhill. Sin enters the world and God's perfect creation is tarnished by sin. People are separated from God. Creation is under a curse. Sin and death seem to have one the day. But God intervenes and begins to write a new story of renewal and transformation. He makes a new way and brings about an opportunity for transformation through Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:17 paints a picture for us of the kind of transformation that is made possible by His grace. In Him, we become a new creation, like a caterpillar that is transformed into a butterfly. The old is gone and we are set free from the baggage and failings of our past

"If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come; the old has gone, the new is here!" – 2 Corinthians 5:17

With God, our current story, doesn't have to be our ultimate story. He is a God of newness and of eternal hope, no matter where we are. He is continually at work in and around us to restore, to redeem and to renew. On the one hand, God is the same – yesterday, today and forever – and He is the eternal, unchangeable certainty on which we can build our lives, but on the other hand, He is the Creative Master of the universe and He is continually creating and doing new and unexpected and exciting things. In relationship with Jesus Christ, we have the promise of new things and of true transformation of ourselves and our world.

Like the legacy of transformation of Zacchaeus' story, so each of our stories can be those of transformation and renewal. Each of us is sent out into the world as ministers of the love, redemption, reconciliation and

transformation God offers. He asks us to help bring about His eternal reality in our world, where there will ultimately be no more tears, pain or suffering, but all things will be made finally and totally new.

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new!” – Revelation 21:4-5

Our gracious God is at work even now, in you and me, making us new and bringing about complete restoration and transformation. There is nothing that is too broken or too far beyond repair for Him to make new and whole again. He makes all things new.

For Further Reading / Study

Isaiah 43:15-21

2 Corinthians 5:1-21

Revelation 21:1-5

Questions for personal reflection or group discussion

1. How have you experienced the transforming power of God in your life?
2. What stands out for you most about Zacchaeus’ story and why? What emotion does it evoke in you?
3. Why do you think Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus’ house?
4. How could you be more active and proactive in extending the invitation of Jesus to others?
5. What does the “renewal of your mind” mean to you (Romans 12:2). How can you practically engage in renewing your mind better?
6. What aspect of your heart needs renewal right now?

Week 5

**MARY'S HOUSE:
A LEGACY OF WORSHIP**

A legacy of worship

In Matthew 26 we read about an incredibly bold, sacrificial act of worship. A woman gate-crashes a party to pour out her love on her Saviour in a very practical way. She comes and anoints Jesus, pouring out expensive perfume all over him. She is not invited, nor welcome. She is not well-received and she is harshly judged and criticised for her actions that are regarded as inappropriate, wasteful and generally distasteful. But Jesus says this about her: *“I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her”* (Matthew 26:13).

What a legacy! Jesus said that she would always be remembered, and indeed she has been, as someone who worshipped extravagantly, and pleased God. This woman was regarded as “sinful” by those around her, so chances are, her story was one

She ended up being immortalised in the larger story of Jesus, not as a sinner, but as a worshipper.

of sin, rejection and shame... but after her encounter with Jesus her story and her legacy was transformed to one of forgiveness and of worship. She ended up being immortalised in the large story of Jesus, not as a sinner, but as a worshipper.

Her story is a reminder that whatever your story is now, it can be something entirely different if you want it to be. It is also an encouragement that seemingly small acts of worship – of pouring out our love on God in sacrificial ways – can have a big, eternal impact.

For Further Reading / Study

Matthew 26:6-15

Mark 14:1-10

Tuesday

Real worship is controversial

Mary's act of worship when she anointed Jesus was really brave. Imagine being known as a "sinful woman" – someone who was clearly marked by contempt and disdain, who has the courage to come, uninvited into someone's house, despite the whispering, and possibly the overt confrontation she must've faced. People had a lot to say about her "inappropriate" display. It was controversial to say the least. Some condemned her simply because she was sinful and should not have dared to come near Jesus. Some were outraged that she would dare waste her perfume on such a seemingly pointless thing. Her story reminds us that real worship is controversial.

Real acts of worship often don't make any sense. A lifestyle of worship demands that we care less about what others think than about what God thinks and so often, it leads us to doing things that don't make sense from an earthly perspective. A lifestyle of worship is one that does illogical and courageous things for the sake of blessing Jesus. It requires spending ourselves on things that don't always add up in the earthly realm. Sometimes living a life of worship for God means looking like a fool to others.

Real acts of worship often don't make any sense.

Paul knew about this from first-hand experience. He lost every last shred of dignity and respectability in his old community. I can't imagine what his

respectable Pharisee friends thought when suddenly Paul was preaching on street corners about Jesus, being lowered down city walls in a basket, running from the law, being beaten, mocked and imprisoned. He went from being a popular and respected community leader to being, in many ways, an outlaw and a laughing stock. In 1 Corinthians 4:10 he writes, *“For Christ’s sake we are fools...”* We read later, in Philippians 3 his motivation as to why he was willing and able to become foolish for the sake of Jesus. It was because he, like Mary, knew that pleasing the heart of God is more important than anything else. He writes, *“But whatever things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. But no, rather, I also count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them to be dung, so that I may win Christ...”* (Philippians 3:7-8).

Living a life of worship and leaving a legacy of worship may mean looking foolish. It may mean enduring the criticism and lack of understanding of others. It may be controversial, but *real worship* that pleases God is one of the most significant things you can do with your life.

For Further Reading / Study

1 Corinthians 10:1-21

Philippians 3:1-14

Wednesday

Real worship is messy

Mary came in unannounced and uninvited and did a beautiful, but very messy and undignified thing for Jesus.

Scripture tells it like this: *“As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.”* (Luke 7:38).

When we read things like this, we tend to get very romanticised pictures of how things played out because this sounds all nice and we’ve seen paintings and heard nice sermons and stories about this, but really think for a moment about the messiness of this act.

This woman was sobbing – she was crying enough to wet Jesus’ feet – so that’s a lot of tears. She’s was not doing a nice like ladylike sniffle. She was doing the full-blown sobbing it out, ugly cry - and we all know how pretty that is. And then, she went on to wipe Jesus’ feet with her hair. Have you ever noticed how non-absorbent hair is? What happened when she was finished crying and wiping Jesus’ feet. Just imagine what she looked like as the whole stunned crowd watched her get up, her hair full of tears, perfume and probably standing up at all kinds of crazy angles. She must’ve looked a little bit frightening. If people didn’t have a reason to judge her before, I’m sure they did now.

The point is however, that she didn’t care. She didn’t care how undignified her act of worship was or that people were going to think even less of her because of it. All she cared about was expressing her gratitude and love for Jesus in the only way she knew how.

When was the last time I did something, even though it was messy to bring a significant offering of worship to Jesus?

Her story challenges me to consider when last I did something, even though it was messy, to bring significant offering of worship to Jesus because I was so overwhelmed by love and gratitude? I think sometimes we fall into the trap of going through the motions and doing just our little bit – our “that’s enough, I’ve ticked the boxes of being a good Christian” and

then we go back to doing what's convenient for us. We will worship God as long as it doesn't interfere with our plans or our lives too much – as long as it doesn't get too messy.

Mary's life and legacy of true worship challenges us to think about the lengths we will go to and the humiliation we're willing to suffer to bring joy and show love to God.

For Further Reading / Study

Luke 7: 36-50

Thursday

Real worship is costly

Mary's act of worship was not just physically humiliating and scandalous, it also cost a lot – not just in terms of pride – but in terms of money. The perfume she poured out over Jesus' feet was worth about a year's wages. It was probably the most valuable thing she owned and she poured it all out for Jesus. It reminds us that real worship is costly and sacrificial.

It is interesting to note that after the account of the anointing of Jesus in Matthew 26, the very next verse says, *"Then one of the Twelve – called Judas Iscariot – went to the chief priests and asked, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?' So they counted out thirty pieces of silver."* (Matthew 26:14-15). Mary's sacrificial act of worship is so strongly contrasted with Judas' self-seeking scheme. She seeks to pour herself out, with a total disregard for her own dignity or the cost of what she gives, and Judas seeks to betray Jesus, to gain for himself, to hold on to what he can get.

In Mark's account of the anointing, he also clearly contrasts Mary's sacrificial act with those who are stingy and worried about the physical cost of things rather than their spiritual worth. Some of those who witnessed the event were immediately indignant that the expensive perfume had been wasted when it could've been sold and been put to better use, but Jesus defended Mary's actions. She had learned the important lesson that the spiritual value of things is far more important than any physical value.

The worshipful life that God asks us to live doesn't make sense from a worldly perspective. Being a Christ-follower means that we are called to be generous, to hold loosely to all our worldly possessions and see them as belonging to God and not to us – and that doesn't make any earthly sense. Our lives must be driven by the correct priorities and by passion for Christ in response to Who He is and what He has done for us – nothing else. We, like Mary, must be willing to break our jars – ourselves – open, for the sake of the glory of God, and when we do, in that brokenness, we will find true wholeness and purpose.

We, like Mary, must be willing to break our jars – ourselves – open, for the sake of the glory of God, and when we do, in that brokenness, we will find true wholeness and purpose.

What really matters is living a life that pleases God – no matter what the cost – because there will be a cost. Jesus was clear. He told those who wanted to follow Him to count the cost and to lay down their lives, take up their cross and follow Him... but at the end of the day, that is the only way to really find life.

For Further Reading / Study

Matthew 26:6-16

Mark 14:1-11

Luke 14:26-35

2 Samuel 24:17-24

Real worship is powerful

In 2 Chronicles 20 (10-24) we read an incredible story about the Israelite army under King Jehoshaphat. Judah was being attacked by Moab and Ammon. The King sought God, praying and calling a nation-wide fast to seek God's guidance and help. God responded to the king's plea and told the people that the battle did not depend on them, but on Him, and that He would give them the victory. In fact, God told them that they would not have to fight at all, but that they should simply take up their positions and stand their ground, and He would do the rest. To their credit, Jehoshaphat and the people trusted God, so much so, that they sent out musicians – in effect, a worship team – in the front line of the army. As the musicians began to sing and praise God, the attacking army was thrown into a panic and they turned on each other, annihilating their own forces. Their worship and trust was a powerful force that stood up against their enemy and roused a work of God on their behalf.

Mary's act of worship was also powerful in its own way, because it moved the heart of Jesus. Any worship that moves God's heart has incredible potential to change us and to create opportunities to experience Him and His power.

**Any worship that moves
God's heart has
incredible potential ...**

Throughout Scripture, we see that worship releases great power, perhaps because it is an act of setting our focus and trust on God. Sometimes, worship changes things in the spiritual realm, in a way that is not immediately tangible for us, but sometimes, it breaks very physical chains and changes our circumstance like it did for Paul and Silas when they were freed from prison during a midnight worship stint in their cell (Acts 16:22-40), or like the crumbling walls of Jericho, flattened by a simple cry of

worship and faith (Joshua 6). Whether or not we see and feel its consequences, we can *know* that worship has great power because it changes our hearts and it moves the heart of God.

For Further Reading / Study

2 Chronicles 20:10-30

Acts 16:22-40

Saturday

Real worship is beautiful

Mary anointed Jesus just before He headed towards the cross. When she did, she didn't just spray a little bit of perfume on Him; she poured a whole jar of perfume all over Him. I wonder, as He entered into the trials and pain of those dark days, whether now and then, He caught a whiff of that perfume that made Him smile as He remembered Mary's love. I wonder if the fragrance of her worship strengthened His heart as He faced the denial and desertion of His friends, the isolation, the torture and the pain that He had to endure. I wonder if, as the thorns from his crown brutally tore into his flesh, the scent of Mary's worship washed over Him and gave Him the courage to go on and to pour Himself out for us as she had poured her love out on Him.

Real worship – worship that is sacrificial, courageous, honest and vulnerable – delights the heart of God.

Pour My Love on You – by Philips, Craig and Dean

*"I don't know how to say exactly how I feel
I can't begin, to tell you what your love has meant
I'm lost for words*

*Is there a way, to show the passion in my heart
Can I express how truly great I think You are?
My dearest Friend.*

*Lord, this is my desire
To pour my love on You*

*Like oil upon Your feet
Like wine for You drink
Like water from my heart
I pour my love on You*

*If praise is like perfume
I lavish mine on You
'Til every drop is gone
I pour my love on You..."*

For Further Reading / Study

Philippians 4:18-23

2 Corinthians 2:14-17

Questions for personal reflection or group discussion

1. What stands out for you most about the account of Mary anointing Jesus? Why?
2. Reflect on / discuss the different reactions of the people present: Mary, Jesus, the disciples and the Pharisees. What do you think their motivations were for responding the way they did?
3. Has your worship ever been controversial or unpopular? In what way?
4. How do you think we can cultivate an attitude of being “undignified” in our worship, or being willing to do things that may make us look foolish? How do we get to a place of not caring what others think?
5. What does your worship cost you? What do you think it should cost you?
6. Read the account of the army of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:10-24. Why do you think they sent the musicians out in front of the army? What does this account mean for you?

Week 6

CORNELIUS' HOUSE: A LEGACY OF INCLUSION

Included

In Acts 10 (1-48) we read the really interesting account of a man named Cornelius and how he shook up a whole lot of people's faith simply by having some himself. We read about how God gave Peter a vision about eating unclean animals that he couldn't understand until people knocked on his door asking him to come to the house of a Gentile named Cornelius who was asking questions about God. Peter thought he had all the answers when it came to faith and he knew for certain that the message of Jesus was for the Jews, so a few days earlier, he might not have agreed to go, but after his strange vision about God wanting him to eat things Jews were not supposed to touch, he realised, rather reluctantly, that maybe God was up to something. Peter was so set in his ways that he didn't want the Word of God to interfere with his opinion. Ever had that problem? We all have... Like Peter, we're often stubborn, obstinate, and downright hard headed sometimes when it comes to change or to accepting possibilities beyond our current experiences and understanding.

The Bible talks a lot about this problem and is full of stories of people who struggled with change. One of the most significant struggles the early church faced – and one we still face today – is the issue of having to be inclusive with the Gospel rather than exclusive. It is our nature to create closed circles and cosy cliques in which we feel comfortable, but that is not the life or witness to which God calls us. He calls us to throw our arms wide open, to include *everyone*, and to break down the walls that divide us.

As we read Cornelius' story (which is Peter's story and the Early Church's story too), and if we go further and examine Jesus' life and ministry, we cannot miss the message of inclusivity. This has to lead to ask some crucial questions: How is the Church today, as the incarnation of Christ in the world in our time and context relating to those around us, specifically to those

If we examine Jesus' live and ministry we cannot miss the message inclusivity.

undervalued in our own society, or those who are on the "outside"? Are there any ways in which we are making the Gospel exclusive and closed off? Do we still choose to eat with "sinners" as Jesus did? Do we exist as an authentic, inclusive community or are we an exclusive community reserved for members who fit a certain profile?

Surely our faith and love for Christ must challenge us to act as He did and to extend a hand of grace across the divides between individuals in our world?

For Further Reading / Study

Acts 10:1-48

Tuesday

Bringing the outsiders in

The story of Peter and Cornelius is about God getting the Good News to the Gentiles. Cornelius represents the Gentiles – people Jews avoided and would not have anything to do with when it came to spiritual matters. Gentiles were, after all, outside the covenant promises of God.

God revealed to Peter however, that not only was He inviting Gentiles into His covenantal relationship, but they didn't even have to become properly Jewish and carry out the regulations of the covenant to be accepted by Him. This was ground breaking and revolutionary news for the Jews and not something that was easy for them to accept. They were so used to things being done a certain way, that when God revealed the truth that all people were in fact invited to be part of His story, it was a very difficult fact for the Jews to swallow.

Some early Jewish Christians were determined that people had to be Christians on their terms and had to adhere to the Mosaic Law, but we read in Acts 15:19 that at the Council of

“... we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God...” – Acts 15:19

Jerusalem, James comes to the conclusion: “It is my judgement, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

The early Jewish Christians quickly discovered that God was at work around them in incredible ways and that He was reaching out to people they would never have expected or would have sought to include in their community. The same is true for Christians today. The message and ministry of Jesus remains the same and He is at work in the world, drawing all people to Himself. He invites us to join Him on that mission but upon reflection, if we are entirely honest with ourselves, some Christians and churches are more of a hindrance than a help in terms of helping people discover the grace of God. If you ask non-believers or people outside of church circles to describe Christians, one of the words that usually comes up quickly, is the word “judgemental”. People are drawn to Jesus but often, not to His followers. Why is it that Jesus is seen as loving, compassionate and accepting, while His church is often branded as judgemental, hypocritical and exclusionary?

Like the early disciples, we have to ask ourselves hard questions about our perception of faith and the faithful. We need to be sure that we aren’t making it difficult for anyone to turn to God, but rather, that we are revealing the real heart of Jesus to those around us.

For Further Reading / Study

Acts 15:1-41

Wednesday

Conforming vs. isolating

We've been taught so well not to conform to the world (which is important) that we often isolate ourselves from the people in it. The truth is, isolation is just as sinful as conformity!

Jesus did it right. He went to the homes of publicans and sinners and ate with them. He never got swept up in the things they did wrong or started doing things the way they did, but He did not shy away from engaging with them either

– whether they were Pharisees, tax collectors, prostitutes or recently resurrected friends. The whole time the "super-righteous" were scorning Him for keeping company with sinners. He replied, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance (Luke 5:31).

Isolation is just as sinful as conformity.

You can't always choose the people God sends into your life with whom He wants you to share the Good News. We can't just choose people who dress like us, talk like us, look like us and act like us. The Good News of Jesus is for everybody, whether they are like us or not, and while we are called not to be swept up in conforming to the world, we are also not called to stay so far removed from it that we cannot reach out to others with friendship and grace.

For Further Reading / Study

Luke 5:12-39

Matthew 9:9-38

A new kind of community

When we read about Jesus' ministry, it becomes clear that He held a radical new way of thinking about community. He had a vision for a new kind of society in which people would be known by their love for one another (John 13:34-35) and in which the cultural and social barriers that separated people would be broken down and ruthlessly eradicated.

Jesus' actions and inclusivity are strongly contrasted with the exclusivity and disdain of the Pharisees for the socially unacceptable. They keep asking, "Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?" (Luke 5:30) and Jesus condemns them for their failure to understand the heart of the message and law of God as well as for their treatment of the vulnerable in their communities (Luke 11:37-54). They had the appearance of true religion on the outside, but corruption and hatred on the inside.

John Burke^{iv} argues that all Christians need to guard against our natural inclination towards a Pharisaic spirit that sees ourselves as more righteous than those around us and while authentically trying to pursue God in righteousness, is simultaneously judging, condemning and excluding those that Christ does not. We, like the Pharisees, can become so worried about who is getting things right and living up to God's standards that we fail to see how prideful and pompous we have become.

"The absolutely unpardonable thing was not his concern for the sick, the cripples, the lepers, the possessed; not the way he put up with women and children around him, nor even his partisanship for the poor, humble people. The real trouble was that he got involved with the moral failures, with obviously irreligious and immoral people: people morally and politically suspect, so many dubious, obscure, abandoned, hopeless types existing as

in ineradicable evil on the fringe of every society. This was the real scandal. Did he really have to go so far?” – Hans Küng

The story of Cornelius is one that reminds us that God throws open the gates wide and invites everybody in. His legacy is one of inclusivity that speaks about God’s grace for all people and that we are now all, in Christ, God’s chosen people. Cornelius’ faith started a movement that spread like wildfire throughout the known world as the early disciples began to grasp the beautiful truth that God leaves no one behind, but invites everybody in.

God leaves no one behind, but invites everybody in.

For Further Reading / Study

Acts 11:1-30

Romans 10:12

Ephesians 2:18-22

Colossians 3:10-25

Friday

Even ground

There is no doubt that Christ’s ministry challenged the prevailing cultural norms regarding who was acceptable and who was not. Christ overturned social standing and rules regarding ritual purity to reveal a radically inclusive approach that invited anyone and everyone to be a part of His mission. He Himself was a stranger and outcast who “practiced the ‘hospitality that causes scandal’ by associating with and eating with the least, the last, and the lost of Jewish society...”^v His call to the outcasts and misfits to be His followers echoes through the centuries and challenges the modern church to follow His

Will you have the courage to carry on?

example of seeking the lost, of inviting in the outsider and of eating with the sinner.

The reality of the Gospel of grace is that we are all equal at the foot of the cross. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), and undeserved favour has been extended to each of us. That does not leave any room for boasting, arrogance or pride. Jesus' inclusive message and ministry was unheard of in a society built on status and social scales, and it is still revolutionary today. The apostle Paul reminds us however, that in Christ, there is *"neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28).

For Further Reading / Study

Romans 3: 19-31

Galatians 3:23-29

Ephesians 2:1-22

Saturday

Inclusivity and social justice

There are many critical social issues that must be addressed at present, not the least among them issues around white privilege, the #blacklivesmatter movement, race and racism, the gap between the rich and poor and the ever-plaguing issues of corruption and injustice in government and just about every sphere of life. These issues are extremely complex and there are no simple answers or pat solutions, but many of them have a similar root cause – pride and judgement. Human beings have a natural propensity to try to elevate themselves above others, to find justifications as to why they are better, more worthy, more valued, or why others are wrong and they are right. What would the world look like if we, like Jesus, extended

**How do we practically reveal
God’s radically inclusive
Gospel to a broken world?**

grace instead of judgement? When it comes to matters of social justice, what is our response as the church? How do we practically reveal God’s radically inclusive Gospel to a broken world?

In his remarkable book, *Who is this Man?*, John Ortberg writes about the revolution that Jesus began in every sphere of life, but particularly in terms of the way the world understood and viewed humanity and the value of every life.

He writes about how, some sociologists believe that one of the major reasons that the “Jesus Movement” spread and gained influence in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries was because of the way Jesus’ followers responded to sick people.

There were some terrible epidemics of something that might have been smallpox that broke out in 165 AD and again just under a century later and it was reported that it is worst, the disease was claiming the lives of 5 000 people in Rome each day. Records and reports from this time tell us about the devastation of what was happening and how people responded with panic.

Ortberg^{vi} writes: *“At the first onset of the disease they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease. But there was in that world a community that remembered they followed a man who would touch lepers while they were unclean; who told his disciples to go heal the sick, who got into arguments at dinners that embarrassed whole tables. Dionysius, a third-century bishop of Alexandria, wrote about their actions during the plagues: “Heedless of the danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to*

their every need, and ministering to them in Christ. And with them departed this life serenely happy, for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbours, and cheerfully accepting their pains.”

What on earth could motivate these early followers to sacrifice their own health and ultimately their lives to care for the vulnerable and ailing? I believe that it was the earth-shattering, eternity-altering concept of grace... a grace that moves from heaven to earth and breaks through into time and space so that it can literally touch us and find us where we are.

They had experienced the love and grace of Jesus and there was nothing that could keep them from sharing it, from reaching out with grace and from touching those who most needed a touch of kindness and mercy.

The inclusive Gospel of Christ compels us to consider how we are engaging in issues of social justice and whether we are really throwing open our faith, our arms, and our lives wide, to bring Christ’s healing and grace to a world that needs it so desperately.

For Further Reading / Study

James 1:27

1 Peter 5:5-14

Micah 6:8

Questions for personal reflection or group discussion

Why do you think people's natural inclination is to be exclusionary rather than inclusive?

1. How inclusive do you think you are and our church is at present?
2. What does the story of Cornelius and Peter reveal to you? (See Acts 10)
3. Why do you think it was so hard for the early church to accept Gentiles?
4. How do you think God may be challenging us to be more radically inclusive at present? What practical action is required in this regard?

Week 7

**HOPE HOUSE:
A LEGACY OF...**

More than we can imagine

As we have considered the legacy of some of the people in Scripture, it challenges us to think about the kind of story our lives are telling. What would people write about us? What kind of legacy will we leave? As we ponder this very important question, one thing if which we can be certain is that God has *more* in mind for us. Whatever dreams He has placed in your heart, whatever things you have already accomplished or hope to achieve, He wants MORE for you.

In Ephesians 3 (14-21), Paul writes this powerful prayer that reveals this principle so beautifully:

*“For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰**Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,** ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”*

God wants us to know His love and root us deeply in His amazing grace so that we will live filled up and full. He wants us to live this way so that we will be able to begin to believe Him for more... to dare to trust that He can really do immeasurably more than we could even imagine. And do you notice how

He does this “more than we can imagine” work? Paul says he does it according to His power *that is at work in us*.

Oh friends... we have not yet scratched the surface of all our God is able to do; of all that He wants to do in us and through us.

When history is written, what if we are part of the story, like the people in Scripture who dared to follow God? Will we dare to believe, with courageous faith, that God can really use us to change to the world and to leave a legacy of His love?

Will we dare to believe, with courageous faith, that God can really use us to change the world and to leave a legacy of His love?

For Further Reading / Study

Ephesians 1:15-23

Ephesians 3:1-21

Tuesday

Making room for God

One of the most profound statements in Scripture is the summary of discipleship in 8 words uttered by John the Baptist. People were asking him about this Jesus who had appeared and was stealing his thunder. John, with great wisdom and insight and an incredible amount of humility and grace says: *“He must become greater; I must become less.”* He understood that his life was not about pointing people to himself, but that his destiny was to point people to Jesus.

“He must become greater; I must become less.” – John 3:30

It seems a bit counterintuitive to consider leaving a legacy that isn't about us, but in reality, we are all meant to live sign-post lives. Our lives are meant, not to point to ourselves and our own accomplishments, successes and greatness, but to the wonder, beauty and power of God. Jesus said it in another way in Matthew 5:16 when He said, *“Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”* The light in our lives is not meant to illuminate us, but to point to and reveal our Father.

For this reason, one of the most important steps to take in leaving a legacy that matters is making room for God... being willing to allow yourself to decrease and Him to increase, so that ultimately your life story is less about you and more about God.

“The purpose of my ministry is to point men to him. When that is done my work is done. I came not to form a party of my own, nor to set up a religion of my own; and my teaching must cease when he is fully established, as the light of the morning star fades away and is lost in the beams of the rising sun. This evinced John’s humility and willingness to be esteemed as nothing if he could honor Christ. It shows us, also, that it is sufficient honor for man if he may be permitted to point sinners to the Lord Jesus Christ. No work is so honorable and joyful as the ministry of the gospel; none are so highly honored as those who are permitted to stand near the Son of God, leading perishing men to his cross.” – Albert Barnes^{vii}

For Further Reading / Study

John 3:22-36

Matthew 5:1-16

A new story

Your current story doesn't have to be your ultimate story.

If there is one theme we see in Scripture over and over again, it is the writing of a new narrative and the chance at a fresh start. The God we serve is the God of new things, new beginnings and re-creation.

**The courage to obey God
will always result in victory.**

Whatever your story has been up to this point – whatever the legacy of your family or parents have been, whatever mistakes you've made, whatever pain you have endured and hurt you have suffered – there is always an opportunity with God to leave the baggage and brokenness of the past behind and step into a new future with Him... to let Him pen a new story for your life.

Abraham's and Sarah's story was one of barren emptiness until God intervened. Joseph's story was one of rejection upon rejection, until God made it one of redemption and salvation. Moses' story was about a runaway murderer until God made it about a courageous deliverer. Esther's was a story of insignificance until God used her to write a new story of protection, faith and peace for His people. Jonah's went from being one about running to one about rescuing, Peter's from fishing for fish to fishing for people, Paul's from a story about hating and persecuting to being persecuted for preaching love.

No matter how young or old you are, God can do something new in you and write a new story... draft and craft a new legacy that honours Him and changes the world.

For Further Reading / Study

Isaiah 43:18-21

Thursday

Such a time as this...

Esther found herself in a really difficult situation. She had, against all odds, gone from being a refugee with no status, to becoming the queen of Persia, but before she could really enjoy her new position, she was faced with the threat of the extermination of her people. She had not told the king or those in the palace that she was a Jew and therefore, she had a lot to lose by revealing her true identity and trying to intervene. She had some influence because of her position, but the king hadn't called for her in a long time when all this came about and she couldn't just show up to see him. One had to be summoned by the king. Anyone who came before the king without being called by him risked execution, right there and then, no questions asked.

Esther was reminded by her uncle, Mordacai, that God had brought her to her position for this moment in history... for this reason. He said, *"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14).

Esther responded with a courageous heart that risked her life to save the lives of others. She is remembered as one of the heroes of the Jewish faith and left a legacy of courage and hope.

Her story reminds us that God is always at work, often behind the scenes in ways we don't always notice or put together, and that we too are called for such a time as this. The position you hold, the influence you have, the social sphere in which you exist, are not an accident. The unique gifts, abilities, resources, experiences, relationships and skills you have were given to you for a purpose, at this moment in time, in this country, in this place. God wants to use you. Will you, like Esther, respond with obedience and courage and a willingness to risk everything for the cause?

You were born for such a time as this...

For Further Reading / Study

Esther 4-5

Luke 9:23-25

Friday

Our values

On what values are you building your legacy?

As a church community, we are building our foundations on the values God has laid on our hearts as we strive to become the people and the church He has called us to be. Our values are to:

- **Worship authentically:** to connect with and experience God personally, profoundly and authentically.
- **Love sincerely:** to learn to love God, ourselves and others like Jesus did.
- **Connect purposefully:** to connect with God, others and ourselves.

- **Grow intentionally:** to together, discover and become the people God intends for us to be.
- **Live sacrificially:** As we encounter God, to be moved by His heart and step out practically in the world in the relentless pursuit of justice.

Spend some times reflecting on these values today. Where do you think you're doing well in terms of these? In what area do you need the most growth? How are we doing as a church community in terms of living up to and establishing these values so that they will become the legacy of our community?

For Further Reading / Study

Psalm 29

1 Corinthians 13

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Ephesians 4:1-16

Romans 12:1-3

Saturday

Going together

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” – African Proverb

Our greatest legacy is a collective one. What will God do through this community? What potential and promise is there in us... together? As we consider our potential as God's children and the unique gifts, abilities and influence He's given us, there is so much encouragement and joy in knowing that we are not called to go out into the world alone, but that we are connected, and called together. If there is potential in the life one Christ-follower, there is abundantly more potential in the life of a faith community.

As God forms and shapes us a church, as He builds us as a building made up of living stones, we have to keep asking ourselves what kind of community we want to be? What will the impact be that we will make in this place at this time in history? If we had to strip away everything but the bare essentials, what would our community really be about? What would people miss about us if we were gone? Will we be the community that Jesus envisaged, that is known by our love for others? Will we live up to our full potential as a community and leave an indelible mark on the world?

For Further Reading / Study

1 Peter 2:1-25

John 13:33-35

Questions for personal reflection or group discussion

1. How do you think we can trust and believe God for more? (Ephesians 3:20-21)
2. How do you think we practically live out John the Baptists' statement that Christ must become more and we must become less (John 3:30)?
3. How do you feel like you could make more room for God in your life?
4. If you had to write your story right now, what would it be about? What would you want it to be about if you could change it?
5. What do you think it means for *your life* that you were born "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14)
6. What do you think the collective potential and legacy of Hope House is and can be?

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