



ADVENT FAMILY DEVOTIONAL



INTRO to WEEK 1

SCRIPTURE READING

- Isaiah 11:1-10 (COVERED in CHIL DREN'S CHURCH).

Have you ever done a family tree for one of your classes at school? You might be surprised to know that the idea of family trees first came from the Church several hundreds of years ago. Churches would make wall paintings or stained glass windows of trees with names and events leading up to the birth of Jesus depicted on the branches. They would do this as a way of helping people better understand the story of the Bible leading up to Jesus. And they would call these, Jesse Trees.

So for centuries, families have been using the weeks before Christmas to rehearse together the storyline—the tragedies, the promises, the deep longings, the glimpses of hope—leading up to the coming of Jesus and the true life and hope that He brings into the world.

This week we start in on our own Jesse Tree journey by reading Isaiah's promise of One who would come from the fallen stump of Jesse, a shoot that would be armed with the power of God's Spirit to restore righteousness to God's people and peace in His beautiful creation.



- Genesis 1 (or from the *Jesus Story Book Bible—The Beginning: A Perfect Home*)

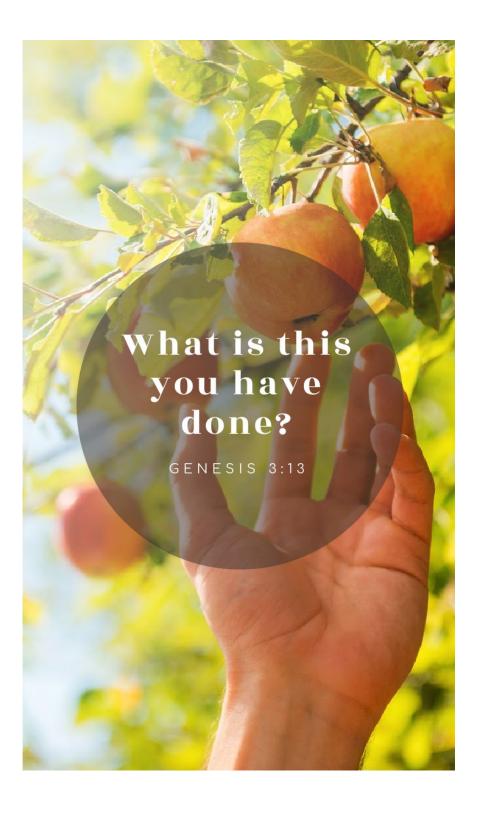
Have you ever tried jumping in to a movie or tv show that your brother or sister started without you? They're halfway through it, and you're trying to make sense of it, wondering who the characters are, how they know each other, why one of them seems to be running for their life or is really excited about news they've just heard. You ask questions, but your sister just says, "Shhhh!"

That's sorta what its like trying to understand the storyline of the Bible without reading the opening scenes. Its here in the beginning that we're introduced to the main characters—the gracious Builder and Life-giver, the servants called to fill up and care for their wonderful new home, the creatures and lights and plants that make this home the perfect place to live and worship. Its here in the beginning that we get a glimpse of the way things were always supposed to be...and the way things will one day be again! When we talk about Christian hope, this is essentially the picture of what we are hoping and waiting for. The coming of the king, the birth of Jesus, and His future return is all so exciting because He not only solved the problem of our sinfulness, but started the project of reclaiming and restoring our beautiful home...a project He fully intends to complete! That's why Christmas is a time for lighting up the darkness, singing carols of great anticipation, growing in our ability to wait faithfully, and tasting some of the joy that will one day be our unending experience in the beauty of creation and relationships restored!

DISCUSS

- Spend some time imagining together what it would have been like to enjoy the world in its original goodness. What would you most have enjoyed? What do you look forward to most?

TAKE IT FURTHER— <u>bibleproject.com/explore/heaven-earth/</u>



- Genesis 3 (or from the Jesus Story Book Bible—The Terrible Lie)

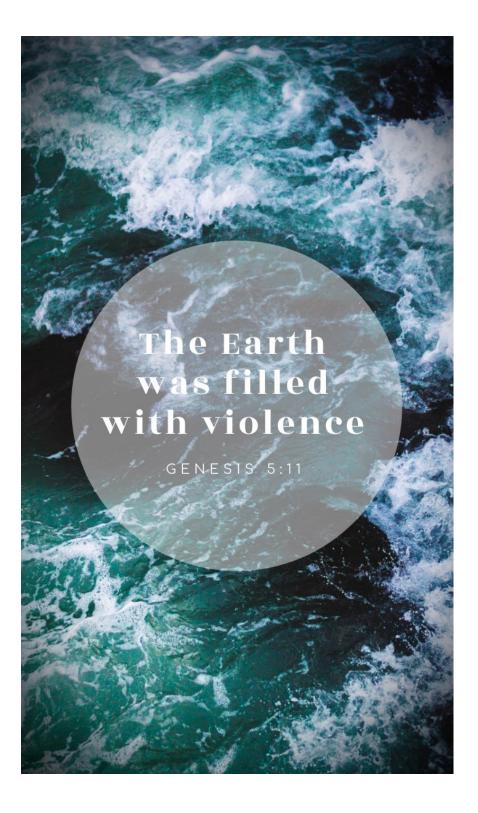
How could they have ever doubted that God only wanted the best for them? How could they possibly think that God was being selfish or unfair after providing them their perfect home, caring for their every need, showering them with blessing upon blessing? How could they not love Him back enough and throw that lying snake out of the garden...let alone keep their hands off the tree God asked them to avoid?

But that's what happened. Adam and Even listened to the snake when he questioned God's goodness and lied about His character. They obeyed his voice instead of their Creator's. They took sides with the enemy. And when they did, the power of evil was let loose, and everything they once loved and enjoyed was now broken—their perfect home, their joy and innocence with one another, and their intimacy with God Himself. And perhaps worst of all, that evil now had a place inside their own hearts. They would forever hear the voice of the snake and be tempted to listen, tempted to follow him down the paths of sin and death far away from the One who had lovingly given them life.

The only hope now was if that Creator would one day enter into the darkness, chase them down the roads of death, and deal with the evil they had unleashed...even if it would break Him along the way. Do you think He loved them enough to do that? Do you think He loves and cares enough to do that to rescue you, you who like Adam and Eve are tempted to doubt God's goodness, disobey His commands, and side with His enemies? Christmas provides a clue.

DISCUSS

- How have you chosen your own desires over God's this week? How have you been tempted to believe Satan's lies about God's goodness and love?



- Genesis 6:11-14, 7:11-8:3, 9:8-13 (or from the *Jesus Story Book Bible—A New Beginning*)

It couldn't be that bad right? What's the worst that could happen? All they did was listen to a talking snake and eat a piece of fruit. But actually, if you were to read all the passages between Genesis 3 and Genesis 6, you'd find that that sin was pretty devastating. After Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, chapter 4 tells the story of a man's jealousy that led him to murder his own brother. Chapter 6 tells of strange and perverse sexual sin. And by the time we come to today's passage, we read that the earth was filled with violence and that every intention of men and women's hearts was only evil all the time (6:5). Just like if you open a window on a winter's day you allow the cold air to fill the room, when evil is allowed in and given a place inside creation, it fills the air, consumes the hearts of men and women, and wreaks complete havoc throughout creation.

And instead of allowing His creation to remain in that state of perpetual violence and evil, God steps in and with a heavy and sad heart judges the people and the world He had made. He sends the flood to wipe the earth of sinful hearts and lives. And...at the end, he makes a promise never to do it again. We catch a glimpse in this story of God's resolve to deal with the problem of sin, to not allow sin to forever destroy His good creation. And we also get the promise, that even if sin were to wreak its havoc yet again, God would find another way to intervene and stop it.

DISCUSS

- What does this passage teach us about the problem of sin? What does it teach us about God's right judgement? How does it point us to the cross of Jesus?
- How does this passage challenge or convict you?

In you, all the families of the Earth will be blessed

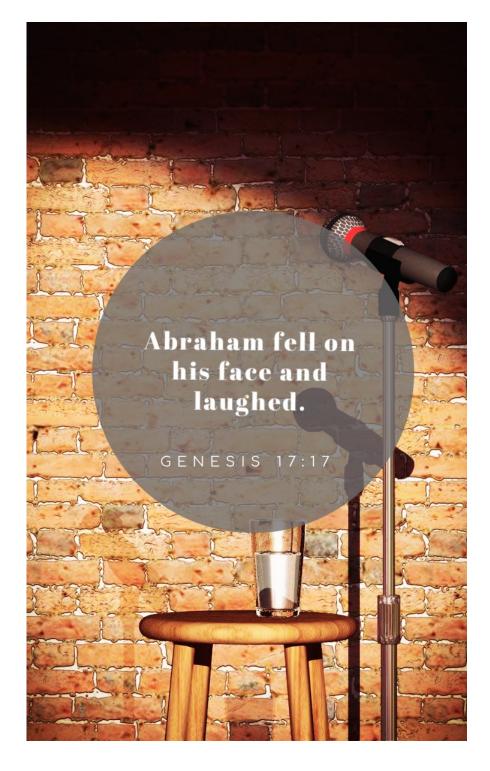
- Genesis 12:1-8

Where have we heard this before—God speaks to a man and woman, gives them a land in which to make their home, and tells them they will be fruitful and multiplied? What God is doing here with Abraham and Sarah in many ways resembles what he did with Adam and Eve back on page one. In some sense, we're starting anew. Sin and evil had tarnished God's beautiful creation. Death, violence, and disobedience were ruining the life he intended for His people to enjoy. Even after God rescues Noah and his family from the flood, there is soon a strange scene of drunkenness and perversion (Gen. 9:18-25). And then we come upon more pride and rebellion at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). What God begins with Abraham is a new story with a new people, called out from among the nations, given a new home and promised great blessing. AND...we hear God's promise to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham children (12:3)! This is one of the most important verses for understanding the story of the Old Testament, even the storyline of the whole Bible. What God is doing with this family is ultimately about all the families of the earth. God is undertaking a plan to rescue all the peoples of the Earth from the curse of evil and the ruin of sin.

Centuries later, a young woman named Mary and a priest named Zechariah would both give thanks to God for remembering His mercy and the promises made to their forefather Abraham. (Luke 1) The promised blessing to all the nations through Abraham's seed was about to appear. The rescue mission was about to reach its climax.

DISCUSS

- How does Jesus fulfill the promise to Abraham? What does this promise and plan teach you about God?



- Genesis 17:1-8 & 15-17 (or from the *Jesus Story Book Bible—Son of Laughter*)

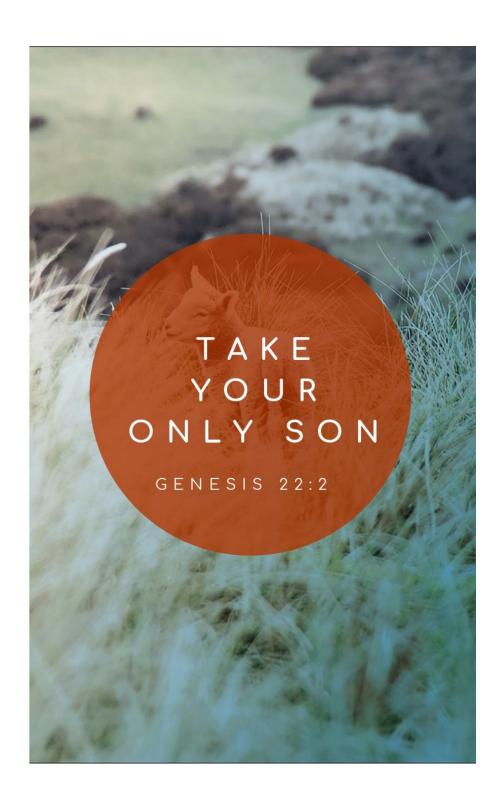
Can you imagine laughing at God after He's just made an incredible promise to you? That's a bold move by Abraham to say the least. But that laughter stands out in this passage and actually says quite a lot to us about God's promises.

First of all, it shows how wild the promise is to begin with. Abraham had long since given up dreams of a family. Its practically too good to be true. But the other side is, the promises of God can be difficult to believe and entrust our lives too. When you think about yesterday and today's passages, God asks tought stuff of Abraham. He asks him to leave his home, his place of comfort and security, and venture to some undisclosed location. He asks Abraham to essentially leave behind whatever "gods" (aka providers and protectors) his forefathers may have worshipped and enter into an exclusive covenant relationship with Him alone. These are some big asks! And they're rooted in God's promises...that make Abraham fall over in laughter.

Advent is a season for reflecting on God's incredible promises—promises to one day renew the face of the earth, restore the deep joy and longings of His people, resurrect dead and decayed bodies from the grave. These can be promises somewhat hard to believe in the midst of a dark and hurting world AND...these are promises that ask a good bit of us. They ask us to trust God alone for our hope. They ask us to live more sacrificially, not trying to gain every we want now, but living faithfully for the kingdom of Christ while we wait. They ask us to follow Jesus into purposes and plans that might not be our own.

DISCUSS

How is it going trusting and *living* according to promise? Is there a step of faith God might be asking of you in light of His promises?

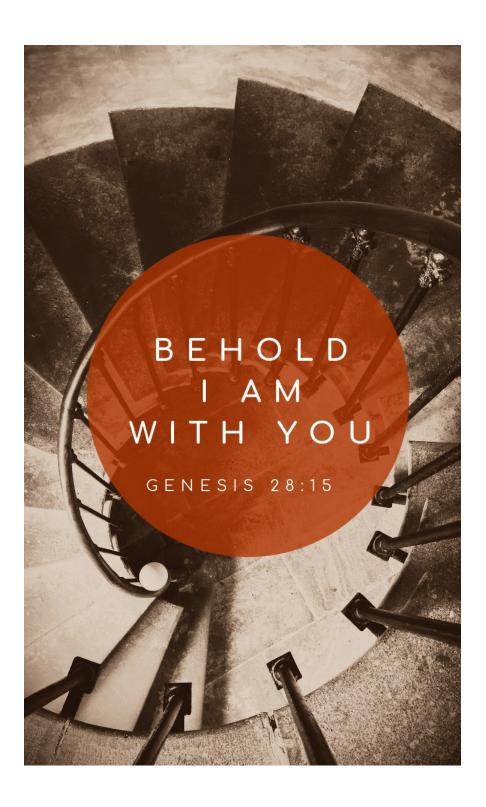


- Genesis 22:1-14 (COVERED in CHILDREN'S CHURCH)

Sometimes Amy will walk into the room, cozy up next to me, look at me with her cutest smile...and say the words that cause me great distress —"How much to do you love me?" That's usually a pretty clear sign that she's either done something disappointing, like throw away the left-over sausage I'd been saving in the fridge, or she's about to ask me to do something she's knows I'm less than thrilled about.

You could say that the story in Genesis 22 is God's way of asking Abraham, how much do you love Me. And it's a really important question! Because remember, Abraham and his family have a crucial role to play in God's rescue mission. They're going to be His agents of blessing to all the families of the Earth. But that only works if their hearts are willing to serve God in love...if they're willing to love God even more than the treasures He gives them. God is promising to be gracious beyond measure to them, giving them healthy, abundant, and secure families and fruitful land (the two greatest treasures in the ancient world). Which is a good thing and possibly a dangerous thing. It's great because, who doesn't like treasure? But once you get your hands on treasure, can you ever take them off in service to God's purpose? Can you let it go? We already watched Adam and Eve fail miserably at that. They literally had paradise, but couldn't let go of the smallest portion to be obedient. What about Abraham?

What about you? You too have a vital role to play as God's ambassador (2 Cor. 5), His living witness (Acts 2), part of His royal priesthood to the unbelieving families of the Earth (1 Pet. 2). Do you love Him? The good news is that He has already proven His love to you. He has already taken His hands off *His* greatest treasure, His only Son, and given Him in love for you. That's why Christmas is good news—it is the proof that frees us to trust His love and commit ourselves in loving service and obedience for Him.



- Genesis 28:10-22

We pick up our story this week with Abraham's grandson Jacob., who's out on the run. He tricked his old, blind father (Isaac) into giving him the family blessing which was supposed to go to Esau, his older brother. Esau now wants him dead as a result. So Jacob flees home and sets out towards Haran. Things won't go so well for him there though. He'll actually be on the receiving end of some trickery and be exploited into hard labor for his uncle.

So here it is in between all that—death threats behind him, tough times ahead—that God meets him in a dream with promises and assurances of His presence. Jacob sees Heaven opened up and a flight of stairs reaching from Heaven to Earth. He sees angels (ministers of God's care and protection) ascending and descending the stairs. And God restates the promise made to Jacob's grandfather: I will give you this land on which you sleep. I will make your descendants like the sand of the dessert. Through your family, all the families of the earth will be blessed. And I will be present with you wherever you go. It's almost as if this little plot of land is becoming a new Eden—a place where God's people will be fruitful and multiplied, where God's blessings will spill over, where there will be a special "connection" between God's throne and man's home.

It actually has quite a few connections in our story. It resembles the day when Israel will, like Jacob, be a wanderer in the wilderness and God will build a tabernacle to be with them. It points forward to the day when the Son of God will take on flesh, descend from Heaven to Earth, tabernacle with God's people, and deliver them from their sins. And it points even further to when the city of God will one day descend from Heaven to a fully restored, new creation where tears and sadness will be no more and God's home will be forever be with those He loves!

DISCUSS—What does God's promise and His presence mean for you today?

AND HE WEPT WITH THEM

GENESIS 45:15

A FORGIVING, BETRAYED KING

- Genesis 37-46 (from the *Jesus Story Book Bible—The Forgiving Prince*. Or for a video reading of the Storybook Bible version .— https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okpGa9OVOuo)

Have you ever stopped to consider how the Bible's story line would have played out had Joseph not forgiven his brothers? After all, they did throw him in a pit, sell him to slave traders for 20 shekels of silver, and essentially ruin his life for the next several years. At best we might expect him to deny their pleas for food. At worst, he could have rightfully imprisoned them or handed them a death sentence for their wicked crime. But think if he did. There'd be no Israelites delivered from Egypt years later, no entrance into the promised land for Abraham's offspring. There'd be no Moses, no Joshua, no tribe of Judah from which would come David, Solomon, or the promised messianic king. In other words, this great plan of blessing the families of the Earth through Abraham's family would have come to a screeching halt. Instead though, Joseph finds a strange ability to forgive through the plan and purpose of God. Being convinced that even the painful and unfair trials he was dealt in life somehow were part of God plan to save many, he was freed to forgive.

Joseph resembles another king who would one day be rejected by his family, sold for 30 pieces of silver, and suffer death at the hands of hate-filled sinners. But with a similar conviction that God was up to something incredible, that He was turning the world's hate, violence, and injustice in on itself to rescue the souls of many, Jesus was freed to cry out in love amidst the agony of the cross, "Father forgive them!"

DISCUSS

- Have you ever considered how powerful the strange business of forgiveness is in God's mission of redemption? Is God inviting you to extend forgiveness to someone today? How can you find freedom in the loving and gracious purpose of God to do so?

THAT YOU MAY KNOW

EXODUS 10:2

GOD TO THE RESCUE

WEEK 2 / DAY 4

SCRIPTURE READING

- Exodus 3-13 (Jesus Storybook Bible—God to the Rescue)
- StoryBook Bible Reading—https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=xW3Q6cjMwLk

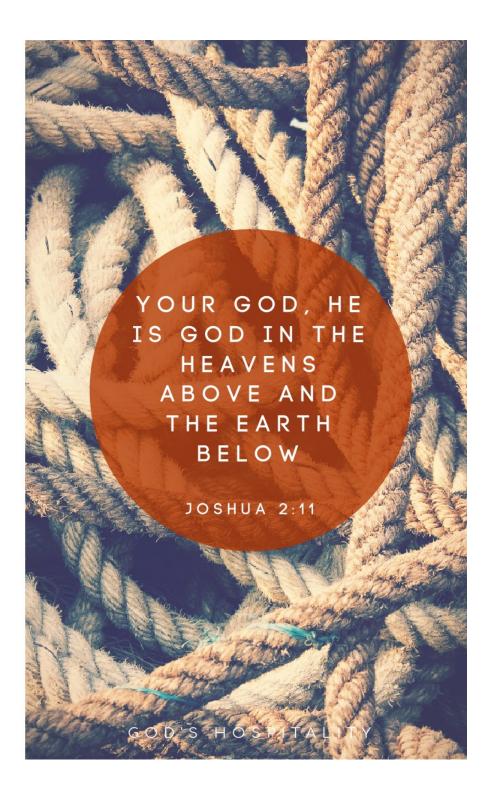
Swarms of frogs leaping out of beds and cupboards? Hordes of locusts so thick that the sky seems dark? Painful boils and sores infecting people's skin, hail crushing crops and the animals grazing in the field? Is it just me, or is this a bit overkill? If God can do all this, He could've skipped the fuss and just magically transported the Israelites out of Egypt into the promised land. He could've softened Pharaoh's heart into simply letting them walk out from the get-go. But instead we get this dramatic display. AND God actually tells Moses (a few times) along the way, that He intends to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will NOT let God's people go until God is done unleashing all these plagues. So...why?

God puts it very simply: so that Israel may know that He is the only true God, worthy of their worship. Keep in mind, all that Israel had seen to that point was the power, the wealth, the success of Pharoah and his mighty empire with its supposed gods. Power, money, success—these are all things that tempt people's worship. God wants their undivided loyalty, confidence, and obedience so that He can use them for His great mission and purpose. And so He goes over the top to prove His power, His worthiness, His ability to deliver and protect the people He loves.

DISCUSS

- What are you tempted to trust more than God Himself? What do you sometimes think is more able than God to make your life safe and satisfied?
- How has God shown to us His ability to save and defend? How has He proven that He is worthy of our confidence, our commitment to His purpose for our lives, and our faithful obedience?

TAKE it FUTHER: Sing together or listen to Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!



- Joshua 2;1-21

If you were to jump ahead to the first page of Matthew and read the genealogy of Jesus, you'd come across the name Rahab. The interesting part is Rahab was not originally part of Israel's family. She was not a particularly important person. She was not exactly a virtuous woman or upstanding citizen (at least leading up to this story) Not to mention the obvious—she was a woman. (women usually were not considered important enough to list in family genealogies back then)

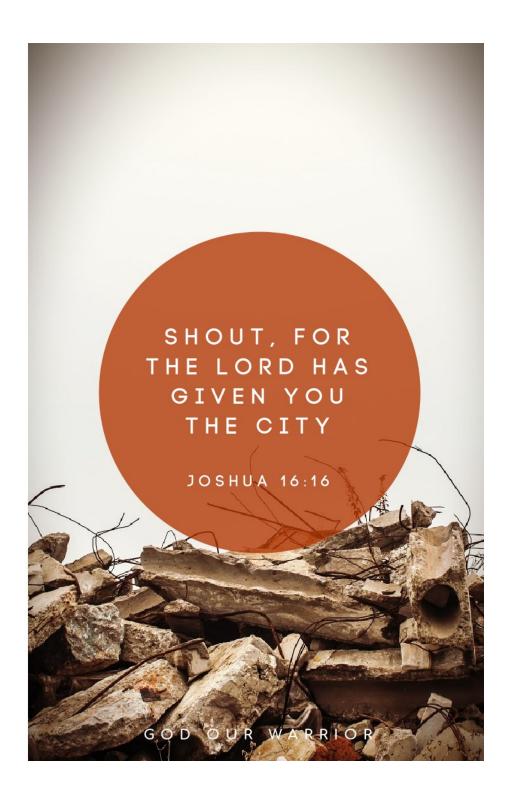
Today's passage is Rahab's story – her fear and respect for the one true God of Israel that she'd heard rumors about; her bravery inspired by that respect; her actions to save her family; her critical role in God's plan to establish His people in their new home.

Its also part of God's own story. In particular, we are reminded in the Rahab story that God has a gracious plan that ultimately includes those families and nations outside of Israel as well. Rahab's faith is used to rescue her family who then become part of God's chosen people. And it will be from the line of Rahab that we get the great King David and the even greater King Jesus.

Rahab's name in Jesus' genealogy is a neat little sign that this king comes, at least in part, from a line of sinners on the outside of the religious establishment, and that He has come to bestow God's blessings on those whom others might consider unimportant or those who don't have notable family names backing them up, or those who's character and past lifestyles are perhaps less than admirable. He takes His place alongside sinners on the outside of God's family so that He might share with them His status as a dearly loved Son.

DISCUSS-

How does the Rahab story challenge and/or encourage you?



WEEK 2 / DAY 6

SCRIPTURE READING

- Joshua 3 and 6 (*Jesus Storybook Bible—The Warrior Leader*) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewXXQSMlCkk

Sometimes, if I'm working with one of my kids on their sports skills, maybe their jump shot or their tennis backhand, I might show off a little...maybe whip a shot down the line that catches their attention or drain a 3-pointer from a ways out (not that that happens all that often!). The goal is not just to show off, but perhaps to be able to say to the kids, "See that? Stick with me, learn from me, and you'll be good to go."

In some ways, this story is like the one we read two days ago. God is almost showing off a bit. The Israelites are finally entering into their land of promise. They come to the fortress of Jericho with its massive walls protecting it. They perhaps wonder how in the world they'll be victorious. And God essentially wins the battle for them. Stick with me (He says), and you'll be good to go.

Its an important lesson they need to learn. Whenever the Israelites doubt the power, the promises, or the love of God for them, they usually go chasing after other gods and worthless idols. They bow in worship to those gods and do detestable things to make those dead gods happy. What they need is to remember and trust the might of the living God who has promised to faithfully work His power on their behalf...and proven He can do it!

It's the same thing we need. We need to remember the great promises God has pledged to us—us resurrection life in a new creation fully restored to its original goodness, a day where there is no more sin to shame us or death and loss to bring tears and regret, no more feeling distant from the one who made us and loves us. And we can look to the power that raised Jesus from the dead as proof that God is able to do it. We don't need the promises or temptations of cheap idols. We can wait faithfully on the return of the One who's already out in front, fighting...and winning(!) our battles for us.

JOURNAL

