GOD SAID LIVE!

MOUNT CARMEL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

From the moment that God breathed life into this world, we were created to live an abundant life. Throughout Scripture we see God redeem the broken, sinful, and dying. Through the salvation that comes from the name of Jesus, we're called to live. Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and rose a few days later. Well, that resurrection power, it runs in our veins too! GOD SAID LIVE!

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

THE BIBLICAL TEXT

We begin each guide with the text from Scripture. We believe all discussions about the truth God has revealed to us should begin with his inspired Word. So, we encourage you to read the text carefully even if the verses are ones you are already familiar with.

EQUIP

The questions presented in the "equip" section of each guide are designed to help you read the biblical text carefully. By doing so, you can figure out the meaning of the passage. Some questions might lead to obvious answers, but others may not. What is important is that the questions force you to slow down and consider the text beyond just a quick and cursory reading. It also provides the basis for an informed discussion on biblically rooted ways to apply the text, as the next section covers. Note that, at the end of each guide, we have included thoughts about the Equip questions. These thoughts do not cover every possible answer, nor do they claim to be the best possible answers. However, they can help guide you if you feel puzzled by a certain Bible passage.

ENCOURAGE

The "encourage" questions aim to move you from understanding the text toward applying it to your life. These questions will begin this process by asking you to reflect on your life as it was, as it is, and as it could

be in relationship to what the Bible passage teaches. By prompting you to think about your life in the light of what Scripture teaches, you can be encouraged to be open to God's transforming work in you.

ENTHUSE

In the "enthuse" section, we ask you to consider a specific way that you can apply the truth of Scripture to your life that week. This always begins with prayer to God and seeking his guidance. In many cases, we then ask you to reflect on how it went when you sought to live out what God was calling you to do.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Finally, the "something to consider" section provides you with a devotional reading from one of the writers behind this study. The devotionals aim to present you with both thoughtful and personal insights on the topic. Our thoughts and stories may help you to live out the Scripture passages as well.

TAKE ACTION

The final section of each guide is a call to action! What are you going to do with the Scripture you just studied? What are you going to do with the challenges presented in the guides? What are you going to do with what God may lay on your heart as you read through Scripture and pray?

LIVE 01

DRY BONES COME TO LIFE

EZEKIEL 37:1-14

APRIL 2, 2023

EZEKIEL 37:1-14 (NIV)

The Valley of Dry Bones

1The hand of the Lord was on me, and he
brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and
set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of
bones. 2He led me back and forth among
them, and I saw a great many bones on the
floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.
3He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones
live?"

I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

4Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these
bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the
word of the Lord! 5This is what the Sovereign
Lord says to these bones: I will make breath
enter you, and you will come to life. 6I will
attach tendons to you and make flesh come
upon you and cover you with skin; I will put
breath in you, and you will come to life. Then
you will know that I am the Lord.'"

7So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as
I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling
sound, and the bones came together, bone to
bone. 8I looked, and tendons and flesh
appeared on them and skin covered them, but
there was no breath in them.

[9]Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath;
prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is
what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath,
from the four winds and breathe into these
slain, that they may live.'" [10]So I prophesied as
he commanded me, and breath entered them;
they came to life and stood up on their feet—a
vast army.

[11]Then he said to me: "Son of man, these
bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our
bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we
are cut off.' [12]Therefore prophesy and say to
them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says:
My people, I am going to open your graves
and bring you up from them; I will bring you
back to the land of Israel. [13]Then you, my
people, will know that I am the Lord, when I
open your graves and bring you up from them.
[14]I will put my Spirit in you and you will live,
and I will settle you in your own land. Then you
will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I
have done it, declares the Lord.'"

GENESIS 12:1-3 (NIV)

The Call of Abram

1The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

2"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
3I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."

EQUIP

The prophet Ezekiel delivered his messages during a time when the Israelites were held captive in a foreign land while their own nation lay in ruins. Read Ezekiel 37:1-3 and Genesis 12:1-3. In light of their current circumstances, how would the Israelites have interpreted the scene that Ezekiel describes? How would their situation have made them doubt the promise that God gave Abraham centuries earlier?

Read Ezekiel 37:4-14. What does the rest of Ezekiel's vision entail? According to God, how could this image give his people hope?

ENCOURAGE

Grief and hopelessness inevitably come our way during certain parts of our lives. It is not hard to understand how the Israelites may have felt distant or abandoned by God during their captivity. The image

of the dry bones captured this feeling well. Describe a time in your life when you felt your hope tested or drained.

Ezekiel's prophesy goes on to show that God's mighty power can give life to the dead and even raise a mighty army out of dead skeletons. Because of this, the Israelites could have hope that God hadn't abandoned them or broken his promise to Abraham. Has God ever restored your hope during times when you felt tested or drained? If so, how?

ENTHUSE

It is easy to fall into hopelessness when our circumstances are painful and difficult. Yet, the Bible encourages us to rejoice in the Lord always. David, for instance, asks God in Psalm 51:8, "Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice." This week, think of how you can seek joy and gladness even in the midst of difficulties. God is trustworthy even when it seems like all is lost. Take

time to reflect on how God has restored you from troubles in the past. Remember his healing power. Pray on it. Journal in the space below about how remembering God's help in the past can sustain you now and in the future.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Amanda Scherer

Sometimes we sing a worship song to God in which we declare, "I see the evidence of your goodness all over my life." This has never resonated more deeply with me than in the last few years. I'm going to be completely honest. Before, I went through many years of dark despair, loss, and doubt. I was nothing but dry bones. My relationship with God was merely muscle memory of a time past, and my soul was comatose. That's what my miscarriage did to me.

Grief is a beast. It overtakes you and holds you captive. It isn't just a loss of someone or

something. It's a loss of yourself that becomes a prison. For years, I was locked away, not knowing how to live. I had not known much grief in my life before my miscarriage.

One day, I told Liz, a dear friend of mine, that I couldn't wait to get over it. Her response was startling but wise. She told me, "Amanda, you don't get over it. You have to learn to live while carrying it." It took me many years and more losses before I could completely comprehend this.

It wasn't until one of my best friends from college unexpectedly passed away that I grasped the full meaning of these words. In the wake of her death, I was filled with a deep conviction to live each day to its fullest. To live a life that is honest, worthy of the title Daughter of the King. To love others fiercely in light of God's character. Surprisingly, it was grief from a miscarriage that took my life, and it was the loss of my dear friend that gave it back.

I wouldn't let grief define me, but rather learn to live while carrying it.

Let me tell you, it wasn't easy. As I began to dive back into the Bible, I was still filled with tremendous doubt. I actually prayed one morning, "God, I cannot live in mediocrity anymore. I need you to show me your truth in Scripture, or we have to part ways." (I can hear the gasps from my irreverence.)

But here is the truth. I see myself right in Ezekiel's vision! I was a pile of dry bones, but then I heard the word of the Sovereign Lord. His power drew my bones together, attached my tendons, and made my flesh and skin grow. Through various people, God breathed life into my body until I could breathe and live again.

Living proof, the evidence of God's immense goodness. All. Over. My. Life.

TAKE ACTION

For many people, it can help to have a certain Scripture to recall during difficult times. This week, take a dive into the Bible to find a verse or passage that you can commit to memory. Don't be afraid to ask a fellow Christian for help in finding a passage that will serve you well. Once you find it, write it down somewhere you'll see it often, commit to remembering it, and share it with someone close to you.

EQUIP THOUGHTS

The prophet Ezekiel delivered his messages during a time when the Israelites were held captive in a foreign land while their own nation lay in ruins. Read Ezekiel 37:1-3 and Genesis 12:1-3. In light of their current circumstances, how would the Israelites have interpreted the scene that Ezekiel describes? How would their situation have made them doubt the promise that God gave Abraham

centuries earlier? As they entered their tenth year of captivity, the Israelites' hopes of becoming a flourishing nation had to be shaky. They were grieving the loss of their nation and the deaths of many Israelites. In this grief, many people lost hope: hope for redemption and hope in the promise God made to Abraham. Like the valley of dry bones, their nation seemed dead. In this situation, God's promise that Abraham's nation would be great and blessed probably sounded like a lie.

Read Ezekiel 37:4-14. What does the rest of Ezekiel's vision entail? According to God, how could this image give his people hope? Ezekiel's vision begins with nothing more than a valley full of dead skeletons. However, Ezekiel prophesies to the bones as God instructs him, so they are put together and given the breath of life. Thanks to the very words of God, they go from being a valley of dead people to being a vast army. God tells Ezekiel to let the Israelites know that, like these skeletons, they too could rise to life even from the depths of despair. God's Spirit would give them—and their nation—life once again.

NOTES

LIVE 02

JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-22

APRIL 9, 2023

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-14 (NIV)

[1]Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. [2]By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

[3]For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4]that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, [5]and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. [6]After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. [7]Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, [8]and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

[9]For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [10]But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. [11]Whether,

then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

The Resurrection of the Dead

[12]But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? [13]If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. [14]And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. [15]More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. [16]For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. [17]And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. [18]Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. [19]If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

[20]But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. [21]For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. [22]For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

EQUIP

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. Paul wants to remind his readers of the gospel that he had preached to them. The word "gospel" is derived from words that mean "good news." The term good news would have been commonly used for a variety of reasons. Good news could have been used when talking about a military victory, the birth of a child, or really any significant moment. What is the gospel or good news that Paul is referring to here?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-11. According to Paul, why does he have the privilege of preaching the gospel?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-22. Paul talks about a foundational piece of the Christian faith: the resurrection of Jesus. Why would it be a tragic mistake to deny the resurrection? But why can we have hope when we believe it?

ENCOURAGE

Doubt is a normal aspect of our lives. When we haven't witnessed something firsthand, it can become easy to question whether something is true or false. Paul understands this, and so he encourages his readers with what he knows to be truth: that Jesus did physically rise from the dead. Can you think of a time when you found yourself struggling with doubt, but someone encouraged you to find the truth? Explain what you went through during that time.

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Paul asserts that the resurrection of Jesus is transformational. It truly changes everything! If you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then it has to transform the way you think and operate. How has the good news of the resurrection of Jesus transformed your life?

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ENTHUSE

The power of Jesus' resurrection is still alive and active today. Paul says in Romans 10:9, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be

saved." (NIV) This is tremendous news for us today! How can it transform your attitude and actions? Take time to reflect and pray on it. Write down your thoughts here.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Aaron Adams

I don't know about you, but sometimes I find it easy to read parts of Scripture and view them as "stories of the past." I wasn't present when these Scriptures were written. I didn't witness the teachings and miracles of Jesus. I certainly wasn't present at the crucifixion of Jesus, nor was I there when he rose from the dead.

But these moments aren't just "stories from the past." These Scriptures are life changing. They're transformational. And they're alive for us today!

In 1 Corinthians 15:14, Paul says, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." (NIV) Paul's point is that Jesus rose from the dead, and if we believe it, it changes absolutely everything! It changes everything, even

for us today. God is at work, and he is actively present in our world today.

I am so thankful for the sacrifice of Jesus and that he rose from the dead. He defeated death so that I have an opportunity to be made right with God! Hallelujah!

TAKE ACTION

Have you ever been asked why you believe something? It was important for Paul to reinforce the facts behind Jesus' resurrection and provide the names of those who had seen the risen Jesus. So, why do you believe? Take some time to write out why you believe the good news. Some points to consider: What are the Scriptures that have encouraged you to press onward in your faith? Who are the people who have been influential in your faith?

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. Paul wants to remind his readers of the gospel that he had preached to them. The word "gospel" is derived from words that mean "good news." The term good news would have been commonly used for a variety of reasons. Good news could have been used when talking about a military victory, the birth of a child, or really any significant moment. What is the gospel or good news that Paul is referring to here? Paul

reminds his audience that Jesus died for our sins. Jesus was buried and rose again on the third day. Jesus then appeared to his disciples and others.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-11. According to Paul, why does he have the privilege of preaching the gospel? Paul makes it clear that he didn't win the right to preach the gospel by being a good person. After all, he used to persecute Christians. Rather, the grace of God allows him to preach. In verse 11, he reminds the Corinthians that he's preaching the same good news as the other apostles.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-22. Paul talks about a foundational piece of the Christian faith: the resurrection of Jesus. Why would it be a tragic mistake to deny the resurrection? But why can we have hope when we believe it? Paul asserted that faith would be useless if the resurrection never occurred. After all, we'd still be trapped in our sins, and we would not rise again after death. However, we can have hope because Jesus did in fact rise from the dead, conquering death itself. Unlike Adam, who trusted himself and experienced death, we can trust Christ and experience true life.

NOTES

LIVE 03

LAZARUS, COME OUT!

JOHN 11:1-44

APRIL 16, 2023

JOHN 11:1-44 (NIV)

The Death of Lazarus

1Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was
from Bethany, the village of Mary and her
sister Martha. 2(This Mary, whose brother
Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who
poured perfume on the LORD and wiped his
feet with her hair.) 3So the sisters sent word to
Jesus, "LORD, the one you love is sick."

4When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness
will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory
so that God's Son may be glorified through it."
5Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and
Lazarus. 6So when he heard that Lazarus was
sick, he stayed where he was two more days,
7and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go
back to Judea."

8"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the
Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are
going back?"

9Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours
of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime
will not stumble, for they see by this world's
light. 10It is when a person walks at night that
they stumble, for they have no light."

[11]After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

[12]His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." [13]Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

[14]So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, [15]and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

[16]Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

[17]On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. [18]Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, [19]and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. [20]When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

[21]"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had

been here, my brother would not have died.
[22]But I know that even now God will give you
whatever you ask."

[23]Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise
again."

[24]Martha answered, "I know he will rise again
in the resurrection at the last day."

[25]Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and
the life. The one who believes in me will live,
even though they die; [26]and whoever lives by
believing in me will never die. Do you believe
this?"

[27]"Yes, LORD," she replied, "I believe that you
are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to
come into the world."

[28]After she had said this, she went back and
called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is
here," she said, "and is asking for you."
[29]When Mary heard this, she got up quickly
and went to him. [30]Now Jesus had not yet
entered the village, but was still at the place
where Martha had met him. [31]When the Jews
who had been with Mary in the house,
comforting her, noticed how quickly she got

up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

32When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34"Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

35Jesus wept.

36Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

37But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

38Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39"Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the

dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

40Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you
believe, you will see the glory of God?”

41So they took away the stone. Then Jesus
looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that
you have heard me. 42I knew that you always
hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the
people standing here, that they may believe
that you sent me.”

43When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud
voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44The dead man
came out, his hands and feet wrapped with
strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes
and let him go.”

EQUIP

Read John 11:1-16. How does the author describe Jesus's relationship with Lazarus and his family? How did Jesus respond to the news that Lazarus was sick?

Read John 11:17-37. How did Martha and Mary react to Jesus when he arrived four days after Lazarus's death? How did Jesus respond when he saw the people mourning?

Read John 11:38-44. According to Jesus, how would witnessing Lazarus's revival from the dead transform the people around him?

ENCOURAGE

In John 11:36-37, the people watching Jesus as he wept near Lazarus's tomb could see that Jesus clearly loved his friend, but they couldn't understand why a loving miracle worker allowed Lazarus to die in the first place. As the rest of the event shows, God planned to do something even greater than a healing: he brought a dead man back to life. Have you ever experienced a time when it felt as if God were callously holding out on answering one of your prayers, only to find that he had something even greater in store for you? What ups and downs did your faith go through during this time?

As we know from the Bible, God is the creator of the entire cosmos who oversees all of eternity and knows the heart and mind of every person he has made. We also know that Jesus was God in the flesh. So, in this chapter of John's account, we find the omniscient God crying when he sees his children crying. Since God never changes, he is still deeply moved when he sees his children in pain. How can taking this truth to heart influence your perception of God and your relationship with him?

ENTHUSE

This week, take time to pray openly to God about any hurts and pains you are going through. Remember that acknowledging your pain isn't a sign of unbelief. After all, Martha was confused because Jesus didn't heal Lazarus from his illness, yet she still believed that Jesus was the Son of God. As you pray, keep in mind the deep sympathy that Jesus demonstrated to his children in this chapter, remembering that God still sympathizes with your pain as well. Also, think about how you can follow Jesus's loving example when you see others in pain and distress. Please come back to this space to journal about your prayers with God and consider how you can faithfully support others through their struggles as well.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Bobby Miller

To help us along in this devotional, I decided to write a little story.

Once upon a time, there was a young boy who loved a stuffed rabbit that his parents got him for his second birthday. The boy never went anywhere without Mr. Rabbit! He took his pal with him for car

rides, for playground adventures, and for peaceful bedtimes. For years, Mr. Rabbit was the boy's best friend.

One day, however, the boy was in his backyard, tossing Mr. Rabbit high up in the air. After all, according to the boy, Mr. Rabbit wanted to be a pilot someday. At one point, the boy threw his stuffed friend too high and too far. Mr. Rabbit went right over the fence and into the neighbor's yard. As soon as the neighbor's dog saw the stuffed toy, she used her teeth and claws to tear it to shreds, right before the boy's eyes.

The boy's cries were so loud that his father could hear him from inside the house. When the dad came outside, he could immediately tell what happened. He saw the shredded rabbit toy in the other yard, and he saw the waterfall of tears running down his son's face.

The dad loved his son deeply, so he knew exactly what he needed to do. He knelt down in front of his son and said, "Suck it up and calm down. Objectively speaking, there's no reason to cry. That toy is nothing but fabric and stuffing sewn together, so we can replace it soon. Plus, look on the bright side: at least you're not hurt."

The boy instantly calmed down and nodded. "You're right, Dad. Crying won't do anything." After that, the boy never bothered thinking about

Mr. Rabbit again.

And they all lived rationally ever after.

After reading that, you might be saying, "What the heck? Bobby, that is one of the dumbest stories I've ever heard. What loving parent would tell their child to just suck it up after losing something precious to them? And do you seriously expect me to believe that a child would calm down after hearing such a cold response from their parent?"

Well, I agree. The story is stupidly unrealistic. But I think it illustrates some painful, misguided conceptions we have about God's relationship with us.

Chances are, you've heard many times before that God is your loving father. This truth appears in many of our favorite Bible passages and worship songs. However, I think some of us struggle to appreciate the full scope of what that means. When it comes to matters of eternity and salvation, we know God loves us. In fact, he sent Jesus to die for our sins so that we can have eternal life.

But we may fall into the trap of thinking that big ol' God doesn't care about our little human problems. We might think that, since God has already promised us an eternity of everlasting bliss, he might get grumpy when he sees us stressed out over our problems. When we go to him in prayer,

we might be afraid of getting some cold response that dismisses our feelings. Even worse, after he sees our anger and tears, maybe he'll decide we're not faithful enough.

That's not what the Bible teaches about God's love, though—not even close. Take a look at the Psalms, for example. In them, we see faithful men who were willing to share their sorrow and even their anger with God. Since those emotional songs have been preserved for us today, God clearly believes we can learn something from them.

And in today's Bible reading, we directly see God's reaction to his children's sorrow. People were in deep mourning after the death of a man named Lazarus. Of course, Jesus already knew that he was going to bring Lazarus back to life. In fact, even if he didn't revive the dead man right then, Lazarus would've been resurrected along with everyone else at the final judgment. So, did Jesus wag his finger at the friends and family crying over Lazarus? Did he tell them to suck it up? Did he tell them to look on the bright side?

No. As one of the shortest yet most profound sentences in the Bible tells us, "Jesus wept." Other verses explain that he was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled." Some translations render that as "a deep anger welled up within" Jesus. Now, some readers might assume that Jesus was angry because the people were crying despite his

promise to revive Lazarus. But since our Lord was crying as well, many scholars believe Jesus was angry because he saw the deep pain that our fallen, sin-torn world was bringing to his children. Remember, there is a huge difference between righteous anger and selfish, malicious anger.

Let all of that sink in. When God in the flesh saw his children in tears, he didn't lecture them on reasons why it was irrational to cry. Instead, he wept too. In fact, he was angry that our world brought pain to the people he loved.

God's still the same today. When you lose something or someone precious to you, God feels your pain. He's weeping right alongside you. When you find yourself troubled or angry by the suffering you see in the world, God feels your pain. He's infuriated right alongside you.

Yes, one day in the future, God will bring an end to all sorrow and pain, wiping away every last tear. He will bring us into eternal bliss, a place where all our troubles will fade away. He has promised that to us. He has died for us to make that happen. He's waiting for just the right time to carry out his plan.

But, until that day comes, remember that your loving father never dismisses your feelings. Instead, he invites you to bring every hurt, every praise, every sorrow, every joy, right to him. His heart's big enough to receive it all.

And perhaps, when we see others in time of anguish, we can follow our Lord's example. Rather than dish out some explanations to suffering people, maybe it's better to relate to their pain. To feel their sorrow and anger as well. That might sound difficult, but God has given us his Holy Spirit so that we may love others as he loves us. And it's a deep kind of love that respects every hurt and every joy of the heart.

TAKE ACTION

Your challenge this time, should you choose to accept it, is... to listen. More specifically, listen well when people speak with you. While that might sound easy, many of us aren't natural-born listeners! When we hear someone talking, we mentally load up some advice, a joke, or even an insult rather than actually pay attention to how the other person feels. Or maybe we just tune them out altogether. Instead, try listening attentively, respecting the other person's feelings. God respects our hearts, so try extending that same respect to everyone else.

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read John 11:1-16. How does the author describe Jesus's relationship with Lazarus and his family? How did Jesus respond to the news that Lazarus was sick? These verses reveal that Jesus had a close relationship with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Mary had already shown devotion to Jesus by anointing him with perfume. The text describes Lazarus as one

whom Jesus loved. Regardless, Jesus did not go immediately to heal Lazarus from his illness. Instead, he decided to wait because he wanted to do something that would make the people "believe." Jesus was committed enough to his mission that he did not fear the faction of Jews who were trying to stone him.

Read John 11:17-37. How did Martha and Mary react to Jesus when he arrived four days after Lazarus's death? How did Jesus respond when he saw the people mourning? Martha and Mary each pointed out that Lazarus wouldn't have died if Jesus had arrived sooner and healed him of his illness. Still, Martha, Lazarus's sister, expressed confidence that Jesus was the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah. She also expressed her faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Once Jesus reached Mary and the other people in mourning, he wept as well. He felt deeply moved and troubled when he saw the crowd in pain due to death's grip on the world.

Read John 11:38-44. According to Jesus, how would witnessing Lazarus's revival from the dead transform the people around him? Based on Jesus's words in this passage, Lazarus wouldn't be the only one transformed during this miracle. The people watching this event take place would see the glory of God at work, allowing them to believe that the Father sent his Son into the world.

NOTES

LIVE 04

THE TRUTH OF GOD'S SPOKESMEN (SCRIPTURE) BRINGS LIFE

2 KINGS 4:8-37 & 42-44
2 KINGS 13:20-21

APRIL 23, 2023

2 KINGS 4:8-37 (NIV)

The Shunammite's Son Restored to Life

8 One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. 9 She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. 10 Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

11 One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. 12 He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. 13 Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'"

She replied, "I have a home among my own people."

14 "What can be done for her?" Elisha asked.

Gehazi said, "She has no son, and her husband is old."

[15]Then Elisha said, “Call her.” So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. [16]“About this time next year,” Elisha said, “you will hold a son in your arms.”

“No, my lord!” she objected. “Please, man of God, don’t mislead your servant!”

[17]But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.

[18]The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. [19]He said to his father, “My head! My head!”

His father told a servant, “Carry him to his mother.” [20]After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. [21]She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out.

[22]She called her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.”

[23]“Why go to him today?” he asked. “It’s not the New Moon or the Sabbath.”

"That's all right," she said.

[24]She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Lead on; don't slow down for me unless I tell you." [25]So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, "Look! There's the Shunammite! [26]Run to meet her and ask her, 'Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?'"

"Everything is all right," she said.

[27]When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why."

[28]"Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?"

[29]Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. Don't greet anyone you meet, and if anyone

greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy's face."

30But the child's mother said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So he got up and followed her.

31Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, "The boy has not awakened."

32When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. 33He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord. 34Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy's body grew warm. 35Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

36Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite." And he did. When she came, he said, "Take your son." 37She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

2 KINGS 4:42-44 (NIV)

Feeding of a Hundred

42A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said.

43"How can I set this before a hundred men?" his servant asked.

But Elisha answered, "Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: 'They will eat and have some left over.'" 44Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.

2 KINGS 13:20-21 (NIV)

20Elisha died and was buried.

Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. 21Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.

EQUIP

Elisha was a prophet to Israel during a time when many of God's people were turning away from the laws of the Lord and worshipping idols instead. To learn more about Elisha, read 2 Kings 4:8-37 and 4:42-44. What amazing miracles did this prophet carry out in God's name? Also consider how these examples of his ministry reflect the ministry of Jesus.

Read 2 Kings 13:20-21. What happens in this brief but surprising account? What does it suggest about the validity of Elisha's ministry?

ENCOURAGE

Our text from 2 Kings 13 begins with Elisha dead. Basically, his ministry of helping common people and guiding kings was over. Have you ever lost a close mentor, a spiritual leader, or someone else you looked up to? How does it feel to lose a person like that, and how has that loss impacted your faith?

Even though Elisha was dead, the Lord still used his body to work a miracle and bring a dead man back to life. Plus, his ministry is still recorded for us today. In what ways have you seen God use the legacy of faithful people to keep making a positive impact?

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We have already talked in this series about how God can bring life even from death. In this story, God uses dead bones to restore a man to life. How can this story encourage you when you are facing challenging times?

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ENTHUSE

God used Elisha to speak his truth to the kings of Israel. The legacy of Elisha's ministry was so significant that his bones channeled miracles even after his death. His ministry would go on to inspire many of the Lord's faithful people. In this coming week, pray that God would show you a person in your life who could benefit from some encouragement, especially if they've been an inspiration to you. Then, plan a time

to meet with that person—even if it's just for lunch or on a break—and have a meaningful conversation with them. Get to know each other better. As you do this, pray that God will show you ways that you can continue loving this person in the same way he loves all his people. Use the space below to write about what God reveals to you.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Aaron Thatcher

In 2 Kings 13:10-18, King Joash of Israel desperately begs for counsel from Elisha while the old prophet lies on his deathbed. Elisha dies after offering his final prophecy, leaving Jehoash to lead without any more of his prophetic guidance. Elisha himself experienced the loss of a godly mentor years earlier when the Lord took Elijah up into heaven in 2 Kings 2. Like many of us, the men in these stories knew the pain and loneliness of losing a trusted spiritual advisor.

Yet, the legacy of Elisha's ministry persisted even after his death. With just one touch of his bones, a dead man's corpse came back to his life. His words continue to have power for us today as Scripture,

with his amazing faith offering an example for us to live by. Much like how Elisha walked in Elijah's footsteps, the ministry and guidance of those whom we have lost carries forward with us.

Our own efforts to live like Jesus, pointing toward the good news of his return, can have the power to impact others, especially those who look up to us. For those of us who survive our mentors, we can live out their faithful legacy every day. In doing so, we can lead lives that will direct others to Jesus. While the people who guided our faith will pass on, that does not mean God will stop using their ministry. He will use us, in their memory, to do his work in the world.

TAKE ACTION

Although face-to-face talks are usually the best way to connect with someone, there are other ways as well. Here's one special way to show someone that you appreciate them: write a nice letter for them. Yes, a letter, written with a pen or pencil. No matter how bad your handwriting is, an encouraging letter can be a special keepsake. Perhaps you could write a kind letter to the same person you meet with for the Enthuse section. Or you could write it for someone else, maybe someone far away who could use some love. Whatever the case, take action and give somebody kind words they need to hear—or, in this case, read.

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Elisha was a prophet to Israel during a time when many of God's people were turning away from the laws of the Lord and worshipping idols instead. To learn more about Elisha, read 2 Kings 4:8-37 and 4:42-44. What amazing miracles did this prophet carry out in God's name? Also consider how these examples of his ministry reflect the ministry of Jesus. During his life, Elisha performed many miracles. Even just in 2 Kings 4, we see him raise a faithful woman's son from the dead (v. 8-37) and use a few loaves of bread to feed one hundred people (v. 42-44). Many of these miracles are similar to those later performed by Jesus, like the feeding of five thousand people and raising Lazarus from the dead.

Read 2 Kings 13:20-21. What happens in this brief but surprising account? What does it suggest about the validity of Elisha's ministry? Some Israelites had to hurry up and bury a man before some foreign raiders attacked them, so they tossed the corpse into Elisha's tomb. Somehow, the man came to life after touching Elisha's bones. The story does not explicitly say how touching the prophet's bones brought this man back to life. However, a miracle clearly occurred since touching bones does not usually revive the dead. Since Elisha performed many miracles during his life with the power he received from the Lord, the source of power for this miracle probably came from God himself. God clearly demonstrated here that Elisha's ministry was a miraculous one, expanding even beyond the prophet's death.

NOTES

LIVE 05

THE SPIRIT WHO RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD IS THE SPIRIT WHO LIVES IN US

ROMANS 8:1-14

APRIL 30, 2023

ROMANS 8:1-14 (LIVING BIBLE - TLB)

[1]So, there is now no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ Jesus. [2]For the power of the life-giving Spirit—and this power is mine through Christ Jesus—has freed me from the vicious circle of sin and death. [3]We aren't saved from sin's grasp by knowing the commandments of God because we can't and don't keep them, but God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours—except that ours are sinful—and destroyed sin's control over us by giving himself as a sacrifice for our sins. [4]So now we can obey God's laws if we follow after the Holy Spirit and no longer obey the old evil nature within us.

[5]Those who let themselves be controlled by their lower natures live only to please themselves, but those who follow after the Holy Spirit find themselves doing those things that please God. [6]Following after the Holy Spirit leads to life and peace but following after the old nature leads to death [7]because the old sinful nature within us is against God. It never did obey God's laws and it never will. [8]That's why those who are still under the control of their old sinful selves, bent on following their old evil desires, can never please God.

[9]But you are not like that. You are controlled by your new nature if you have the Spirit of God living in you. [10]Yet, even though Christ lives within you, your body will die because of sin; but your spirit will live, for Christ has pardoned it. [11]And if the Spirit of God, who raised up Jesus from the dead, lives in you, he will make your dying bodies live again after you die, by means of this same Holy Spirit living within you.

[12]So, dear brothers, you have no obligations whatever to your old sinful nature to do what it begs you to do. [13]For if you keep on following it you are lost and will perish, but if through the power of the Holy Spirit, you crush it and its evil deeds, you shall live. [14]For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

EQUIP

Read Romans 8:1-8. According to Paul, why is knowing God's commandments not enough to save us from sin?

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Read Romans 8:1-8 again. What is God's plan to save us, and how is he carrying out that plan?

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Read Romans 8:9-14. How can the Holy Spirit give hope to believers even as they face sin and death?

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ENCOURAGE

In this passage, Paul explains how his own efforts to be right before God were never enough. Instead, he learned to rely on the Holy Spirit. On your own faith walk, have you ever seen your own efforts to be a good person come up short? Have you ever felt God

working through those faults in a way you couldn't on your own?

God continues to offer his Spirit to all who believe in him. Based on what you've read in Romans 8, and based on what you've seen God doing in your life, how can this truth bring you hope?

ENTHUSE

This passage teaches us to live right with God by putting aside our fleshly desires and instead embracing his Spirit. The Scripture tells us we have a choice about who and what we allow to control our lives. Oftentimes, what we're following is evident by what we're doing and thinking. Our behaviors echo what's in our heart.

This week, we invite you to take some time to reflect on who and what controls you. Ask God to show you areas where you may be letting your natural desires stand between you and him. Next, ask him to fill you with his Spirit so you may release control to him in this

area. It might be helpful to talk with a trusted friend and pray together.

Use the space below to reflect on this process. Pray to God about the struggles you may face, and celebrate with him if you feel him at work in you.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Darletta Martinez

In Genesis, we're told that God breathed his very life into the first human, Adam. I can't help but wonder if that was humanity's first experience with the life-giving Spirt of God. Since I'm no theologian, I don't have a great answer to that question, but even the most educated among us would say there are mysteries about God and his infinite love for us we don't understand.

For any who have struggled to breathe, or watched someone struggle to breathe, we can tell

what the body craves in a breath: LIFE! Do our God-given spirits crave a similar spiritual breath? I believe so. We know, through our text, that God's Spirit gives us life and creates in us a connection with the Father that was made possible through our Lord Jesus Christ.
If I let my imagination wander, I can envision that same Spirit in the tomb with the human body of Jesus. I can see the Spirit breathe life into his body so that he could conquer death, rise again, and complete his work on Earth. I see his chest rise, his breath catch, and his beautiful eyes open. I see him sit up and breathe in the sweet fragrance of the Spirit.

As followers of Jesus, we believe he rose from the dead. His resurrection holds immense significance. Through his resurrection, he demonstrated absolute obedience to the Father, despite the physical and emotional pain it put him through. Like us, he found that the spirit could conquer the flesh, as we see in passages such as Matthew 26:41. In fact, God conquered the grave for us to live! As if that weren't enough, he left with us the Holy Spirit to live within us, making our relationship with the Father right and our time on Earth meaningful.

His Spirit is still at work today. Your enemy and mine, Satan, cannot conquer this Spirit within us. The devil can only lie, trying to confuse us and lead

us in ways that God doesn't intend for our lives. You see, God's perfect plan for our lives leads us to Jesus and makes us useful for his kingdom. If we want to live that way, then we must train ourselves to seek him first and pray in the Spirit for wisdom and guidance—even in the small details of our lives. As we do this, we come to life in Christ in everything we are and everything we do.

My prayer for you is to grasp the meaning of this in your life. To have the courage to step forward into the unknown in faith as you learn to listen to the Spirit. To celebrate the sacrifice of our Lord in the way you live. This is my own prayer, and as you reflect, I hope it becomes yours too.

May God richly bless you in your journey here on Earth as he prepares you to live with him eternally.

TAKE ACTION

When we learn about how we should live according to God's will rather than our own fleshly desires, we may fall into a dangerous trap. We see our faults, but rather than trust in God's power to transform us, we just end up trying harder to be perfect. Of course, that will end in failure and frustration.

So, to remember your dependence on God, sprinkle lots of prayers through your days to come. Thank him whenever something goes well—even if it's as simple as a safe drive. Tell him you still trust him whenever

something doesn't go well—even if it's as simple as waiting in a long, long line. And whenever you find your thoughts or actions straying from his will for you, don't beat yourself up over it. Instead, pray for his guidance and reaffirm your trust in him. After all, he's glad to help you live through his Spirit.

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read Romans 8:1-8. According to Paul, why is knowing God's commandments not enough to save us from sin? God's commandments were given to the Israelites a long time before the birth of Christ (see Exodus 24). That law gave them specific instructions on how God wanted them to live. The Israelites struggled to keep those commandments. In fact, all of humanity has struggled to live right with God due to the sin running through us. No sinful human can keep God's law perfectly, so knowing what it says isn't enough to purify us.

Read Romans 8:1-8 again. What is God's plan to save us, and how is he carrying out that plan? God loves us and wants to have a relationship with us, so he doesn't leave us in a place where we are always trying—but always failing—to obey him. Instead, he gave us himself through Jesus so that, if we accept him by faith, we can live in the way he created us to live. By following the Holy Spirit rather than our own desires, we can live peacefully with God.

Read Romans 8:9-14. How can the Holy Spirit give hope to believers even as they face sin and death?
As we learn to seek and listen to the Holy Spirit, we are filled with power that is not our own. This helps us to obey what God directs us to do. Our habits and instincts change: rather than look inside ourselves for all the answers, we seek Jesus and the Spirit in all things first. As we do this, we hear him more and recognize his voice above our own or society's. We become filled with the life-giving Holy Spirit who guides us and empowers us to do more than we ever could on our own. His power even carries us through eternity.

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GOD SAID
LIVE!

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