



A Series to Help with the New Normal

Small Groups

Week 1: Living in the Wilderness | Numbers 14:1-25

OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, your words are sweet to the taste, sweeter than honey; let them be my daily meditation and my study. Give me ears to hear. Teach me your ways, grant me patience and persistence, and equip me for every good work. Guide my feet, keep me from every false way, for you alone speak the words of life. Amen. (based on Psalm 119 and 2 Timothy 3-4)

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree/disagree with the sermon this week?
- What's the one thing right now that immediately pushes your buttons, causes you to grumble? Now what about that is so upsetting?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Numbers 14:1-25

- What strikes you most about this passage?
- What is your immediate reaction to the people? When is a time you overreacted or your emotions got the best of you? What did you learn from that experience?
- What does this scripture teach you about God and God's character? How does this impact your life?
- As you consider the reasons the people would like to turn back and their specific complaints, how do you perceive their fears?
 - What giants are you facing right now? How can this passage help you?
 - What fears are overwhelming you?

Read the major events as the story continues: Numbers 15:37-41; 20:1-13; 21:4-9; 22:21-41; 27:1-11(36:5-9); 28:16-25.

Answer the following:

- What's going on and how does this impact the story?
- What do you need to learn that the Israelites are struggling with?
- How will this scripture change your life?



NEXT STEPS:

- Make a list of the fears in your life that may be holding you back. Take one each day and lay it before God for one minute; then read this passage and spend another minute in prayer.
- In prayer, reflect upon the greatest wilderness of your life. What helped you survive and get through? In reflection, what would you have needed or wanted? What lessons does God want you to apply to the coming wilderness?
- What spiritual and life goals does God want you to set?

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

Come, O Holy Spirit, Come!
Come like Holy Fire and burn with us.
Come like Holy Wind and cleanse us.
Come like Holy Light and lead us.
Come like Holy Truth and teach us.
Come like Holy Love and enfold us.
Come like Holy Power and enable us.
Come as Abundant Life and Fill us,
Convert us,
Consecrate us,
Until we are wholly thine.
Come, Holy Spirit, Come!
--A Prayer of the Ancient Church



A Series to Help with the New Normal

Small Groups

Week 2: Living in a Strange Land | Jeremiah 29

OPENING PRAYER:

Give me a pure heart that I may see Thee,
A humble heart that I may hear Thee,
A heart of love that I may serve Thee,
A heart of faith that I may abide in Thee. (Dag Hammarskjold, 1905-1961)

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree/disagree with the sermon this week?
- If you moved as a child, what are your memories? How did you feel?
- Have you ever visited a country where you didn't speak the language? What was that experience like?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

This week's reading is to the exiles who are living in a strange land. The listeners of Jeremiah were living in refugee camps in Babylon. Read Jeremiah 29:1-23.

- Imagine yourself as a refugee and one of the exiles. What do you hear? What is most comforting? Painful?
- V. 10-14 is an often quoted and memorized passage. Why do you believe that to be? What is the 'hitch' to the wonderful promise?
- V. 11-14 highlight how God will bring good out of the bad situation. When have you experienced this in your life? How did/does God want to use that?
- As our state is moving from red to yellow to green, what is Jeremiah 29 trying to teach you? How can you apply this scripture to your life?

Read Jeremiah 30:1-24.

- This passage is part of a section of chapters called 'The Book of Consolation.' What words of consolation do you need to hear in this time? What verses give you comfort?
- Some scientists and experts are saying that our lives will always be different from what they were before the pandemic. What does Jeremiah 29 and 30 teach you about your world and how to live in a 'new normal'?
- Despite all of the losses of this pandemic, what do you see God wanted to restore in your life?



NEXT STEPS:

- Reflect on your life since the pandemic, beginning sometime in mid-March. What changes have you experienced? Pray with God on how to use those experiences.
- Make a list of all the blessings you've experienced in this time. Post it as a reminder.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

"God of life, there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and wear us down; when the road seems dreary and endless, the skies grey and threatening; when our lives have no music in them, and our hearts are lonely, and our souls have lost their courage. Flood the path with light, we beseech Thee; turn our eyes to where the skies are full of promise..."--Saint Augustine



A Series to Help with the New Normal

Small Groups

Week 3: Living in Isolation | Daniel 6

OPENING PRAYER:

Holy and illuminating God, as your Word is opened before us, pierce our preoccupations, our penchant for unexamined and unconscious living, and our stubborn resistance that we may be attentive to your presence. For the sake of Christ we pray. Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree/disagree with the sermon this week?
- How did you do through the weeks of Shelter in Place? What was your biggest struggle? What was the easiest part?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Daniel 6:1-24

- There's so much going on in the early verses of this amazing story. What do you hear? What's your biggest question? How do you respond to 'office politics'?
- What is your take on the response of the King to his advisors/satraps? Is there a time you've felt such peer pressure?
- The decree asked that no one would pray except to the King. Ask yourself how you honestly would have responded. It took tremendous faith for Daniel. What would help you to build that type of faith?
- Where is the hardest area of your life to stand up for your faith? What lessons from Daniel will help you? Who and what could help you?



NEXT STEPS:

- When you reflect on your weeks of isolation in “Shelter in Place,” what would you like to continue in your life? What can help you make that happen?
- Name one area of your life that is the largest struggle for you to stand up for your faith. Spend time each day to pray over this subject.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

Lord, teach me to listen. The times are noisy and my ears are weary with the thousand raucous sounds which continuously assault them. Give me the spirit of the boy Samuel when he said to you, "Speak, for thy servant hears." Let me hear you speaking in my heart. Let me get used to the sound of your voice, that its tones may be familiar when the sounds of the earth die away and the only sound will be the music of your speaking voice. Amen. -A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*



A Series to Help with the New Normal

Small Groups

Week 4: Living in Community | Nehemiah 6

OPENING PRAYER:

Holy and good Creator, you are the God who communicates. Thus, the One who wrote upon tablets of stone is the same One who writes the divine word upon my heart. Prepare me to hear, receive and obey your word. May it penetrate deeply and move me to respond to your Spirit. Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree/disagree with the sermon this week?
- Imagine a time in your life when you really looked forward to something and it was completely the opposite or didn't live up to your expectations. How did that feel? How did you respond?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Nehemiah believed that everything had led him to this purpose. Yet in Nehemiah 6, Nehemiah doesn't face an easy road.

Read Nehemiah 6:1-14.

- What is Nehemiah's response to the opposition and the argument for choosing another path? What does that teach you about your response in life?
- What do you think helped Nehemiah determine the false prophet? What helps you to hear God and the voices of evil in this world?
- While many wanted to derail him, Nehemiah stayed focus on God. What helped him and gave him strength? What gives you strength to stay focused on the 'right' path? What are your weakest points that God wants to help you strengthen?
- A famous business quote says, "good is the enemy of great." How does this phrase apply to the scripture? What was Nehemiah's response? How did that impact the entire nation?

Read Nehemiah 6:15-7:3.

- What jumps out at you?
- What steps does Nehemiah take? What is significant about the timing and placement?
- What does this scripture teach you about setting goals and accountability? How could that help you in everyday life?



NEXT STEPS:

- Goal Setting – we are living in an entirely new era. Spend time in prayer each day on where God is leading you. At the end of the week, spend time with God to create goals for the 'new normal'.
- Who holds you accountable? What would a spiritual accountability team look like for you? Pray over who you could invite into your life?

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

Lord God, help us to open our hearts to your great and amazing love. Help us also to open our minds to your word of truth. May your word for us be a comfort, guide and also, when needed, a word of confrontation. Lord God, help us to open fully the doors of our churches, that we would welcome the stranger, the foreigner and immigrant, and even the one who is really different. Help us, Lord, to blossom and grow in your embracing love and, yes, Lord, help us always to be peacemakers. We rejoice, Lord God, in all your blessings and gifts. We thank you, Lord; in the name of Jesus. Amen.



A Series to Help with the New Normal

Small Groups

Week 5: Living in New Places | Acts 8:1-8; 11:19-26

OPENING PRAYER:

Holy God, you have done a new thing. Risen from the dead, you show us the path to new life. You give us your word, and we hear good news. You give us water, and we are washed clean. Let the words of Scripture and these moments of study impact my life. Help me to see a new way. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree/disagree with the sermon this week?
- What range of emotions did you experience the first time you moved out of your childhood home?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

This passage begins the diaspora – the spreading of the gospel out from Jerusalem. Read Acts 8:1-8.

- What do you make of the fact that the spreading of the gospel comes because of the persecution of the church?
- This reference to Saul/Paul is one of the earliest in Acts. What does this passage teach you about God through Saul? How does this apply to your life?
- How do you think Philip felt having to flee from Jerusalem and settle in a new city like Samaria? How do you think he felt after v. 6-8? How can these verses help you to live in a new normal with the pandemic?
- Because of the persecution in the Acts 8, now the gospel begins to reach Gentiles. Read Acts 11:19-26.
- Antioch was a far different city than the disciples were used to. It was the third largest Roman city with a very diverse population; yet we remember the church in Antioch. What is God's Word trying to teach us?
- Who is often left out by Christians today? How does this scripture impact your life?
- This passage is one of only a handful that use the word, Christian. Why do you think that is? What does the lack of the title teach you about faith? Life with Jesus?



NEXT STEPS:

- Take the following seven groups and pray for one each day of the week: those who have hurt you, (y)our enemies, the LGBTQ community, those with COVID-19, our leaders, those in the other political side from which you identify, your church.
- Pray with God about where you are being sent.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

O God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking guile! Let there be in me no malice, but a prayer for the good of all. Show me the way of righteousness, that I may hurt no one, and help me to bring the blessings of love to others. Open my heart to do your will; strengthen my desire to obey your commandments. May my thoughts and prayers be acceptable to you, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. --Gates of Prayer



A Series to Help with the New Normal

Small Groups

Week 6: Living in a New Kingdom | 1 Peter 2:9-12; Philippians 3:20-21

OPENING PRAYER:

Loving God, we come to you in praise, in humility and in hope. You alone are our promised land, our house with many rooms, our refuge and strength. Be with us today. Pour out your grace, which sustains us beyond measure. Speak a word that we may hear. Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree/disagree with the sermon this week?
- How would you describe the Kingdom of God? (if you struggle with this question, there are many sites available: Christianity.com, ibelieve.com, etc.)

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read 1 Peter 2:4-12

- What strikes you most about this passage?
- What does it mean for you to be 'a living stone'? As you return to your job or a world that is returning to 'green' what would being a living stone look like for you?
- What does Peter mean in v. 8 that Jesus causes people to stumble? How does that apply to your life?
- V. 11 calls Christians "aliens and strangers" or "temporary residents and foreigners", depending on your translation. What do you think this means? What would it look like for you to live as a stranger in your local community?
- If we are described as a spiritual house, what part of your 'spiritual house' and life do you need to improve? What steps will you take to build a strong house with God?

Read Philippians 3:20-21.

- What does it mean to you to be a citizen of heaven? Does this change your way of life? How could it?
- Are you more likely to strive for excellence in your secular life or your spiritual life?



NEXT STEPS:

- Add one spiritual discipline to your life. (start reading or add more scripture, add 5 minutes to your prayer time, start fasting, join a small group, etc.)
- Pray every day for the people with whom you work.
- Identify one person to pray with at work.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

You are cause for rejoicing, O God, and the source of our gladness. You know what afflicts us; you can sense our distress. You remove whatever net will ensnare us; you give our feet firm places to stand. In Christ you have brought us deliverance. For all your mercies we praise your name and worship you now as our refuge and strength. -James G. Kirk