



Week 2

WEEK 2:

PRESENCE, NOT PROSPERITY

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Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and work through the discussion questions.

Have you ever had a day, week, month, or year that you'd call "the worst"? Give one word to describe how you handled that time in your life.

We learned in the video teaching that "earthly redemption is not the point of the Scriptures." How does that truth hit you personally?

Read Hebrews 11:13-16. If earthly redemption isn't the point of the Scriptures, what is?

What does it mean to acknowledge that you are a stranger and exile on earth, desiring a better country? Would you say that describes you? Explain.

Read 1 Peter 1:18-19. What redemption is ours right now, in each and every circumstance we experience? How does this truth inform you about the struggles we read about in Scripture in the lives of faithful men and women who followed Jesus?

Read Philippians 3:7-11. Put this in your own words. What point was Paul making for us today?

Read Philippians 3:12-21. What makes these verses challenging? What makes them encouraging?

What does Philippians 3:20-21 tell us about the goal of spiritual growth—of God's work in our lives? How does this goal motivate you to pursue Christ today?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

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DAY 1—READ HEBREWS 11:13-16

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Have you ever looked back on a hard time in your life with the knowledge that God was at work—even when that work wasn't clear to you? We don't always get to understand God's work in our lives but can know He always provides, often in ways we wouldn't and couldn't imagine. His ways are so much higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8)!

The Old Testament heroes of the faith listed in Hebrews 11 lived by that understanding. Each one had a faith that looked forward. They didn't have a crystal clear view of the future, but they chose to trust and obey God. And they remind us how to live.

We may not see the fulfillment of all of God's promises in our lifetime. But as we live in obedience to God and do what He teaches us in the Bible, we will experience abundant life even in the many trials that come our way.

We can follow difficult and perplexing commands. Though we might be puzzled, we can be confident that God's way is ideal. His thoughts are unsurpassed. When Jesus returns, we will experience the fruit of God's fulfilled promises. The best is yet to come!

What was the primary hope of these Old Testament heroes of the faith written about in Hebrews 11? Why?

Read 1 Peter 2:11-12. What does it mean to be a “sojourner” or an “exile”? What is challenging about understanding this about yourself? How does viewing yourself in this way encourage you?

What is a redemptive story you long to see play out here on earth? How does today’s passage encourage you in that situation?

Thank God for His promise of eternity where every other promise He makes will be ultimately and finally fulfilled. Ask Him to help you live as someone who is looking forward to a better homeland.

DAY 2—READ 1 PETER 1:17-19

¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Peter called out the “futile ways” or aimless conduct of his audience’s ancestors that they were also in danger of. And so are we. It is easier to focus on earthly forms of redemption than it is to center our hearts and lives on the promise of eternal life in Christ.

What are some of those futile, aimless ways you are tempted to focus on?

There is one answer to the problem of focus and daily intention—Jesus gave up His life so you could have eternal life. He is the ultimate demonstration of love that you should emulate. His sacrifice gives purpose to your pain.

It is not easy to live a holy life in this unholy world, but it is always worth it. Jesus was the perfect, sinless Lamb of God. The plan of redemption was God’s plan from the beginning of time and is for all who believe in God and put their faith in Him. Faith in God, then, cannot disappoint us because our faith and hope are in the One who defeated death.

Nothing is impossible with Jesus. You can love people who are hard to love. You can control your thoughts and focus on Him. You can choose holy living because He is holy. Your response to Jesus’s great love for you should be to love deeply so that the lost world is drawn to the Savior you place your faith in.

What does it mean to “conduct yourselves with fear”?

How does 1 Peter 1:18-19 speak to the idea of God’s presence being ultimate in our lives over any measure of earthly prosperity?

How should the realization that you were redeemed by the blood of Jesus impact the way you live?

Thank God for His perfect plan for your redemption. Praise Jesus for the sacrifice He made on your behalf and confess the ways you have taken that for granted instead of seeking to live a holy life. Ask for wisdom to see where and how you need to make changes to your own conduct.

DAY 3—READ PHILIPPIANS 3:7-8A

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

What is it you're longing for in life right now that you would consider great gain? A new job? A promotion? A raise? Getting out of a house you're in and into a new, better one? An acceptance letter for your child to get into the college of his or her choice?

Now consider that "gain" in light of Paul's words here in Philippians 3. There is nothing in this world—no reward, no accomplishment, no better circumstance—that could ever compare with the incredible gift of knowing Jesus.

Paul knew this from experience. Before meeting Christ, he had worked harder than anyone to gain all the things the world has to offer. And he had gained those things—he had the respect and accolades of man. But when Paul met Jesus, his values were completely changed. He understood the meaning of worth differently. He saw what really mattered.

We need to see it too. True success is in direct opposition to what the world defines as success. Ultimately, ambition is futile if it exists apart from a personal, growing relationship with Jesus. The greatest gain in life isn't any form of earthly prosperity. It is the gift of knowing God's presence.

Why did Paul consider everything he had ever gained in earthly value a loss?

How can you tell if knowing Jesus holds the place of greatest worth in your life?

What are your current hopes and dreams? How does knowing Jesus affect those hopes and dreams?

Pray that you would increasingly value knowing Christ Jesus your Lord.

DAY 4—READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:8-9

⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

When we read Bible stories, we often forget the time that has passed between different events. Like a movie, we see all the high points and then the resolution tied up in a perfect bow. What we are missing between the stories is frustration, everyday tasks, and time.

If you have prayed a prayer repeatedly with no response, be encouraged: God has worked in people like you all through Scripture. God always shows up, and we see the beauty of His presence more clearly when our need is great and we've persistently sought His help.

Paul wrestled with a prayer request He did not have answered, and God said, "I'm enough." In Paul's need, God was glorified. In Paul's need, God's supremacy was made known. In Paul's need, it was made clear that Jesus is enough. It was God at work through Paul, not the other way around.

We can get frustrated when we have unanswered prayers. But when we find ourselves crying out to God again and again, we must also remember who He is, regardless of the circumstances we see before us. He is present, and He is at work. He is bringing you to Himself and working in your life—even in your lowest moments.

What did God use Paul's problem to teach him?

When you think of lessons God wants you to learn, is His continual presence and power on that list? Why?

Why is God's continual presence and power so valuable for His followers to learn? What danger is there for us in not understanding that about God?

Thank God that His power is made perfect in weakness. Trust Him with yours.

DAY 5—READ PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11

¹⁰ That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Compared to knowing Jesus, this world offers nothing.

That's why God is willing to use any circumstance we face in life as a way of leading us into deeper fellowship with Him. He knows we need Jesus more than anything else. He wants us to understand that knowing Jesus is everything.

We too often think the temporary things of this life are worth more than they actually are. Even if we know it's not true in theory, we live as if all our hopes and dreams are pinned on temporary, earthly outcomes.

Instead, of those temporary, earthly outcomes, God wants us to know Christ and walk in the power that raised Him from the dead. But to walk in the power of Christ's resurrection, we must first walk in His death. We must die to ourselves, to our ways of thinking, and to our self-righteousness.

The call of Christ is always a call to die. But that call comes with the promise of resurrection, new life, power, and righteousness that is far beyond what we will know in ourselves.

Like Paul, you have the great joy of knowing Christ and being known by Him. You can look forward with joy to knowing that no matter what this world brings, there is more coming for you in your resurrection with Christ.

How is what we receive from Christ exponentially better than anything we can receive in this world?

How do we get to the place that Paul did—willing to consider everything worthless for the sake of Christ?

What excites you most about heaven? How does the hope of heaven give you courage in difficult days?

Praise God for making salvation possible. Thank God for saving you. Ask God to continue giving you courage in this life by looking forward to your life to come.

