

BIBLE STUDY: FACING LIFE'S ISSUES WITH A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

1. **“Issues”** [Definition: a vital or unsettled matter, a concern, a problem]

- A 7-year-old son is killed in an accident while his father is texting
- A daughter in 3rd grade is being bullied at school
- Parents discover their son is a practicing homosexual
- A 19-year-old girl cannot find closure following an abortion
- A family learns its home is being foreclosed
- A secular university undermines your son's faith
- Your spouse wants a divorce
-

List some issues which are currently a problem for you or someone close to you.

What emotions are aroused in persons facing these and similar issues in life?

Is there a common root for these issues?

If so, what?

“Issues” underscores the problem of sin in our lives.

2. **“Perspective”** [Definition: the capacity to view things in their relative importance]

A person's perspective in life depends on that person's worldview. Two opposing worldviews predominate in today's world. What are they?

a. _____

b. _____

“Perspective” implies a specific focus in life.

Take a moment to articulate your perspective relative to the issues you listed above.

What was Adam’s God-given perspective (or focus) in life before the Fall?

Genesis 1:27: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

What does “image of God” mean in terms of Adam’s perspective on life in God’s world?

What was Adam’s perspective in life after the Fall?

Genesis 3:9-13: The Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

What range of emotions is evident in this account?

What did God say/do to change Adam’s focus?

Genesis 3:15: And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

What is the significance of the words “I will” in this verse? (See also Genesis 12:2-3)

The Biblical Perspective

1. The change of focus illustrated from the Psalms.

From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture teaches us the importance of an **outward** focus (on God's Word of promise) for our spiritual well-being rather than an **inward** focus (in our hearts). Psalms 13 and 77 help us to see this in action in the lives of David and Asaph.

In **Psalm 13**, what is David's frame of mind in verses 1-4?

What is the focus of his attention?

What changes in verse 5?

In **Psalm 77**, what is Asaph's frame of mind in verses 1-9?

What is the focus of his attention?

What changes in verses 10 and following?

Read Revelation 7:9-12.

John shares with us his vision of heaven. The vision includes "a great multitude... from every nation, tribe, people and language" (verse 9).

What does their **posture** (verse 11) indicate about their focus?

What do their **words** (v.12) indicate about their focus?

"John sees all the angels of heaven surrounding the throne with their eyes fixed on God. Inside the ring of angels are the elders. Revelation chapter 5 also talks about these elders, 24 of them. They

represent all believers in heaven. The elders are focused on God. The four living creatures do the same.” (*Meditations*, NPH, April 27, 2010, page 61)

2. The issues we face in life are sin-related.

You are having a discussion with a co-worker or a new acquaintance about your Christian beliefs. The heart of your witness is on sin and grace, law and gospel. He/she asks you what you mean about sin. How would you respond? **What is sin?** Take a few minutes to think about your answer. Use the space below to summarize the responses:

Compare your response with the following:

“The Reason for God” Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Manhattan (p.162):

“Sin is the despairing refusal to find your deepest identity in your relationship and service to God. Sin is seeking to become oneself, to get an identity apart from God.

“What does this mean? Everyone gets their identity, their sense of being distinct and valuable, from somewhere or something. Kierkegaard asserts that human beings were made not only to believe in God in some general way, but to love him supremely, center their lives on him above all else, and build their identities on him. Anything other than this is sin.

“Most people think of sin primarily as ‘breaking divine rules,’ but Kierkegaard knows that the very first command of the Ten Commandments is to ‘have no other gods before me’. So, according to the Bible, the primary way to define sin is not just the doing of bad things, but the making of good things into *ultimate* things. It is seeking to establish a sense of self by making something else more central to your significance, purpose, and happiness than your relationship to God. . . . Our need for worth is so powerful that whatever we base our identity and value on, we essentially ‘deify.’ We will look to it with all the passion and intensity of worship and devotion.”

(Compare this with what Luther said: “What it is that is more important to you in your life is your God.” Also, recall his explanation of the 1st Commandment: “We should, fear, love and trust in God above all things.”)

In what respects does Keller’s exposition of the meaning of sin differ from your summation above?

In what way(s) does Keller’s insight into the meaning of sin expand your own understanding?

What (or where) is the focus in life of the person who seeks an identity apart from God?

What are the consequences of such an inner-directed focus?

What is the proper biblical perspective on life, and what are the consequences?

Two Historical Notes: At the time of the Reformation one of the essential differences between the Reformers and Rome had to do with opposing views of the basic human nature after the fall into sin. The Augsburg Confession asserts that we are all “*sine metu Dei, cum concupiscentia* (without a true fear of God, *with* concupiscentia). Rome agreed with the first part of the definition but denied the second part. The Reformers employed a Latin term to explain concupiscentia. They taught with Scripture that man is born with a mind that produces only thoughts *incurvatus in se* (thoughts turned back in upon one’s self). That is the default setting with which we were born. Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to convert inner-directed thinking into outward or other-directed thinking. That is the biblical perspective for dealing with life’s issues.

In today’s terms, we could say that sin begins with the default setting with which we were all born. It’s a disease term passed on from one generation to the next. “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5).

In Article II of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Philip Melancthon wrote: “This is precisely the intention of St. Augustine’s definition that original sin is concupiscentia. It means that when righteousness is lost, concupiscentia follows. Since nature, in its weakness, cannot fear and love God or believe in him, it seeks and loves carnal things; either it despises the judgment of God in its security, or it hates him in its terror. Thus Augustine includes both the defect and the vicious disposition that follows. Concupiscentia is not merely a corruption of the physical constitution, but the evil inclination of man’s higher capacities to carnal things.” (Apol II, 103.24).

NEXT LESSON: What has God done to give us an outward-directed focus in life?

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**BIBLE STUDY: FACING LIFE'S ISSUES
WITH A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE:**

**What has God done to give us
an outward-directed focus in life?**

LESSON 2

1. He established a unilateral covenant with us.

Read Genesis 15:8-10; 17-18: In Abram's day, a contractual agreement between two parties was sealed by cutting an animal in half, linking elbows together, and then walking together between the two halves. In this case, three animals (heifer, goat and ram) were used instead of one. Why?

In verse 17, what indicates that this covenant with Abram was a unilateral rather than a bilateral covenant?

What is significant about that?

How does it affect our focus in life?

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34.

What distinguishes the "new covenant with the house of Israel" from the covenant they broke?

Count the number of times God says "I will" in these verses. What was his purpose for the repetitions?

2. He declared the whole world to be righteous for Jesus' sake.

Read Romans 5:18-19.

To whom do the words "one trespass" refer?

To whom do the words “one act of righteousness” refer?

Who are the beneficiaries of the “one act of righteousness”?

Why is it essential to know that what Christ did, He did for all, not just for some?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:19.

Who has been reconciled to God “in Christ”?

What words does Paul use to explain the meaning of reconciliation?

Read 1 John 2:2.

Why is it essential to know that Christ “is the atoning sacrifice... for the sins of the whole world”?

3. He initiates our relationship with Him.

Read Ephesians 1:4.

What is the significance of the fact that we are children of the Father by His choice rather than by our choice?

Read Ephesians 2:4-5 and Colossians 2:13.

To whom and to what do we owe our salvation?

4. He grounds our faith entirely upon His promises,

Read Romans 10:17.

What is the “message” that Paul has in mind? (Cf. CW 382: “My Hope Is Built On Built On Nothing Less”)

5. He has worked out every last detail of our salvation.

Read Ephesians 1:3-14.

What is Paul’s purpose in emphasizing that God “has blessed us... with every spiritual blessing in Christ”?

6. He provided the means of grace to create, nurture and sustain our faith with its Biblical perspective.

Read 1 Peter 1:23.

“The living and enduring word of God” joins the written word with the visible word, the sacraments.

Read 2 Timothy 3:15.

Paul’s Prayer for the Ephesians (Ephesians 3:14-19):

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

NEXT LESSION: God’s Strategy with Our “Issues” in Life (Joseph)

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BIBLE STUDY: FACING LIFE'S ISSUES WITH A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE – GOD'S STRATEGY WITH OUR "ISSUES" IN LIFE (JOSEPH)

LESSON 3

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews assures us that our God is “able to sympathize with our weaknesses.” That’s because “we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are” (Hebrews 4:15). That’s both instructive and comforting. But Scripture reveals that God does much more than just sympathize with us. He has a strategy. He takes positive action on our behalf, just as He did repeatedly with His saints of old. In Lessons 3-5 we want to recall incidents from the lives of saints of God who faced serious issues in their lives, just as we do. From the experiences in the lives of God’s saints of old, we want to learn something about ourselves when we face similar difficulties, but more importantly, we want to discover what’s in the heart of God when life’s problems put a strain on our faith – leaving us with feelings of fear, shame and guilt.

Joseph

The story of Joseph provides one of many examples by which God reveals his strategy for reaching out to help his own when they face major issues in life. Follow the steps from the beginning of Joseph’s “problem” to its ultimate resolution.

The origin of Joseph’s problem: Genesis 37

Who made the first mistake? (verse 3)

What effect does “favored son” treatment usually have in a family? (verse 4)

What were the consequences for Jacob?

What were the consequences for Joseph?

What do you suppose the emotional impact was for Joseph?

Where did Joseph end up? (verse 36)

Joseph's problem compounded: Genesis 39

How did Joseph fare originally in Egypt? (verse 2)

What were the consequences of Joseph's refusal to let Potiphar's wife seduce him?

In what ways was Joseph's problem further compounded?

How did God show Joseph that he had not abandoned him during his years of imprisonment?

Joseph's problem resolved (Joseph reveals his true identity to his brothers):

Genesis 45:7ff: *Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ... do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ...So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God."*

Genesis 50:19-21: *But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children."*

"Man proposes, but God disposes."

What was Jacob's contribution to his family's problem?

What was Joseph's contribution?

What was His brothers' contribution?

What were the emotional consequences of the family's problem on all of them?

How did God bring Joseph to the realization that “God intended it for good”?

What perspective on life did Joseph learn that he also wants his brothers to understand and appreciate?

What does this reveal about the heart of God?

What does Joseph’s experience teach us about God’s strategy for dealing with the issues we face in life?

Hebrews 12:6:

*My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
because the Lord disciplines those he loves.*

Hebrews 13:5-6:

*God has said,
“Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you.”
So we say with confidence,
“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?”*

NEXT LESSON: God’s Strategy with Our “Issues” in Life - David

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**BIBLE STUDY: FACING LIFE’S ISSUES
WITH A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE –
GOD’S STRATEGY WITH OUR “ISSUES” IN LIFE
(DAVID)
LESSON 4**

David

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews assures us that our God is “able to sympathize with our weaknesses.” That’s because “we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are” (Hebrews 4:15). That’s both instructive and comforting. But Scripture reveals that God does much more than just sympathize with us. He has a strategy. He takes positive action on our behalf, just as He did repeatedly with His saints of old. In Lessons 3-5 we want to recall incidents from the lives of saints of God who faced serious issues in their lives, just as we do. From the experiences in the lives of God’s saints of old, we want to learn something about ourselves when we face similar difficulties, but more importantly, we want to discover what’s in the heart of God when life’s problems put a strain on our faith – leaving us with feelings of fear, shame and guilt.

When the time came for the prophet Samuel to anoint someone to take the place of King Saul, the LORD said to Samuel, “The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The selection process finally led to David, Jesse’s youngest son.

David’s Rise:

- 1 Samuel 16:13: *“From that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power”*
- David enters the king’s service: 1 Samuel 16:21-22
- David and Goliath: 1 Samuel 17
- David and Jonathan: 1 Samuel 20
- David saves Keilah, a Philistine fortress: 1 Samuel 23
- David spares Saul’s life (twice): 1 Samuel 24 and 26
- David anointed King: 2 Samuel 2
- David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem: 2 Samuel 6

What temptations often accompany success and the acclaim that accompanies it?

How does a person’s perspective on life sometimes change with success and acclaim? (Cf. Deuteronomy 6:10-12 and 8:10-17)

David’s Downfall:

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:12)

- David and Bathsheba: 2 Samuel 11:1-5
- David and Uriah: 2 Samuel 11:6-26

Which Commandments did David violate in this sordid affair?

What was David’s primary concern after Bathsheba told him, “I am pregnant”?

To what lengths did David go to cover up his sin? (verses 14 and 25)

Why are we so intent on covering up when we do wrong?

What emotions are inevitably involved in attempts to cover up?

David’s Rescue and Restoration:

- The LORD sends the prophet Nathan to David: 2 Samuel 12
- Nathan to David, “You are the man”
- David to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”
- Nathan to David, “The LORD has taken away your sin.”

Explain LORD’s purpose in telling David: *“I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more.”*

What two basic scriptural truths are interwoven in Nathan’s confrontation with David?

How did the Lord bring closure to David for this tragic episode in his life?

What does David's experience teach us about God's strategy for dealing with us when we face serious problems?

Following this episode in David's life, he wrote two penitential Psalms, 32 and 51. The essential, biblical teachings of repentance, justification and forgiveness are prominent in both Psalms. In both of them David lays bare his heart. Graphically and vividly he gives voice to the **agony** that accompanies fear and guilt together with the **ecstasy** that comes from experiencing the forgiving grace and mercy of God. The Holy Spirit inspired David to write these two Psalms as much for our sake as for his own. The story of David reveals to us that there is no sin so serious or so contemptible that it has not already been wiped off the slate by the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world.

Psalm 32:1-6:

*Blessed is he
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
2 Blessed is the man
whose sin the Lord does not count against him
and in whose spirit is no deceit.
3 When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
4 For day and night
your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer. Selah
5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the Lord"—
and you forgave
the guilt of my sin. Selah
6 Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you
while you may be found.*

With what words does David express the feelings of guilt and the terrors of conscience he experienced before the LORD sent Nathan to him?

With what word/words does David express the comfort of the gospel?

David experienced a whole gamut of human emotions during this episode in his life.

Which ones are most evident?

Which ones have been part of your experience, leaving you with a limp and empty feeling of worthlessness?

Which ones do you experience when the Holy Spirit shifts your focus away from self to God's limitless love?

If you (or someone you know) were tempted to cover up something for which you are ashamed, how would David's experience help you to cover yourself in a different way?

What does the Holy Spirit teach us in this Psalm about God's strategy for helping us face life's issues with a biblical perspective?

After David's affair with Bathsheba, he had difficulty forgiving himself ("My sin is always before me" – Psalm 51:3). If someone were to say to you, "I know that God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself," what in the story of David would help you to offer a response? (For an insight into answering this question, read all of Psalm 51, a Psalm David wrote following his affair with Bathsheba).

"Love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8)

What God's law uncovers, God's love covers.

NEXT LESSON: God's Strategy with Our "Issues" in Life - The Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well

**BIBLE STUDY: FACING LIFE’S ISSUES
WITH A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE –
GOD’S STRATEGY WITH OUR “ISSUES” IN LIFE
(THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT JACOB’S WELL)
LESSON 5**

The Samaritan Woman at Jacob’s Well

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews assures us that our God is “able to sympathize with our weaknesses.” That’s because “we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are” (Hebrews 4:15). That’s both instructive and comforting. But Scripture reveals that God does much more than just sympathize with us. He has a strategy. He takes positive action on our behalf, just as He did repeatedly with His saints of old. In Lessons 3-5 we want to recall incidents from the lives of saints of God who faced serious issues in their lives, just as we do. From the experiences in the lives of God’s saints of old, we want to learn something about ourselves when we face similar difficulties, but more importantly, we want to discover what’s in the heart of God when life’s problems put a strain on our faith – leaving us with feelings of fear, shame and guilt.

Francis Thompson’s classic poem, “The Hound of Heaven,” portrays God as a relentless pursuer of the lost. Indeed, that is exactly how God portrays himself to us in the Bible. The Parable of the Lost Sheep provides a familiar example of that. Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well is another example. Take a moment to think of other examples. The list is almost endless – beginning with God’s relentless pursuit of Adam and Eve when they tried to hide from him during their attempt to “cover up” after the Fall. There are times in our lives too when we need to refocus on the portrait of our God as “The Hound of Heaven.”

Read John 4:1-25 with the intent of:

- probing the mind of the woman at Jacob’s well, and
- discovering “the mind of Christ” in His outreach to her

Consider the “issues” she faced:

- her race issue: a Samaritan, scorned by the Jews (like blacks in the USA in the pre-civil rights era)
- her gender issue: no women’s rights in her culture
- her morals issue: five divorces and now a live-in
- her religion issue: confused, and without hope
- her misfit issue: she purposely avoided the respectable women when they came to draw water at the well
- her self-esteem issue: others viewed her as scum (self-esteem is often a circumlocution for pride)

Consider the strategy Jesus employed in reaching out to her:

- Jesus initiates conversation with her (a taboo for Jews), ignoring the race and gender issues
- Jesus respects and accepts her as a person, dealing with the misfit and self-esteem issues
- Jesus carefully avoids intimidating her, even when addressing the morals issue
- Jesus resolves the religion issue, identifying Himself as the Messiah who had come to “explain everything”

What is at the heart of Jesus’ strategy in his effort to reach out to this woman?

What is Jesus careful to avoid in his dealings with her?

Five marriages, five failures, and still looking for something or someone to satisfy her “thirst.” Tactfully Jesus leads her to discover that He is that Someone, “the Messiah.” “I who speak to you am he.” He offers the water of life so that she will never thirst again.

She is overwhelmed with feelings of shame, guilt, failure, thirsting for a way to make sense of life.
Where was the focus in her life?

What new focus does Jesus give her?

CONCLUSION:

When issues in your life leave you with feelings of guilt, shame, failure, depression, listen for the voice of the Relentless Pursuer who says:

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.” (Isaiah 43:25)

Everyone who trusts in him (Jesus) will never be put to shame.” (Romans 10:11)

Or, listen to the counsel of St. Paul who says:

“Forgetting what is behind and straining forward toward what is ahead, I press toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13).

Paul had good reasons for “forgetting what is behind.” He called himself “the chief of sinners.” Before his conversion, he had persecuted Christians. He had participated in the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr. But like a good track and field runner, he understood the danger of looking back while running ahead. His counsel: Keep your eyes on “the prize.” God has called you heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Psalm 103:8-12:

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever, he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;
[NOTE: Present tense, ongoing] *as far as the east is from the west, so far **has** he **removed** our transgressions from us.* [NOTE: Past tense, over and done]

The intent of God’s “relentless pursuit” of sinners is to give us a biblical perspective for facing issues that confront us. State it once more in your own words: What is that biblical perspective?

A final word:

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” (Hebrews 12:2)

Martin Luther, from the Introduction to his Commentary on Galatians:

“So then, have we nothing to do to obtain righteousness? No, nothing at all! For this righteousness comes by doing nothing, hearing nothing, knowing nothing, but rather in knowing and believing this only – that Christ has gone to the right hand of the Father, not to become our judge, but to become for us our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, our salvation!

“Now God sees no sin in us. For in this heavenly righteousness, sin has no place. So now we may certainly think. “Although I still sin, I don’t despair, because Christ lives – who is both my righteousness and my eternal life.” In that righteousness I have no sin, no fear, no guilty conscience, no fear of death. I am indeed a sinner in this life of mine, and in my own righteousness, but I have another life, another righteousness above this life, which is in Christ, the Son of God, who knows no sin or death, but is eternal righteousness and eternal life. For if the truth of being justified by Christ alone (not by works) is lost, then all Christian truths are lost. On this truth the church is built and has its being.”

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