

A LIFE OF HOPE

- A. Introduction: The Bible is a supernatural book because it is inspired by Almighty God (II Tim 3:16). It produces growth and change in those who take the time to read it. Therefore, I am encouraging you to become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament.
1. Regular reading means that you read for 15-20 minutes every day or as close to that as possible. Systematic reading means that you read each book from start to finish in as short a time as possible.
 - a. The purpose of this type of reading is to become familiar with the New Testament. Understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular repeated reading.
 - b. Regular reading changes your perspective. Perspective is the power to see or think of things in their true relationship to each other. Regular reading will give you an eternal perspective.
 1. An eternal perspective realizes there is more to life than just this life, and the greater and better part of our life is after this life. Such a perspective changes your priorities, affects your behavior, and lightens the load of life.
 2. II Cor 4:17-18—For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see right now, rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever (NLT).
 2. An eternal perspective helps us keep this life in its proper relationship to the life ahead. This life is not unimportant, but it is not all important. God has made promises to us—some for this life and some for the life to come. Regular reading helps us know which promises are for now and which are for later.
 - a. The Bible makes it clear that God will take care of His people in this life. Ps 46:1-2—God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea (NLT).
 - b. The problem is that for many of us our confidence that God will help us is undermined by fear. We're plagued with thoughts like these: What if God doesn't come through for me? What if my circumstances don't turn out the way I want them to?
 1. Fear is a natural emotional response when we're threatened by something potentially harmful. You can't stop feelings from rising up. But you can get to the point where those feelings don't torment you, change your view of reality or move you to act in a way that is contrary to God.
 2. In the last two lessons we've focused on the fact that an eternal perspective (which comes from regular systematic Bible reading) gives us hope that helps us deal with the fears that undermine our faith or trust in God and His help and provision in this life. We have more to say tonight.
 3. We've made the point that the Greek word translated faith means persuasion. God, through His written Word, tells us what He has done, is doing, and will do. His Word persuades us or convinces us that we can trust Him to keep His promises to us. Rom 10:17
 - a. Faith or trust in God actually begins with hope or confident expectation of coming good. Heb 11:1 —(Faith) is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen (NLT).
 - b. Like faith, hope also comes from God's Word. Ps 119:114-116—You are my refuge and my shield; your word is my only hope (NLT)...Lord, strengthen my inner being by the promise of your Word so that I may live faithful and unashamed for you (TPT).
 1. Bible hope mitigates the fears that come from the "what if" questions, because it assures us that all will be made right—some in this life and some in the life to come. I Cor 15:19
 2. We can actually live a life of hope based on what we know from God's Word. Rom 15:13—May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your faith, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, your whole life and outlook may be radiant with hope (J. B. Phillips).

- B. To live a life of radiant with you must first understand the parameters of life in a fallen world, along with God's present purpose in the earth. Regular Bible reading gives you an accurate view of those parameters.
1. There's no such thing as a problem free life in this world. The first man Adam was both the head of the human race and earth's first steward. His actions affected the race resident in him along with the planet he was given charge over. The earth is now infused with a curse of corruption and death, and human beings are born with a sin nature which leads them to act in selfish and destructive ways. Gen 3:17-19
 - a. Rom 5:12—When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. His sin spread death throughout all the world, so that everything began to grow old and die (TLB).
 - b. We daily deal with the effects of our first parents' sin. Weeds, decay, natural disasters, and death are currently part of earth's makeup. We have bodies that are mortal and subject to sickness, old age, and death. We interact with people with who make unwise and sinful choices that can directly affect our lives in negative ways.
 2. This world in its present condition is not the way God intended it to be. God created human beings to become His family through faith in Christ and He made earth to be a home for Himself and His family.
 - a. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross so that men and women can be restored to their created purposes as sons and daughters. Jesus will come again and restore the family home (this planet) to a fit forever home for God and His family. Eph 1:4-5; John 1:12-13; Rev 21-22; etc.
 - b. God's main goal right now is not to make this life the highlight of our existence or to make it easy and pain free. His primary purpose is to bring all men to saving knowledge of Jesus and make them sons and daughters through faith in Christ. The Lord is much more concerned with man's eternal destiny than He is with stopping every instance of suffering and injustice in this life. II Pet 3:9
 1. If a person has a perfect, pain-free life but ends up eternally separated from God because of their sin, their wonderful life is all for nothing. Matt 16:26; Luke 12:16-21; etc.
 2. This doesn't mean that there is no provision for help, happiness, and supply in this life, because there is. But life on earth will not be pain free or problem free until every trace of sin and its effects is removed from creation in connection with the second coming of Jesus. II Pet 3:13
 3. We must also understand that life's challenges don't come from God. They are the result of human choice—beginning with Adam's choice against God in the beginning.
 - a. When God created humanity, He gave mankind free will. Free will comes, not only with choice, but with the consequences of choice. If God were to stop choice or its consequences because He disapproves, mankind would not have free will. If the Lord was going to force people to behave a certain way, He'd force them to believe on Jesus because that's most important.
 1. Here's the point for our present discussion. Many Christians mistakenly believe that if they can keep trouble away from them if they do the right things and pray the right way.
 2. Circumstances produced by choice can't always be undone. You can't override human will through your prayers. Some mountains you can move—some you can't.
 - b. This doesn't mean that we have no hope in the midst of circumstances created by free will decisions. The Bible is filled with examples where God used human choice (including those He didn't approve of) and caused them to serve His ultimate purpose—which is to have a family of sons and daughters.
 4. Last week we made the point that the Bible is 50% history—a record of real people who got real help from God in the midst of really challenges circumstances. These accounts were recorded to give hope to subsequent generations, despite how things look. Many of the accounts are in the Old Testament.
 - a. Rom 15:4—Whatever was written beforehand is meant to instruct us on how to live. The Scriptures impart to us encouragement and inspiration so that we can live in hope and endure all things (TPT).
 - b. These many Old Testament accounts show us how God works in the midst of a fallen world, and they give us hope or the expectation that what God did for those people, He will do for us.
 1. They encourage us because we can see the end result (how it turned out), and we find that

everything turned out right for God's people—some in this life and some in the life to come.

2. These records all have certain things in common. We see that God sometimes puts off short term blessing for long term eternal results. We see how God uses human choice and causes it to serve His purposes for a family. We find that God is able to bring genuine good out of real evil. And, He will get His people through until He gets them out.
- c. For the rest of the lesson we're going to briefly examine one example of how God works in a sin damaged world—the story of Joseph. (For an in depth discussion of Joseph's story, choice, God's sovereignty, and human suffering, read my book: *Why Did This Happen? What is God Doing?*).

- C. Joseph's story is recorded in Gen 37-50. He was one of twelve sons fathered by a man named Jacob. Joseph and his brothers were great-grandsons of Abraham, the head of the race through which Jesus came into this world (the Jews).
1. Joseph was his father's favorite son, and his brothers were jealous of him. When he was seventeen, his brothers sold him into slavery and told their father that his favorite was torn to pieces by wild animals.
 - a. Slave traders took Joseph to Egypt where he ended up in prison because his owner's wife falsely accused him of rape.
 - b. Through a series of circumstances Joseph ended up second in command in Egypt in charge of a food storage and distribution program that provided food for Egypt and the entire surrounding region during a severe famine. He was reunited with his family when they came to Egypt to buy food.
 2. Why did these bad things happen to Joseph? Because that's life in a sin cursed earth. God was not the source of Joseph's troubles. How do we know?
 - a. Jesus, who is God and shows us God, never did anything like that to anyone. If Jesus didn't do it, then the Father doesn't do it. Remember, the New Testament gives greater light. John 14:9-10
 1. God delivered Joseph from his afflictions. God doesn't afflict people only to turn around and set them free. That would be a house divided against itself. Acts 7:9-10; Matt 12:25-26
 2. The brothers originally planned to murder him, but sold him into slavery instead and lied to their father about it. Murder and lying are the devil's chief characteristics. John 8:44
 - b. Yes, someone might say, but God allowed it. God allows people to sin and go to Hell. That doesn't mean He is for it, behind it, or approving of it. Joseph's misfortunes were caused by a series of freewill acts carried out by fallen people influenced by Satan.
 3. Why didn't God stop Joseph's troubles? Because the Lord saw a way to use human choice in this circumstance and cause it to serve His ultimate purpose for a family. God put off short term blessing (ending the trouble now) for long term eternal results and used Joseph's ordeal to produce eternal results.
 - a. Had God stopped it at the beginning, it wouldn't have solved Joseph's problems since his brothers still had hatred and murder in their hearts toward him. Joseph would not have ended up in Egypt in charge of a food distribution program, and he and his family may not have survived the famine.
 - b. If Abraham's descendants had been wiped out, it would have thwarted God's plan for a family since Jesus came into the world through Joseph's family (Abraham's descendants).
 - c. God never abandoned Joseph during his ordeal. He preserved Joseph and caused him to thrive in very difficult circumstances. Joseph quickly advanced to a leadership position in his owners' household before he was falsely accused of rape (Gen 39:2-4). Sent to prison, he was put in charge of the entire prison (Gen 39:21-23). It was in prison that he made the connections that brought him to Pharaoh's attention as one who could interpret dreams (the cup-bearer and baker, Gen 40).
 - d. God brought great good out of the evil done to Joseph. Multitudes of idol worshippers heard about the One True God because Joseph acknowledged God throughout his adversities. Gen 39:3; Gen 40:8; Gen 41:16; 38-39; Gen 41:57
 1. Not only did he end up in a position to feed his own family and preserve the Redeemer's line,

- his plan for food storage and distribution spared many thousands of others from starvation.
2. When countries came to Egypt looking for food, they heard the story of the Sovereign Lord as they were told why Egypt had food when no one else did. Almighty God enabled Joseph to rightly interpret Pharaoh's dreams about a coming famine and prepare for it.
 4. Not only can we see the end of Joseph's story, we can see his perspective in the midst of his troubles—a perspective that lightened the load. Perspective is the way you see things or your view of reality.
 - a. Joseph married and raised a family in Egypt. The names Joseph gave his children give us insight into his view of reality and what he thought of God's help and provision throughout his difficulties.
 1. Gen 41:51-52—Joseph named his older son Manasseh, for he said, ‘God has made me forget all my troubles and the family of my father.’ Joseph named his second son Ephraim, for he said, ‘God has made me fruitful in this land of my suffering’” (NLT).
 2. Every time Joseph said those names he proclaimed that God had taken away painful memories of his hardship and loss and given him a life of abundance in what had been a land of suffering.
 - b. Joseph had such peace and victory that when he was ultimately reunited with his wicked brothers (now repentant and sorry for what they did), Joseph was able to tell them: Gen 45:5-7—(God) sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives...so that you will become a great nation (NLT).
 1. Joseph didn't mean that God caused his troubles. Joseph was expressing how in control of his universe and human choice God is. God didn't cause any of it, but He used it. God knew what the brothers were going to do before they did it and worked it into His plan.
 2. As Joseph looked back on his experiences, he could clearly see that God is so great he can take wicked actions not of His doing and cause them to serve His purposes. Joseph was able to declare: As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people (Gen 50:20, NLT).
 - c. In the last several lessons, we have referred to the Old Testament men and women who are listed in Hebrews 11. These men and women did exploits in this life through faith in God. But they also recognized that they would not receive the fullness of everything God had for them until the life after this life. Joseph is listed among those people. He had an eternal perspective. Heb 11:22
 1. Just before Joseph died he made his family swear to take his bones with them when they returned to their homeland. Moses kept this promise when Israel left Egypt several centuries later. Gen 50:24-26; Ex 13:19
 2. Early in Joseph's life, God made two specific promises to him: greatness and a permanent home in Canaan (Gen 37:5-11; Gen 13:14-15; etc.). Greatness was fulfilled in his lifetime when he became second in command in Egypt. However, Joseph never went back to Canaan.
 3. But when Jesus returns, Joseph will be with Him to be reunited with his body raised from the dead. Joseph will stand in his ancestral land—never again to be removed. Promise fulfilled.
 - D. Conclusion: We have more to say next week, but consider several thoughts as we close. We can live a life of hope—not because this life is easy and we never face hardship and loss—but because we know that all will be made right by Almighty God—some in this life and some in the life to come.
 1. God's Word gives us examples of real people who got real help from God. Their stories assure us that God will get us through until He gets us out and cause everything to serve His purposes for good.
 2. God's Word changes our perspective and gives us hope. As we become persuaded of the hope we have in Him, we can encourage ourselves with this information in the hard times.
 3. The apostle Paul, who penned several of the key verses in tonight's lesson (II Cor 4:17-18; Rom 15:4), also about rejoicing in hope. Rom 12:12—Let this hope burst forth within you, releasing continual joy. Don't give up in a time of trouble, but commune with God at all times (TPT). Lots more next week!!