

Case Studies of Called Lives – Week Four

This quiet-time series is used in conjunction with *The Curtain Call*, a series of lessons taught on March 9-10, 2007. Please see www.chicagochurch.org.

Welcome to our final weekly installment of called lives in Scripture.

Day Twenty-Two—Noah

Read Genesis 6:1-7:13

Key word: Righteousness

Other texts: Luke 17:26-27, Hebrews 11:7, 1 Peter 3:18-20, 2 Peter 2:4-5

Righteousness is either the theme or the word associated with Noah from the Genesis account and the later reflections in Scripture about him. It is notable that the people of his generation were found to be characterized by “wickedness” and that the world was “full of violence” (**Genesis 6:11, 13**), “and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (**Genesis 6:5**).

The episode that ensued is fraught with so much debate (was it a local or global flood, who were the Nephilim, how many animals can fit on the ark, etc.?) but there is no debate in the meaning of the story. God was grieved over the state of mankind and its future, and He would wash away the wickedness and begin with a clean slate. In doing so, He chose a righteous person to provide safe harbor for a remnant of people and creatures. The rest is history, literally.

In later times, Noah was the icon for a preacher (**2 Peter 2:4**) and the phrase “the days of Noah” was a powerful symbol used by both Jesus (**Luke 17:26**) and Peter (**1 Peter 3:20**). Later generations would become wicked or fraught with violence and the story of Noah would be recalled. This preacher, shipbuilder and family man has become an object lesson for all time. He has since taken away the excuses of believers in every generation amid ungodly situations.

- 1) Circle Noah’s calling (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial).
- 2) How has Noah served people of faith over many centuries?
- 3) Why do *you* think this story was so important to Jesus, Peter and the writer of Hebrews?
- 4) In a humble way, have you ever been the righteous person who has been the standard-bearer? What was it like?

Day Twenty-Three—Israel's Songleaders

Read Nehemiah 12:27 -47

Key verses: Nehemiah 12:43, 46

Related text: Exodus 15

What if you had just lived through the most glorious event of known human history? How would you first tell the story? Moses and his sister Miriam led the men and women to sing their story of their deliverance. From Israel's first kings and throughout the Old Testament, song and worship leaders became necessary.

For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. (Nehemiah 12:46)

The tribe of Judah had little reason to celebrate during the exile period. Jerusalem was under the control of foreign powers. Local antagonists, true anti-Semites, tried to keep them down. They needed a temple built to replace the destroyed temple and the walls were in major disrepair. Enter Ezra and Nehemiah.

Much more was lost than visible buildings and walls. Their spiritual lives had been devastated by complacency, the marrying of foreigners, the practice of usury and the acceptance of pagan practices. After the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C., the influential ministry of the prophets and the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah brought about many sweeping reforms and times of repentance—truly, things were changing in Judah's favor.

A new vision was being cast for the remnant of God's people. They were able to form a binding agreement in which they would take a stand for how they would live and treat each other (**Nehemiah 10:38**). Three of Israel's original tribes—Judah, Benjamin and Levi were able to be represented in setting up districts in Jerusalem. It was a long way from its original glory, but it was a great start. The leaders and two choirs stood on top of the wall to thank God. There was instrumental accompaniment as well (**Nehemiah 12:36, 41**). This event celebrated a sense of great hope, evident from the chorus of rejoicing that took place.

And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. (Nehemiah 12:43)

People want to praise God for His great deeds but they need to be led. We can best be called into this level of worship by those who have the gifts and desire. There is something that music is able to express that mere words cannot.

- 1) Circle the calling of song directors (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial).
- 2) Where else is the importance of singing evident in the Bible?
- 3) Do you have talents in any related areas of song directing, choir singing or song/hymn writing? Do you use them when the situation presents itself?
- 4) Many great hymns were written after the realities they express occurred. What hymn is the most meaningful to you and why?

Day Twenty-Four–Joseph

Read Genesis 37

One story of the Bible that has earned so much attention, one that is easy to understand but difficult to emulate, is the story of Joseph. One tragic betrayal that flowed from years of deceit in a highly dysfunctional polygamist family, one fraught with spousal rivalry and family favorites, changed the history of all God's people.

As we know, Joseph was expelled from the family and left for dead in a cistern, recovered and sold to some Ishmaelites. A cover up story about his alleged death was told to protect Jacob from knowing what his sons had done to Joseph. Joseph's ups and downs continue in Egypt. Joseph was sold and bought and later his new owner, Potiphar, the Egyptian official, became fond of him, only to have him put in prison for a crime he did not commit. There in prison, God had favor on Joseph and elevated him in the eyes of the prison warden. God continued to be with him and prevailed in putting Joseph into good favor with the ruling Pharaoh.

Disaster was looming in that part of the ancient world as a famine was coming. Joseph was blessed by to be a dream-interpreter to the Pharaoh and help prepare Egypt for the long period without food. This action led to Joseph's ascension in Egypt and his ability to meet his desperate family in later years. The whole story is told through **Genesis 37-50**.

Even after a marvelous reunion filled with healing and God's providence, Joseph's brothers wondered if he was waiting to *make them pay* for their bad deed decades before. In an example that is not common today, neither in society nor in the church, Joseph's response to bitter wrongdoing is both refreshing and hopeful.

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.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.
(Genesis 50:19-21)

- 1) Circle Joseph’s calling (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial).
- 2) What is the specific trait in Joseph during those “down times” that is the most admirable to you?
- 3) Do you know anyone (including yourself) who blatantly hurt another Christian or family member in a life-altering way?
- 4) Have you ever been tragically damaged by the malice of others that you trusted? How have you dealt with it? (being merciful, making them pay, holding a grudge or other ways)

Day Twenty-Five—James, Jesus brother

Read Various Selections of The Epistle of James

Other texts: Galatians 1:18-19, Acts 12:17, 15:13ff and 21:17-19

Jesus had a problem with skeptical siblings, evidenced by this passage: *“For even his own brothers did not believe in him.”* **(John 7:5)** Legend says that they all did a turnabout after the resurrection. More certain is Scripture which says that James had a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus **(1 Corinthians 15:7)** and that he became an elder of the Christians church in Jerusalem.

We do not hear much about this man James until after the apostle named James is martyred **(Acts 12:1-2)**. The emergence of James the brother of Jesus is seen powerfully in Acts 15 and 21. He is a voice of reason in the first significant church controversy **(Acts 15)** and in bridging peace with Paul over tensions between the Jewish and Gentile wings of the church **(Acts 21)**. He also authored the book we call *The Epistle of James*. A Jewish historian named Josephus wrote of James’s martyrdom in A.D. 62.

... so he [Ananus] assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned:

A further reading of this secular source indicates that James was respected by Jews of Jerusalem and that they objected to this unlawful measure. Interestingly, Ananus belonged to the family of chief priests that had presided for many decades who were largely culpable in Jesus’ death. Now Ananus had also

murdered James illegally. Three months later, he is disposed of his position, presumably because he crossed a line with those who respected James, thus ending the crony-based control of the priesthood in Jerusalem.

James was a voice that could not be ignored. He went from skeptic to believer, witness, example mediator and statesmen for Jewish Christians. He helped keep the Jerusalem church, comprised mostly of Jews, on a course of respect for the laws of Moses. Even his natural adversaries were offended by his treatment at the hands of the Sanhedrin, which bore similarities to the abuse Jesus suffered. It took courage for James to stay in Jerusalem during those decades, but he stayed the course and left us a lasting legacy.

- 5) Circle all the evident callings of James (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial).
- 6) What was unique about the situations that James found himself in?
- 7) How valuable is the role of pillars in a congregation? How does one become a pillar?
- 8) How does one gain the respect of their adversaries without compromising?
- 9) What is your favored section of the book of James?

Day Twenty-Six– Teams of Helpers

Read Mark 2:1-12

Jesus had come to Capernaum and an upsurge of support immediately enveloped Him. The small town where Simon Peter's family now resided (**Luke 4:31-38**) was large enough for a synagogue and a perfect place for Jesus to work His miracles.

There was "no room left" (**Mark 2:1**) at the house where Jesus was ministering. A paralyzed man was brought to the house by four men. We have no record of how far they traveled, but no town was so close that it was an easy trek. There must have been a discouraging moment when the crippled man couldn't even hang out by the door (**Mark 2:2**). Jesus was preaching inside and the five were left to be dismayed.

This was a real predicament. But quickly, at some moment, one of them must have said, "Let's go through the roof." That was the optimist. Someone must have been strong enough to be the driving force physically for the paralyzed man to make it onto the roof. We can call him the strong man. The others helped to make it happen in ways that we can only speculate. Perhaps the other two were the roof-diggers and were used to help the crippled man get lowered onto his mat.

Next Mark records these words: “*When Jesus saw their faith*”; then, upon seeing their faith, He responded with a miracle (**Mark 2:5**). Soon he “*took his mat and walked out in full view of them all*” (**Mark 2:12**). Sometimes a great miracle or deed is a short distance from occurring. It requires a soft-hearted team of people who are available, imaginative, resourceful and committed. No doubt there was a fleeting moment that could have been overlooked, and likely no one would have judged them for that. Nonetheless, the instant response of four unnamed seekers was commendable. This story reveals that everyone has a role to play to make great things happen, regardless of their skills or experience.

- 1) Circle the calling of the four men (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial).
- 2) Name other teams you can think of from Scripture.
- 3) Sometimes a calling is fulfilled in a one-time, life-changing opportunity. This one resulted in a famous miracle and was recorded in a Gospel. What deed might be a modern-day equivalent?
- 4) Describe your best moment as part of a team since you’ve become a Christian?

Day Twenty-Seven—Women Correspondents

Read Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:8, Luke 24:9-12

⁵ *The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”*

⁸ *So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. (Matthew 28:5-8)*

¹⁰ *It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. (Luke 24:10-12a)*

It was both the angel and Jesus Himself who selected women to become news correspondents of the gospel. In fact, women were nearby during the execution of Jesus while the apostles were quite disoriented after fleeing the authorities (**Matthew 27:55-56, 61, Mark 16:1, John 19:25**). The women were on hand to confirm Jesus’ death, help in His burial and be first at the tomb.

The providential arrangement served a twofold purpose. Number one, the women were closer than anyone to being eyewitnesses to Jesus death, burial and resurrection. Secondly, at the risk of sounding sexist, women are the greatest communicators of emotion. And if there ever was a moment in human history that called for emotion, this was it! And if you've ever seen the concluding scene of the short movie, *The Cross*, you know what this means.

- 1) The women eyewitnesses were perfect for this kind of calling (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial).
- 2) Describe the special relationship that Jesus seemed to have with a number of women?
- 3) Name some of them.
- 4) Why do you think women were more likely to be found at these key moments?

Day Twenty-Eight– Enoch

Read Genesis 5:21-23, Hebrews 11:5-6

Key phrase: “Enoch walked with God”

Related text: Jude 4

²¹ When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. ²² And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. ²³ Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. ²⁴ Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. (Genesis 5:21-23)

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. (Hebrews 11:5-6)

Enoch was the great-grandfather of Noah and lived an unimaginable length of days. The sum of Enoch's life (that he “*walked with God*”) was just the kind of obituary that any of us would love to have published about our lives. Enoch lived in a time of great violence (**Gen 4:23-34, 6:1ff**) when conditions would have given him a great excuse to live otherwise.

After a long life, Enoch was “*taken from this life*”, which literally means *transferred without the experience of death*. No pain, no sudden fear—truly, the grim reaper missed out! He “*was commended*” as the NASB states “*for he obtained the witness*” that he had “*pleased God.*” Enoch takes away our excuses.

Enoch shows how God can reward someone in an exceptional way. But most do not know this about this great man—he spoke a prophecy that New Testament writers relied upon—a book that we call *1 Enoch*. In fact, **Jude 4** looks almost exactly like a quotation from that book. While we would not call it canonized Scripture, it has some value. It is a book in which Enoch is, in part, being a witness of the angelic realm.

If this line of reasoning is correct, Enoch's walk with God made him a valuable asset in being a witness to the judgment of angels. The book that has survived bearing his name explains a rebellion that had taken place in the heavenly realms.

It is fantastic to think that Enoch may have had a role even after his departure from this world. While this story involves some speculation, the life of Enoch stands as an example of how useful we can be when we walk with God.

- 1) Circle the calling of Enoch(General, Missional, Primal, Crucial).
- 2) Enoch live in violent times. What would you describe the greatest difficulty in walking with God today? (violence, business dealings, the availability of sensual images, material temptation, etc.)
- 3) What positive epitaph would you like to become true about the rest of your Christian life? Take a few moments to write that out.