

## AirHeads: Samson

\*Have any of you ever had an airheaded moment? Would anybody be willing to share a story about a time when you had an airheaded moment?

Airheaded moments are those times when we do things without thinking them through.

*I remember I had a friend who came to school with some cuts and bruises on his face... ceiling fan.*

Tonight I want to introduce you to someone in the Bible who might've made more boneheaded, airheaded decisions than anybody else in the Bible.

But that's not the sad part. The sad part is that this person had more potential than probably anybody else in the Bible. He was amazing. He was full of promise. There was never anybody else that's ever lived who was quite like he was. He could've been one of the most incredible leaders in history.

\*His name was Samson, but when I say his name, you don't think about the great decisions he made. We don't talk about the wisdom of Samson.

Instead, what do you think about? (One of the first things is Delilah)

But before we even get to Delilah, we see that Samson makes a lot of terrible decisions. He just didn't seem to get it. He seemed to live up to that stereotype of having no brains and all brawn.

Very quickly, I want you to take out your Bibles I want us to go back to the very beginning of Samson's life. I want you to turn to Judges

chapter 13. Alright what we're about to read is really important if you want to understand the life of Samson. \*Somebody read 13:1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. <sup>3</sup> And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. <sup>4</sup> Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. <sup>5</sup> For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

Here we read about something called a Nazirite. Does anybody know what that means? \*Turn to Numbers 6.

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of (A) a Nazirite, [a] (B) to separate himself to the LORD, <sup>3</sup> he (C) shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. <sup>4</sup> All the days of his separation [b] he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins.

<sup>5</sup> "All the days of his vow of separation, no (D) razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. (E) He shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long.

<sup>6</sup> "All the days that he separates himself to the LORD (F) he shall not go near a dead body. <sup>7</sup> (G) Not even for his father or for his

mother, for brother or sister, if they die, shall he make himself unclean, because his separation to God is on his head. 8 All the days of his separation he is holy to the LORD.

This Nazirite thing is a vow! Vow is a strong word, isn't it? Wedding vows...so a Nazirite is taking this vow.

\*Alright, so, what were the parts of a Nazirite vow? Separated to the Lord. All the days of their life they...

1. \*Cannot drink wine or strong drink (not even grape juice)
2. \*Cannot cut their hair.
3. \*Cannot go near a dead body.

Ok. So this is Samson's vow before the Lord from birth.

Now we're going to look at some of the airheaded moves that he made. First look with me at Judges 14:5-9.

\*5 So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah.

Now to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him. 6 And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

\*7 Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. 8 After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass of the lion. 9 He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and

mother, he gave some to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.

Alright, from this story, why is Samson an airhead? What's wrong with this picture?

\*Airheaded move #1: broke his Nazirite vow by going near a dead body.

Alright, for the next airheaded move he made, now turn to Judges 16:1. (Screen)

\*Airheaded move #2: He has sex with a prostitute. Alright, here was Samson with all of this incredible strength, but we begin to see a weakness in him. What is it? Women.

Guys and girls, listen to me. When you fall hard for that girl or that guy that you just think is absolutely perfect, don't lose your head. Don't and go into stupid mode when you think that you're in love.

Because here's what happens, I promise you here's what happens.

You begin to think things like, "Well it's not wrong for me to do this. It's not wrong for us, because we're in love. We love each other and God wants me to be in love."

And really what happens is that Satan begins telling you lies.

Guys, listen to me, if your relationship is sinful, your sins separate you from God. Isaiah 59:2

In other words, if your relationship is full of sin and you don't repent of it, God is not in it.

Samson lost his head when it came to the opposite sex. So did David, so did Solomon (his wives turned his heart away from God.).

Finally, airheaded move #3: Samson forgot where his strength lied.

This is the part of the story that you probably know best. Let's go ahead and read it...

\*4After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. 5And(C) the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her,(D) "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to(E) humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver." 6So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could(F) subdue you."

7Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried,(G) then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 8Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. 9Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

10Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound." 11And he said to her, "If they bind me with(H) new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 12So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And the men lying in ambush

were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.

13Then Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 14So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web.[a] And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web.

\*15And she said to him,(I) "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies." 16And(J) when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. 17And he told her all his heart, and said to her,(K) "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man."

\*18When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up again, for he has told me all his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought(L) the money in their hands. 19She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began(M) to torment him, and his strength left him.

Alright and let's pause right here for a moment.

To those of you who have your Bibles, how many times did Delilah ask him this question about his strength?

And Samson gives her several answers before he finally tells her the truth. The first time he says his strength lies where? 2<sup>nd</sup> time? 3<sup>rd</sup> time? 4<sup>th</sup> time?

Do you see the progression? Do you see how Samson is warming up to temptation? It's like he can't resist! He just can't help himself.

First it's bowstrings, then it's ropes, then it's something to do with his 7 locks of hair, then it's the truth about his 7 locks of hair.

And really here's the sad thing: to Samson it's almost like a game. You know, how close can I get before I get into trouble? And he just keeps pushing it.

Now look with me at verse 2. This may be one of the saddest verses in all of the Bible.

\*20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." *But he did not know that(N) the LORD had left him.*

So his hair was gone, but really where did Samson's superhuman strength lie? Was it in his hair? Was his strength a superpower from his hair?

No. His strength was in the Lord. \*Finally if you look at verse 21, (21 And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles...) it's almost ironic that Samson's eyes are gouged out. Because truthfully, Samson had been blind a lot longer than at this point in the story. He was

blind to the fact of how dangerous he was living. And he began to rely upon his own strength more than on the Lord's strength.

You know, we read a story like Samson's and we think how could he be so dumb? We have a tendency to think, what an idiot! I mean, here's this guy who's stronger than Ray Birchett but spiritually, he's nothing but, well, an airhead. And we think, "How could Samson be so dumb?"

But, guys, if we're honest about it, we can be spiritual airheads when it comes to sin. I mean, we can be like Samson! We can be totally oblivious when it comes to sin!

Tonight I want to very quickly share with you some "Airheaded Recipes for Spiritual Disaster." These are things that we oftentimes do that cause us to absolutely crash and burn spiritually.

#### I. Airheads flirt with sin.

What does it mean to flirt with sin? We know what it means to flirt with a girl, but what about with sin?

Samson did that, didn't he? He just inched closer and closer and closer.

Guys, don't think that you're immune to this concept! Every time, EVERY TIME, that you start running with friends that you don't need to run with, or you start going out with that girl or guy that you KNOW is going to be bad for you, every time that you decide to party at the parties where bad stuff is happening, MARK MY WORDS: EVERY TIME YOU DO THAT, YOU WILL GET BURNED.

\*Look with me at 1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

Do you see what he's saying here! Do not be deceived! In other words, don't fool yourself! Oh, I can go to these parties and they won't affect me! I can hang out with these people but they're not going to affect me! I can watch this movie and I know it's bad but I won't let it affect me!

THE BIBLE SAYS DO NOT BE DECEIVED! DON'T FOOL YOURSELF! It doesn't work! Evil companions corrupt good morals."

Every time! But I can be the exception. No you can't! How do you know? Because the Bible says you can't! And I believe God! I had a friend who decided he was going to be the Christian influence at those parties. He fell victim to sin. And he didn't use his influence. He became under the influence.

I'm telling you, I'm telling you: when you flirt with sin prepare to get burned. I could say more about that, but I'll move on.

Don't set yourself up for sin.

2. \*Airheads have great potential, but lack better judgment.

You know, we just looked at a Bible formula for disaster. Bad company. Evil companions corrupt good morals.

I want you to listen to this formula. Privilege minus judgment, equals disaster.

Now for those of you out there who are into sports, think about that statement in terms of sports. What does it mean? How about college football?

We've seen it over and over again in the NFL and in college football. When players hit the big time, and they have no sense of judgment, what happens? Can you name any players like that? (Miami, LSU, Pac Man Jones, Michael Vick, etc.)

We know that things are going to end badly.

Guys, listen to me. Sometimes I hear people say things like, "Man, I'm struggling spiritually right now."

"Why? What's going on?"

"Well I'm just dealing with a lot of peer pressure right now."

"Why?" Well, my friends aren't good influences on me."

"Oh. So you've got friends that are causing you to struggle spiritually?"

"Yes."

"Sounds like you need some new friends."

"Oh, but, you see, I can't do that."

Wait, I thought you wanted to do better.

Or someone will say, "I am really facing a lot of temptations in my life right now."

Why?

"When I go to these parties there's alcohol and drugs, and just a lot of stuff going down. And I keep telling myself that when I'm there I'm not going to give in but I always do."

“Wait, so you’re tempted when you go to the parties?”

“Yes.”

“Well, don’t go to the parties.”

“Oh, but I really like it. It’s fun.”

“Wait, I thought you wanted to overcome temptation? Do you want to fight against temptation or do you want to give in? Do you want to be a Christian or do you want to be a friend of the world?”

\*James 4:4b Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

\*This sounds simple, but if we want to stop making bad decisions, we’ve got to start making good decisions! Don’t go to the party. Don’t get in the car! Don’t go to the guy’s house who smokes weed. Don’t go into that room and shut the door with your girlfriend. Don’t listen to that music if you want to stop cussing!

Listen guys, you want to have good judgment? Listen to these verses..

\*Psalm 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.

\*Proverbs 9:10 tells us: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

\*James 1:5 “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”

You want to be wise? Ask God for wisdom, and follow his lead.

3. \*Airheads will continue to be airheads if they aren’t held accountable.

We had some friends over the other day...their kid was an absolute brat!!! Guess what? He’s going to continue to be a brat until they hold him accountable.

Nobody held Samson accountable. (But on one hand, can you blame them? Maybe one reason nobody held Samson accountable is because he killed 1,000 men with the jawbone of a donkey!)

“Um, Mr. Samson, sir. I believe you are acting like a spiritual airhead.”

“Oh, really, fool? Say hello to my friends Samford and Son.”

Spiritual airheads will continue to make airheaded mistakes until someone holds them accountable.

Whose job is it to hold me accountable? Whose job is it to hold you accountable? We say that, but then when someone calls us out on something we get mad! How dare they say that to me!

What does the Bible say?

\*James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Heart to heart...if you’re struggling, talk to someone about it. Send me a text if that’s your style. Just let someone know who can help you spiritually. I’m here. Laura’s here. None of us are perfect, and there’s no sin that God can’t forgive.

## Jolly Ranchers Cinnamon Fire: Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

\*Show clip of Star Wars showdown.

\*Remember when you were little and someone would come up to you and say, "I'll bet I'm faster than you."

And you're like Nah-uh. And they're like "Uh-huh." (repeat) Until one of you says, "Enough of this madness! Let's settle this right here right now. Let's race."

And so you settled the score. You either won or you lost. You either had to show up or shut up.

We like it when two competitors go head to head don't we? Like in the Star Wars clip with Yoda, that's like the best part of the movie. We anticipate that head-to-head matchup. "Not if anything to say about it I have!" We love a good showdown, where we're able to see once and for all who is really more powerful.

\*Tonight, we're studying one of my favorite Bible stories. It's an epic showdown found in 1 Kings 18.

\*17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, (H) "Is it you, you (I) troubler of Israel?" 18 And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have (J) abandoned the commandments of the LORD and (K) followed the Baals. 19 Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount (L) Carmel, and the (M) 450 prophets of Baal and (N) the 400 prophets of Asherah, (O) who eat at Jezebel's table."

\*20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. 21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long (P) will you go limping between two

different opinions? (Q) If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word.

In the Ten Commandments, God laid it out pretty clearly to His people. Thou shalt have no other gods before me." What's happening here?

God laid it out clearly, and here Elijah lays it out pretty clearly. He says, "Hey, if Baal is God follow him, but if my God is God, follow him.

\*22 Then Elijah said to the people, (R) "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are (S) 450 men. 23 Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. 24 And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who (T) answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken."

Elijah says, "Settle this once and for all, we will."

Here are the rules. Take a bull. Slice it. Dice it. Put in on the wood. Then call upon your god and I will call upon the name of my God and the God that answers by fire is God.

They say, "Alright, cool." My translation. So here we go.

\*25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it."

He says "Ladies first." So the prophets of Baal go first.

26And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made.

Can you picture these guys like doing a fire dance? That's kind of a funny scene, right? You're not the only one who thinks that either! Look what Elijah does. This is awesome.

\*27And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing [in other words, maybe he's in deep thought, meditating], or he is relieving himself [in other words, going to the bathroom or pooping], or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."

And so Elijah has some fun with this scene. He's making fun of them and their god. And they don't stop there!

\*Look at 28And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them.

"Ouchie." Do you remember when Braxton said "Ouchie" that one time?

\*29And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of (V) the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention. 30Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him.

He says, "Check this out."

\*And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been (W) thrown down. [It has been thrown down because of idolatry. They didn't worship the Lord, so they cut down God's altar.] 31Elijah took twelve stones [that's interesting...why'd he do that?], according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, (X) "Israel shall be your name," 32and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. [almost two gallons worth of water] 33(Y) And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and (Z) pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." 34And he said, "Do it a second time." And they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time." And they did it a third time. 35And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

Hmmm...that's weird, why's he digging a trench and filling it with water? It's because God's about to put on a show for these guys. Ever built a campfire? What kind of wood won't burn? Wood that's been soaked with water.

\*36And at the time of (AA) the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, (AB) God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that (AC) you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that (AD) I have done all these things at your word. 37Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."

Alright, so, it's crunch-time. Now it's time for the God of Elijah to answer. Let's see what He does.

\*38(AE) Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

Wow! What a scene! I want you to read that verse again, and picture that kind of fire in your mind. The fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust. And licked up the water that was in the trench.

\*How would you describe this kind of fire? I picture almost like a pillar of fire, a laser of fire falling out of the sky like a comet. Just FLOOOOOOSH! And everything is just consumed. I like how it says the fire licked up the water in the trench. It's like it just slurped it up!

\*39And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God." 40And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

Man, I love that story, don't you?

Let me ask you a question, I want all of you to open your Bibles and I've got a challenge of my own to give to you. Don't worry. Nobody's going to die.

But here's what I want you to do, I want you to reread this story until you find this answer.

\*What are God's instructions for Elijah in this story?

God never said anything to Elijah beforehand about this showdown on Mt. Carmel. I guess I just kind of expected that God gave Elijah this elaborate plan, but if you go back and read it that's not what happened at all!

Did you notice Elijah spells out the rules of the duel as if they've been given directly from God? "You take a bull. I'll take a bull. Cut it into pieces. Put it on the wood. Don't put fire to it. Y'all call on your god and I'll call on mine. The one who answers by fire is God."

In my mind I'd always imagined that God had given Elijah a heads-up on what was about to happen. I was wrong!

Really, this is a story about Elijah expecting God to show up.

And after Elijah's prayer, God did in a big way, didn't He? The fire consumed the bull, the wood, the stones, the dust, and the water.

*\*Here's the life lesson guys: Elijah trusted and expected God to show up...do we?*

When we pray, do we really expect God to show up? Do we really expect answers? Do we allow God to be God, to do things only He can do? Do we invite Him into our plans and hand over the reins?

We pray for blessings

We pray for peace

Comfort for family, protection while we sleep

We pray for healing, for prosperity

We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering

All the while, You hear each spoken need

Yet love us way too much to give us lesser things

We pray for wisdom  
Your voice to hear  
And we cry in anger when we cannot feel You near  
We doubt Your goodness, we doubt Your love  
As if every promise from Your Word is not enough  
All the while, You hear each desperate plea  
And long that we'd have faith to believe

'Cause what if Your blessings come through raindrops  
What if Your healing comes through tears  
And what if a thousand sleepless nights  
Are what it takes to know You're near  
What if my greatest disappointments  
Or the aching of this life  
Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy  
And what if trials of this life  
The rain, the storms, the hardest nights  
Are Your mercies in disguise

(Laura Story)

God doesn't spell out every specific plan that He has in store for us here. He didn't for Elijah either, but what He does expect is for us to be faithful and to give Him room, time, and opportunities to work.

\*Elijah prayed, "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God..." (1 Kings 17:37a)

\*Life Lesson #2: This face-off didn't settle it. The "score" will only be settled at Judgment Day.

You know, I'd love to be able to say that Israel never worshipped Baal again. But that isn't the case. I'd love to say that there are no other religions in the world today, but that isn't the case either! I wish that the showdown on Mt. Carmel would've settled it once and for all! God let His Son hang on a cross and there are still people who don't believe in Him. One day, though, the Bible says, that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess of God."

\*Life Lesson #3: Who are you in the story?

In this story there are three characters. There are the prophets of Baal who have chosen to serve something that isn't the Lord, there's Elijah who is faithful to the Lord, and then there are the people that are "on the fence."

Who are you in the story?

I wish we could all say that we're like Elijah and that we're serving God faithfully. But if we're honest about it, that's probably not true.

Maybe some of us are more like the prophets of Baal. We've turned to an idol. Not something that we bow down to, but something that we put above God and we worship with our time and it's stolen our heart away from God.

Or maybe you're like those people that were on the fence. They were really more like spectators. You know, I'm not too sure about this whole God thing. I mean, he might be real, but he might not be. I'm not so sure about this whole church thing either. Or even this youth group. Or even this Bible class. I mean, everybody seems really nice, but I'm just not too sure about this.

Hey, listen to me. If you're on the fence about some of this stuff, and you've got questions, man, I'd love to talk to you. I want you to send me a text or catch me after class and we'll talk.

God doesn't want you to be on the fence. He wants to show you who He is. In fact, He dares you to let him.

Or maybe you feel like your heart has been turned aside to an idol, something that you've placed above God. I promise you, Satan wants to steal your heart away and he'll use anything he can to do it. It might be that tonight you're thinking to yourself, man, I really want to let go of the idols in my life. Hey, if this is you, let me know or let another Christian know so that we can pray about that. I promise I won't judge you. I've got struggles, too.

But if there's anything I can do to help you fight, I wanna do it. Please, let me know if there's anything I can do. If you wanna meet me for breakfast one morning or meet up one day after school, or whenever you need to, I'm available. (Laura, too).

## Juicy Fruit

- Have Juicy Fruit on each seat.
- Favorite fruit? (pineapple) Best fruit you've ever had?

*16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*

By the way what is lust? A strong, intense, almost irresistible desire. (Like a fresh Krispy Kreme doughnut)

Write flesh on one side; Spirit on the other.

There's an inward battle. Two sides. One is light. One is dark. There's the Spirit of God and the flesh. It says "these are contrary to one another." They work against each other. Then it says so that you do not do the things that you wish. There's a part of you that wishes to do good. Well the flesh works against that part. And then there's a part of you that still desires to do evil. That's what the Spirit is fighting against.

And so there's this battle going on inside and it drives us crazy. Can you relate to what I'm talking about? Like we want so badly to do the right thing, 100% of the time, but on the other hand, it doesn't seem to matter how much I want to do right sometimes, I still sin. I still mess up. Can you relate to that?

\*Ok, so let me ask you a tricky question. First of all, is lust good or bad?

Go back to verse 17. It says that the flesh lusts against the Spirit. So that's a bad kind of lust. Lust of the flesh. But then look what it says. The Spirit lusts against the flesh. LUST (ON BOTH SIDES).

We think about lust this way a lot of times. We think about this intense, strong, desire that we're constantly having to fight against. You might think about it in a sexual way. Some people would say, "Man, I'd give anything to be with her. It's just lust! It's not that big of a deal. Everybody fantasizes once a while. Besides it's not like I'm doing anything wrong. I can look so long as I don't touch."

Jesus said "Whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)

Oh, but Jesus! I didn't do anything wrong. Besides it's not like I'd ever do anything like I've been thinking about doing with her. No harm no foul. I'm just looking at her. I won't ever actually commit that sin with her.

Jesus says "No. You've already committed sexual sin with her in your heart. It's wrong."

But Jesus! You don't understand! This girl is hot! And, man, the way that she dresses? I mean, how can I not think of her that way? She obviously wants me to. I mean, have you seen her body? What you're asking of me is impossible to do. How can I not look at her that way?

Think of it this way. Jesus was a man who had all of the same temptations that you and I have. But He never sinned. He never had an impure thought. He denied himself those thoughts. He didn't stare at women's bodies. He chose to look away. He **CHOSE** not to look at women that way.

Guys, listen. We have to CHOOSE not to treat girls that way. I know that what I'm saying to you is uncomfortable, whenever we start talking about this, we get uncomfortable, because it's not the side of us that we want girls to see. We'd like to convince them that we never have to fight against this.

But it's a choice, guys. It's not a sin to look at girls and think that they're beautiful. Hello? I married the most beautiful girl in the world! It's not wrong to think that girls are beautiful, but we sin when we choose to look at them lustfully. We must choose not to lust. We must choose to see that girl for the person that God created. Not an object, but a soul. A sister in Christ. Or a sister who needs Christ.

So that's one side of lust.

Some would say, "It's just lust." On the other hand God has a just lust. A righteous lust. Think about that! Think about a lust that the Spirit of God would have. It's this intense, strong desire to be your God! He wants that more than anything else. A righteous lust that works against the evil desires we wrestle with.

Let's read on.

*18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident* [what's evidence? Something you can see and know things about], *which are: adultery* [rips marriages and families apart. I'm convinced it's one of Satan's favorite sins],

*fornication* [any kind of sexual sin. Pornography, sexual stuff before marriage, etc.],

*uncleanness* [that's not talking about taking a bath. To be unclean means to be unholy.],

*lewdness* [that has to do with your language like being perverted, or vulgar, or cussing]

*20 idolatry* [when we put other things in God's place they become idols. Baseball, sleep, schoolwork. Those can all be idols.],

*sorcery* [witchcraft], *hatred* [you know what hatred is],

*contentions* [if you are a contentious person it means that you are constantly arguing],

*jealousies* [we looked at what jealousy did last week, Joseph, and Jesus],

*outbursts of wrath* [lightning bolt. having no self-control when it comes to your temper],

*selfish ambitions* [arrows pointing to self. selfishness...this is a constant battle because every sin is selfish],

*dissensions* [that's like rebelliousness], *heresies* [opinions and teachings that would go against what the Word of God teaches],

*21 envy, murders, [d] drunkenness* [Whoa! Wait a minute! You just said murdering is wrong. I get that, but you mean it's a sin for me to get drunk? Well, don't take my word for it. What's God say? You can see the list for yourself. Drunkenness is mentioned in the same breath as adultery, murder, and idol worship] ,

*revelries* [your Bible might have the word “orgies” there. I won’t draw you pictures but basically that’s a word describing multiple people engaging in sexual activities at the same time. Like a crazy sex party],

...*and the like* [Paul says etc, etc. I may have left some things off of this list, but you get the idea];

*of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Draw a line down the middle with a dry-erase marker.

Alright, and now God draws a line in the sand. He says “Here is how to live according to the flesh. According to your own desires. If it’s all about what you want, here is those works look like. By the way, this is the easy way to live. This is a life without any discipline. You just live how you want. But also notice that it’s a life lived in complete rebellion against God. These things go against what He stands for.

Now let’s see about this other side of the line.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love [Heart. The Greek word used there is “agape,” which describes choosing to love. That means you make a decision to love people and love God. Not a feeling. It’s saying “I’m going to choose to love this person in spite of how I might want to treat them.”],

joy [how would you describe joy? Someone help me out. Romans 5:3 says that we can rejoice in our sufferings. How in the world can we do that? It means joy is more than just being happy. It’s an attitude and the perspective of being able to see God’s Will regardless of our circumstances],

peace [olive branch. Having a peace that only God can give. What are some words that you would use that would describe someone that doesn’t have the peace of God? Emptiness, restlessness, chasing a feeling or a person, trying to fill a God-shaped void. Do you know anybody like that?],

longsuffering [or patience...choosing to be patient.], kindness [choosing to be kind], goodness [things that are righteous], faithfulness [staying faithful to God even in the midst of temptation],

23 gentleness [Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.]

self-control. And that last word sums it up nicely. Because if you erase the word control, look where you are. It’s all about self. And then we’re back over in this column.

Draw a tree. God says, “Look, there’s fruit here. And there’s fruit here. This is the fruit that looks good to you. [Remember, the Garden of Eden? The fruit of the forbidden tree was desirable and pleasing to the eye.] But God says, “This fruit is not my fruit. It’s rotten, and it’s evil. It’s self-seeking. It’s all about you. But over here. This is my [God’s fruit] fruit. This is the juicy fruit. This is the fruit that is appealing to me. This fruit is what you need to be spiritually healthy.”

*Against such there is no law.*

Now over here (flesh) there are lots of laws of God against these. But these things, this fruit is what the law and the Spirit of God are all about.

*24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

Look at vs. 24. Christians are supposed to die to this way. The Bible says we have crucified the flesh. (cross) We died to these passions, these desires, these lusts, now we ought to have just lusts of the Spirit.

Then look at 25-26. He says, "If you're a Christian, walk like it! If you have been given God's Holy Spirit at baptism, don't grieve the Spirit, walk in it!"

Let's review a little bit here. I'm going to ask you some trick true or false stuff, to see how you're thinking about this stuff...

Philip's tricky True or false Question #1: The Gospel is for everybody. [1 Timothy 2:4 says God desires<sup>(E)</sup> all people to be saved and<sup>(E)</sup> to come to<sup>(G)</sup> the knowledge of the truth.]

So yes. True. The Gospel is for all. He wants to save everyone.

Philip's tricky true or false question #2: True or false: Everybody will inherit the kingdom.

Remember, God has drawn a line in the sand. And He says, "If you live like this, you can't come here."

Philip's tricky true or false question #3: A Christian should be loving, joyful, peaceful, longsuffering, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.

Philip's tricky true or false question #4: The definition of a Christian is someone who is loving, joyful, peaceful, longsuffering, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.

Is this what it means to be a Christian? Is this all that there is to it? False. Not everybody who is loving is a Christian. Not everybody that is kind is a Christian. You can be a good person and not be a Christian. A Christian is someone who puts on Christ in baptism and follows Him.

Alright, Philip's tricky true or false question #5: Everybody has two lusts going on within them: the lust of the Spirit and the lust of the flesh.

Not everybody has the Spirit. Only those who have obeyed the Gospel. You might have a desire to do right, but if you don't have the Spirit within you, then you don't have God's Spirit, you're lost in your fleshly desires. And by the way, some of this stuff might be going way over your head! But if you want to learn more about what the Bible says you must do to become a Christian, let me know and we'll talk some more.

Philip's tricky true or false question #6: Christians ought to be known by their fruit.

John 13:35. By this all men will know that you are my disciples: if you love one another.

Finally: How are you known? How do people look at you? How do they see you? What kind of fruit are you bearing? Is this you or is this you?

Luke 6:43-45 43 “For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. 45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart [g] brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Jesus says, “You’re either a good tree or a bad tree. You can’t be a good tree and bear bad fruit. You can’t be a bad tree and bear good fruit. Which are you? Are you good or are you evil?”

I’ve shared this story with you before but to me it’s so powerful. It stuck with me, and maybe it sticks with you... Michael. Faithful parents.

You know you can change that tonight. God wants everybody to saved.

## Pop Rocks: Numbers 20:2-13

*\* 2(C) Now there was no water for the congregation. (D) And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. 3And the people(E) quarreled with Moses and said, "Would that we had perished(F) when our brothers perished before the LORD!*

*\*Alright, time out real quick. From the get-go in verse 2 we have a problem. What is it?*

*Now you want to see people at their worst? You want to make people really grouchy? You go on a LONG trip and let people get REALLY thirsty or REALLY hungry. And you see how that goes.*

*And so they begin to gripe (or quarrel). "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD!"*

*For 8 billion bonus points, can anybody tell me what they're referring to in that verse? (When their brothers perished before the Lord). We don't have time to read the story, but if you've got your Bibles, look in Numbers 16. There you'll find the story of Korah's rebellion. Basically he and his followers didn't like the fact that Aaron and Moses got to be God's spokesmen, and so they decided to rebel against their leadership.*

*So God literally opens up the earth and swallows up him and all of his followers. You'd think that after seeing that, the Israelites would be like, "Oh. Ok. God obviously wants us to follow Moses."*

*But that's not at all what happened! Instead they point the finger at Moses and Aaron and said "You have killed the people of the LORD!"*

You know what happened next? God sent a plague that killed 14,700 people for their wickedness.

So now look at verse 3 you know what they're talking about. They're saying, "If only we had died with our brothers then!"

To be honest, sometimes the Israelites annoy me. Oh, but they're not done. Keep reading.

*\*4Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? 5And(G) why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink."*

Alright, y'all give me some words that describe here how the Israelites are feeling and saying...

*\*6Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and(H) fell on their faces.(I) And the glory of the LORD appeared to them, 7and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 8(J) "Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So(K) you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle."*

So Moses is supposed to gather everybody together and say, "Rock, yield water!"

And notice, too, that God wants to give water to their cattle. Why is that important?

Alright, so here we go...

*\*9And Moses took the staff(L) from before the LORD, as he commanded him. 10Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them,(M) "Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" 11And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice,(N) and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock.*

\*Picture of rock. A lot of people believe to be the rock that Moses struck; seems to make sense for it to be. Really there's no way to know, but pretty cool picture nonetheless!

So, awesome, right? Moses saves the day. He hits the rock twice (btw, isn't it weird how he hits the rock twice? Hear now you rebels! Shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" SMACK. Nothing. "Ahem, I said, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" SMACK. *Kersploosh!*) water comes roaring out. And look at the words came out abundantly. That makes me think of a rushing, raging waterfall. This is a big enough water source for the entire congregation and their livestock to drink.

So, yay! They got water! Everybody's happy! And everything's great, right?

Not exactly. You see, Moses and Aaron didn't exactly follow God's plan here. He was supposed to speak to the rock, not beat it to death.

Let's read on.

*\*12And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because(O) you did not believe in me,(P) to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them."*

Wait, what?!? They're not going to enter into the Promised Land? Are you kidding me?!? After everything that Moses and Aaron had done? After all of the victories that they've had together in working for the LORD, doesn't that seem a little harsh?

I mean, this is Moses and Aaron we're talking about here! And hey, look! The water still came out of the rock! What difference does it make? I guess it didn't really matter so much to God that He prevented that from happening. So why is it such a big deal? What difference does it make how the water came out so long as they got the water?!

*\*In fact, let's talk about that for just a minute, why do you think that God allowed water to come out of the rock even though Moses struck the rock instead of speak to it?*

I know we don't have an example of a modern day Moses, but let me try to illustrate this to you. I'm trying to think of two people that you guys would greatly admire and respect in the church. How about David Shannon and Phil Waggoner?

What if David and Phil decided to start stealing money from the church without anybody knowing it? And they started off small, like say \$20 here and \$50 there. But this happened over a long period of time. And what if over the course of about two years they were able to steal about \$10,000?

Now that would be wrong, wouldn't it? And if they didn't repent of that sin and ask for God's forgiveness they would be punished for that wouldn't they?

But would it make sense for God to punish the entire congregation for what Phil and David did? No! The congregation had no idea! It

wouldn't make sense for God to punish all of his people for mistakes their leaders made.

That's similar to what's going on here in this story. This is Moses' and Aaron's sin. That's why God doesn't deny his people water. He punishes the leaders, not everybody.

*\*13 These are the waters of Meribah,[a] where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and through them he showed himself holy.*

#### Life Lessons

I. \*\*When God says something, He means it.

Have you ever heard people say things like this? "Well, I don't think God will send someone to hell over \_\_\_\_\_." Now I know that some things are matters of opinion, but guys, whenever you hear people say things like that, a red flag ought to go up. Watch out!

Because who are we to judge what is and is not a big deal to God? For me to say, "Well that's not a big deal." What if I tell someone something that they're doing is no big deal, and it is. How terrible would that be?

The only one who can judge those types of things is The Judge. I'm not God. I'm just going to have to assume that He meant everything that He said to be taken seriously.

Sin is sin. And every sin is a big deal to God. There is no little sin/big sin. All sin separates us from God. Romans 6:23 says "For the wages of sin is death." Sin comes with a death penalty.

It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter if you're Moses, none a single one of us is good enough to make it to heaven on our own! We can *never* earn God's grace!

2. \*\*Look at how God interprets Moses and Aaron's sin. Look what sin really means to God. Verse 12.

*\*12 And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because (O) you did not believe in me, (P) to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them."*

When we disobey God he interprets it two ways: 1. He says we act as though we don't believe in him and 2. He sees it as us not upholding Him as holy.

Disregarding God's Word is the same as disregarding Him. When we disregard His Word we treat God as if He doesn't exist and as if He isn't set apart (He isn't different).

3. \*\*We may not always uphold God as holy, but He will show Himself holy.

What do you think that statement means?

*\*13 These are the waters of Meribah,[a] where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and through them he showed himself holy.*

Despite Moses and Aaron's disobedience, God still took care of his people. He still proved himself holy.

We will fail God over and over again, but He will keep on being holy. We will aim at holiness and miss the mark (and by the way, that's literally what the word "sin" means, "to miss the mark.") We will aim

at being holy as God is holy, and treating God as He is holy, and we will fail over and over again.

But no matter how many times we fail to treat Him as holy, He will continue to be holy.

He will continue to do things that only He can do. He will continue to be God. He will continue to hold all things together. He will continue to answer prayers. He will continue to take care of His people.

He will show Himself holy.

Skittles: Joseph

How many of you have ever wanted to take revenge before? I want you to think about one of the first times in your life when you can remember that you wanted to take revenge.

*\*My younger brother's name is Andrew. And one time when I was young, I decided to do something mean... I hid Ashton's ring. For no good reason, except I thought to myself "He deserves this. He's my younger brother. He bothers me, and this will hurt him." And so I did it. It was a pretty evil thing to do for a 5<sup>th</sup> grade kid.*

And so I hid the ring...on the way to school, started crying, and it hit me. "Wait, I took it." Tonight, a story of revenge. Is it really as sweet as it sounds?

*\*2 This is the history of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father.*

Oooo, not a good way to make friends with your older brothers. What word do we have for our younger brothers and sisters when they run and tell mom and dad something bad that we did? (We got ourselves a tattle tale here. You know any tattle tales? I had a cousin that was the biggest tattle tale. He was always trying to get people in trouble. Anyway...)

*\*3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.*

Ok, so quick recap. Joseph's brothers hated him why according to verse 4? Bc he was the favorite. Why was the favorite (vs.3)? And he also gave him a tie-dyed tunic or coat. I'm kidding, but it was a coat of many colors.

*\*5 Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. 6 So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: 7 There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf."*

Hey, guys. Listen to this cool dream I had. All of us were binding sheaves in the field. And your sheaves bowed down to mine. Isn't that cool the way that your sheaves all bowed down to my sheave?

No. Joseph is writing a book by the way on how to get beaten up by your brothers...

*\*8 And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.*

*9 Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, [Hey, guys. Listen to this other cool dream I had:] "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me."*

[Get it how there's like eleven and you? Cool huh?]

*\*10 So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" 11 And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.*

Alright, now you imagine Joseph is your younger brother. And this stuff has been happening. How are you going to feel about him?

*\*12 Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." So he said to him, "Here I am."*

*14 Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.*

By the way, I'm sure that his brothers LOVED it when their younger brother came to check in on them. Let's skip down to verse 18.

*\*18 Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. 19 Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming! 20 Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!"*

Alright so what's their plan?

*\*21 But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." 22 And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.*

So Reuben changes the plan a little bit. What does he say?

*\*23 So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. 24 Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.*

*\*25 And they sat down to eat a meal. [Because taking away your brother's coat of many colors and pushing him into a pit makes you hungry.] Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. 26 So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh." And his brothers listened.*

Judah says let's make a little money off this kid.

*\*28 Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.*

*\*29 Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. 30 And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?"*

*31 So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. 32 Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, [Y'all look at the way that they word this sentence] "We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not?"*

They show zero sympathy. They are deceptive. They don't even refer to him as their brother.

*\*33 And he recognized it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces." 34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. 35 And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but*

*he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him.*

We'll stop our story here tonight, but you probably know that that's not where Joseph's story ends. Here a 17 year old dude sold into slavery. Who's 17 in here? Which of these people would y'all want to ship off to Egypt? =)

But Joseph's story doesn't end there. Basically his dreams come true. He becomes a mighty ruler in Egypt and eventually his brothers do bow down to him.

But tonight I don't want us to focus on his whole story. I want us to focus in on something that I found in my study this week.

Let's go back to Genesis 37:18 Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him.

In Genesis 37:18 there's a word that appears for the very first time in the Bible. It's the first time we ever see the word "conspire." What does it mean to conspire? (Ever heard of a conspiracy theory? What's that?)

Have you ever been in a situation where people collectively sought evil? I'm not talking about devil worship. I'm talking about a time when a group of people got together and decided to do something wrong...

When I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade something terrible happened—the story of John. Parents got involved. The basketball coach, our Bible teacher, had a nervous breakdown. Sank into deep depression and was never the same when we were in school.

A few years later some girls at Lipscomb who had a sleepover and decided at the sleepover to do something really mean and cruel to one of the girls...they waited until she went to sleep and then they cut a huge chunk out of her hair, and they took pictures and sent it to all of their friends.

\*When people get together and conspire against somebody, bad things happen.

*You think about how true that this is. When people are so filled with rage or jealousy that they want to see someone else be hurt, mark my words: YOU WATCH OUT. Because guess what? They'll succeed.*

And listen to this: I'd like to tell you that one person can change that. Like maybe you can be a part of that group and be the voice of reason that convinces them otherwise.

A group gets together and somebody says "Hey, I brought some weed." And you go "Guys, whoa now. You shouldn't have brought weed to the party. Why don't you get rid of it?"

How's that gonna go over? I'd like to tell you you're going to change their minds, but you aren't going to be able to.

\*Remember Reuben in this story? Look at verse 22 *And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.*

He wanted to free Joseph. But there was no convincing his brothers. They had already made up their mind what they wanted to do.

I hate to be a downer, but sometimes it doesn't matter who steps up! You're not always going to be able to be the voice that everybody listens to.

Can you think of another time in the Bible when others conspired against someone else? (Jesus)

\*Very good. Matthew 12:14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

When people get together to plan something that's wrong, there's no such thing as a voice of reason.

When people's hearts and emotions get wrapped up in evil, there's no convincing them otherwise. When you think about two people that are having an affair who think that they're in love, but really they're just in love with sin, and there's no reasoning with them.

We just mentioned Jesus and how they conspired against him. Do you remember who tried to reason with the people when he was delivered up to be crucified? (Pilate.)

Their lust for blood was so great, that Pilate couldn't stop them. He couldn't reason with them.

So what? Here are three things you need to know tonight.

1. When you are wronged (notice I didn't say *if* you are wronged) when you are wronged, do what's right.

It's so easy to want to take revenge.

Let me share with you a little secret about revenge. It's never as sweet as we think it is. In fact, it only brings with it more pain, more hurt, and shame and regret.

When we feel like we've been wronged, we feel the need to make someone else feel our hurt.

\*Jesus said, "If someone slaps you on the cheek..."

\*God says, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay."

2. \*If you find yourself outnumbered in a bad situation, get out.

Listen close: You can't reason with stupid. If people consumed something, you can't reason with them. If it's alcohol or drugs, or making someone pay, if their heart is set on it, you aren't stopping them. Get out.

Get out of the car. Leave the party. Get out of the relationship. Distance yourself from evil.

\*I love 2 Timothy 2:22 here. 22So(AQ) flee(AR) youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with(AS) those who call on the Lord(AT) from a pure heart.

God says, "Run away from this and run towards this." Pursue what is right. Run towards righteousness.

And that kind of goes back to point number one.

3. \*Pray that God will change the hearts of those who oppose what is right.

We just looked at 2 Tim.2:22, but I want you to see the rest of it as it pertains to us this evening.

\*23Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant(AU) controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. 24And(AV) the Lord's servant[d] must not be quarrelsome but(AW) kind to everyone,(AX) able to teach, patiently enduring evil, [check this out] 25correcting his opponents(AY) with gentleness. God(AZ) may perhaps grant them repentance(BA) leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26and they may come to their senses and escape from(BB) the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

When I was younger I used to see people this way. "Man, that guy is such a jerk." Or that girl is a snob. Or that guy is so two-faced. Or that person is heartless."

Instead of labeling people, let me challenge you tonight to understand people. Think "I wonder why that person acts that way?" Maybe there's a reason.

You know that bully in kindergarten? There was a reason he hit people. There was a reason he talked the way that he talked. He didn't wake up one day and decide to be a bully. Maybe he needs a friend. Maybe he needs someone to listen and to show him Jesus.

Maybe that girl that you think is a snob isn't a snob at all. Maybe you need to get to know her and show her kindness yourself...isn't it funny how we label people as snobs yet we never take the time to talk to them either?!?

That kid at school that never smiles and looks like he hates the world. Maybe he really does hate his world. Find out why. Get to know him. Listen to him.

You want to change a crowd? Change an individual. And another individual. And another individual.

We need to pray that individuals will come to their sense and come to a knowledge of who God is. But they won't unless you have the maturity to know how handle your opponents, just like 2 Tim. 2 teaches.

## Smarties: Matthew 23

(The ABCs of the Pharisees)

*-Have them sit in groups as they come in. I will have signs printed up for you taped to the wall. Jan-March. April-June, July-Sept., Oct.-Dec. You should have four mixed groups. Adjust them as needed. =)*

I feel like I've been doing a lot of lecture lately, because I have. And tonight I want to make this extremely hands on. So I want everybody to get a Bible tonight and we're just going to dig into the Word of God and I want you to learn some things together.

And let's make a commitment together tonight. We've got the high school together tonight! And one reason I wanted us to do that tonight was so that we could have some deep, meaningful discussion. And so tonight when you get into your groups, let's not talk about what happened at school today. Let's not try to make the cute girl in your group laugh. Let's not laugh at how funny this thing or that thing was. Tonight, let's just be in the Word. Can y'all get on board with that?

Tonight, I want us to spend a lot of time in study. We're going to be talking about some people that if you don't know who they are, you will not understand much of what Jesus had to say. He had a ton of things to say to these people. In fact, you might say that He had the harshest things to say to this group of people.

They were a group of people called the Pharisees.

Here's a quick rundown on who they were.

The Pharisees were the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They took the Old Testament Law very seriously. (Btw, whenever you see the word

Law capitalized, it's talking about the Law of Moses. Like the Ten Commandments...and the books of Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. They were very strict.)

They were very highly regarded (or at least thought that they were) in people's minds in their day and age. And ultimately, they were the masterminds behind the plan to have Jesus crucified. So they had the appearance of holiness, but Jesus saw them for who they truly were.

We just had Halloween. It's difficult to know who is who sometimes. Some costumes are that good. Sometimes we have no idea who someone really is underneath the costume. The Pharisees wore a great costume. They played the part well. But really, they were just wearing a mask. Jesus saw them for who they really were.

And so here's what I want you to do, I want you to turn to Matthew 23. This chapter will give you a great idea of who these guys were, and why Jesus had such strong things to say to them and about them.

In just a minute, we're going to get into groups and read verses 1-36.

Read it in thoughts. Bit off small bites. If I were you, I'd read a thought as a group, and then I'd stop and talk about it. I thought about laying it out for you in a really easy way. But I want you to wrestle with it. You guys need to know how to handle the Word of God, so here it is. I want you to just dig in. Read a thought. Stop. Talk about it. Really discuss what it means. Then write down things as a group.

And then you're going to take your sheet there and write down different characteristics that we see in these verses. For example, you might read, just for a quick example, let's read verse 3.

<sup>3</sup>so practice and observe whatever they tell you—<sup>(D)</sup> but not what they do.<sup>(E)</sup> For they preach, but do not practice.

So you might say, “Hmmm... what can I write about the Pharisees from that verse?” (The letter P: did not practice what they preached.)

So do it in this order. 1. Read the Bible a little bit at a time. 2. Stop and talk about it. 3. Figure out what characteristics are represented there.

*Give them PLENTY of time.*

*When you finish, move quickly. Go from group to group and let them give a letter of what they wrote down.*

*When you have finished that, get back into your groups and discuss the questions on the back...*

*I hate to say it, but for me it's easy to relate to the Pharisees. When you look at the list that you've created, and the things that Jesus had to say, do you see similarities between your faith and the Pharisees?*

- Everyone in the group share your answer on this question: How does it make you feel when you compare your faith to that of the Pharisees? Why?
- What do you think is the easiest sin for you to fall into that the Pharisees committed?
- What do you think is the fastest way for a Christian to come across like a Pharisee?
- What truly separates a Christian from a Pharisee?

My final thought is from Matthew 15:3-9...

<sup>3</sup>He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup>For God commanded,<sup>(F)</sup> 'Honor your father and your mother,' and,<sup>(G)</sup> 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' <sup>5</sup>But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God,"<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>6</sup>he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have<sup>(H)</sup> made void the word<sup>[b]</sup> of God. <sup>7</sup><sup>(I)</sup> You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

<sup>8</sup><sup>(J)</sup> "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>9</sup>in vain do they worship me, teaching as<sup>(K)</sup> doctrines the commandments of men."

What truly separates a Christian from a Pharisee? It's the heart... where is your heart? (I will probably close by asking them to do some soul searching)

## Snickers

To snicker is to laugh...a story about laughter.

Genesis 18:1-21

\*1 And the LORD appeared to him [Abraham] by the(A) oaks[a] of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him.(B) When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth

\*Alright, so Abraham looks up and he sees these three amigos. And when he sees them, it's like some kind of alarm goes off in his head, and all of a sudden he's sprinting towards these men to meet them and he's bowing down at their feet.

And he doesn't stop there. He rolls out the red carpet. Look at verses 3-5.

\*3and said, "O Lord,[b] if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. 4Let a(C) little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, 5while I bring a morsel of bread, that(D) you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—(E) since you have come to your servant."

He's saying, "Hey, guys. Have a seat. Take a load off. Rest in the shade. Make yourself at home. You can wash your feet here, eat some bread, regain your strength, and then you can go. But please, I insist, let me take care of you.

*Now, a question for you: why do you think Abraham is doing this? (Don't know if this is the way that he usually treated guests or not, but I think he knew that there was something special about these guys.)*

\*So they said, "Do as you have said." 6And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs[c] of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes."

Now Abraham didn't say "Sarah! You get in there and make me some cake now, woman!" You know how I know Abraham didn't say it that way? Because Sarah doesn't slap Abraham in the next verse. I think Abraham knew that there was something special about these visitors. Sarah obeys, and begins pulling the food together. But Abraham's not done running around like a maniac just yet...

\*7And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. 8Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

If you have your Bibles open, you can look through verses 2-7 and notice the words "run" and "quick." I counted six times in these six verses we have forms of the words "run" and "quick" being used.

\*So Abraham is running around like my Yorkshire terrier, Kabuki. He's working like crazy to take care of his guests.

\*9They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is(F) in the tent."

Wait a minute, how did they know her name? There must be something different about these guys after all...

10The LORD said, "I will surely return to you(G) about this time next year, and(H) Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. 11Now(I) Abraham and Sarah

were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.

Timeout. You may have heard this story before, but just for a moment, imagine that you haven't.

Abraham is 100 years old. Sarah is 90. Imagine your great grandmother being told that she is having a baby next year...

Sometimes I just love the way that the Bible words things: "The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah." In other words, 90 year old women aren't built for giving birth. That body ceased to be with her.

And so, here are a man and woman, one 90 and one 100 years old, being told that they are going to have a baby. Imagine sitting there while this conversation takes place. Abraham and the three men are drinking water and eating the cakes that Sarah prepared, and talking and just chillin'.

But then they tell him about the baby. And to me this is one of those moments, when someone tells you something that's really funny just as you're taking a sip of water and you just can't help it, you spew it out of your mouth all over the place.

And you die laughing. No way! You can't be serious! You're kidding me, right?

\*Look at verse 12. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, (K) "After I am worn out, and (L) my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" (In other words, the pleasure of having another child.)

So Sarah laughs, and by the way, before we gang up on Sarah for laughing at God here, we've got to include Abraham, because according to Genesis 17:17 Abraham laughed, too. In fact, it says he fell on his face and laughed. He was on the ground laughing.

They say, "Uh, God...timeout! Let me give you a little anatomy lesson here. You see, people don't have babies when they're 100 years old."

...Now let's take a step back and look at what's *really* happening here.

Because when you take a step back and see this for what it is: Are Abraham and Sarah really talking to God about the way that the human body works? Are they giving God pointers on this? Do you find that at least a little bit off? They're giving a lecture about the human body to the one who created the human body.

And so they laugh. "That's a good one, God!"

And while at first it looks like a little harmless laughter, that's apparently not the way that God takes it.

Look what He says.

\*13 The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 14 (M) Is anything too hard[d] for the LORD?(N)

He says, "Oh, I'm sorry. Were you confused about who I am? Did you forget who you're dealing with here? Are you really doubting my Word?"

“Is there anything out there too hard for me to do?”

He goes on to say, and I’m paraphrasing here, “Alright, we’ll see if this is too hard for me to do: next year, you’re going to give birth to a son.”

*(At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.)*

15But Sarah denied it,[e] saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. *[and I can understand that, but good luck lying to God. But God says]* He said, "No, but you did laugh."

He says “Sarah, did you really laugh?” And she says “Who me!!? No. I didn’t laugh.” And God says, actually that was more of a rhetorical question. Of course I know you laughed. I’m God.]

And we don’t read what happens next but you can imagine Sarah like a little kid caught in a lie, having to own it. “Yes, Lord. I laughed. I’m sorry I doubted you.”

#### Application

Alright, so, there’s the story. But now let’s talk about what we learn from it, and what it means to me and you.

\*1. I think from this lesson we learn the importance of lifting up our eyes and looking to show kindness.

Go back to verse 2.

\*2He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him.(B) When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth

What was it that set this story into motion? In other words, when did this story become a story?

The story began with Abraham lifting up his eyes. Now that might sound a little weird, but if we want to show love and kindness to people, we’ve got to lift up our eyes. Open them up. And look around. Because I guarantee you that if you do that long enough you’re going to begin seeing a lot of people that could use some kindness, love, and attention.

*When you think about lifting up our eyes to show kindness, is there another Bible story that comes to your mind?*

It’s hard not to think about the Good Samaritan in this point. What did he do to show kindness? He bandaged wounds. He gave up his time. He got his hands dirty.

I made a visit to the cleaners yesterday which is a big deal, because fun fact about me, I had a suit that I hadn’t washed until the other day, that hasn’t been washed within the 5 year period of our marriage. So I made a long overdue trip to the cleaners.

*Cleaners story: And while I was there an older woman came in... stubbed her toe. Gushing blood. The owner ran and got a First Aid kit. Began wiping her wounds.*

I left the store. Was about to start the car. Realized, man, I just saw the good Samaritan, and I didn’t even invite her to church. So I went back inside... Clara... etc.

\*Are we lifting up our eyes and looking at each other?

Hey, man. I want you to know that I've been praying for you.

Do you notice the people that come to class every week and don't say a word because they don't feel like they're a part of the group?

Do you notice that person that hasn't yet obeyed the Gospel? Are you praying for them?

In order to show kindness you've gotta lift up your eyes and look.

2. \*God didn't appreciate Abraham and Sarah's "snickers" in this story...would He appreciate the things that you and I laugh at?

Now, please don't get me wrong here. I don't anybody who likes to laugh more than I do. I love to laugh. I think God's people ought to be joyful. I picture Jesus and his disciples laughing together. Laughter is a good thing.

\*But I did an experiment. I wondered about everything that the Bible said about laughter. Was it good or bad? Does God have more good things to say about it or more negative things about it? I won't tell you what I discovered. In fact, I'd like for you guys to find out for yourselves. So watch the Facebook group this week and we'll share our findings and dig a little deeper into that study.

Let me tell you something you already know about laughter that you probably learned in kindergarten: laughter can be joyful and pure. But laughter can also be lethal and hurtful.

Have you ever noticed that inappropriate laughter just sounds different? Have you ever overheard a conversation between two people and you can tell just by the way that they're laughing that they're laughing at somebody else? It sounds different doesn't it?

Or have you ever noticed that the laughter that comes after someone tells a dirty joke sounds different?

Here's a verse I want you to see.

\*Isaiah 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

What does that verse have to do with laughter?

3. \*"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" God is faithful to keep His promises.

You know there were times when people laughed at God...or at God's Word. People still do.

You probably know the rest of the story. Nothing is impossible with God: Abraham and Sarah do have a son in their old age. His name is Isaac. Which, by the way, is the Hebrew word for laughter. Sarah said, whenever someone hears that God gave me a child in my old age they will laugh at me. And so she named her child laughter.

\*God made a promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations and that his son Isaac would be the child through which God would fulfill that promise.

Later on in time, Isaac's name is changed to Israel. And then Israel has some sons named Levi, Judah, Benjamin, Joseph, Simeon, Gad, Asher, those guys...

And as we continue reading on in the Bible, we know that the Old Testament tells us the story of the children of Israel.

Well, who are they? They are the descendants of Israel, aka Jacob, aka the grandson of Abraham, aka the one that they are laughing at in this story.

God is faithful to keep his promises.

\*3 responses...2 cartoons.

## Three Musketeers: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

(Fireproof Faith Daniel 3:1-30)

And before we get too far into our story, I just have a feeling about something. It seems like whenever fire is present something stupid or crazy is bound to happen.

\*So I thought we'd begin this way: does anybody in here have a good fire story?

Story of my brother at the Barker house; crazy old man that you have no idea how you're related to: If you play in the fire you'll wet the bed!

I, for one, have always been fascinated by fire. Maybe it's a guy thing. I don't know why we feel the need to burn things, but we love it. As a kid, it didn't matter if it was Styrofoam, an unopened Coke can, or a stick, I wanted to put it in the fire just to see what it would do.

We're kind of conflicted when it comes to fire, aren't we? We need it, yet at the same time we fear it. We love a fire going in the fireplace. It's comforting. But fire out of control consumes and destroys. Maybe you know someone who's lost a house or worse, a loved one, because of the deadly element of fire.

\*Today we're going to talk about three men who literally had to face the fire named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. To set the stage, we need to go back in history. In 605 B.C., there was a king by the name of Nebuchadnezzar who took the reigns of Babylon.

He was a proud man, and a powerful one. One of his conquests was the land of Israel. He subdued the nation and carried off its treasures. And he also did this. He took brightest, most intelligent

young men from the best families in Judah, and he took those guys and put them to work.

He educated them in the Babylonian culture, and put them into top positions in his administration. Three of those young men were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar eventually gave these young men some administrative responsibility over the province of Babylon.

You probably know the story, but what I want us to do is to take a look at their lives and discover what it was that fireproofed their faith and gave them the power to stand in the midst of adversity.

\*Read Daniel 3:1-12

Alright so Nebuchadnezzar has this giant statue built. And he makes a law that says "Bow down." Bow down or die. And so naturally the people obey...well, almost everybody obeys. And here is where we meet our three musketeers: Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego.

Then what happens? Suddenly some haters come onto the scene. And by haters I mean tattletales. Critics. People that talk smack about you.

And so they go to the king and tattletale on S, M, A by telling the king that they refuse to bow down to the image.

Let's stop right here at go ahead and notice our first point this evening. We're talking about having fireproof faith in times of adversity.

\*#1: If we want to have fireproof faith we must rise above evil critics.

Have you ever noticed that the haters, the critics, people that talk junk, gossips, whatever you wanna call them, always work behind your back? They don't have the courage to confront the people they have a problem with. Basically they are cowards.

By the way, these are also the most divisive people in the church. They create problems everywhere they go. They have a knack for stirring things and people up: whether it's rumor or fact.

\*It's no wonder that in Proverbs 6:16-19, it says what?

16 These six things the LORD hates,

Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:

17 A proud look,

A lying tongue,

Hands that shed innocent blood,

18 A heart that devises wicked plans,

Feet that are swift in running to evil,

19 A false witness who speaks lies,

And one who sows discord among brethren. (What does that last verse mean?)

Anybody in here ever had to deal with people talking junk about you behind your back? Take me through your thought progression. What's your natural tendency when you find out about someone talking junk about you?

What do you do to cool down?

After you cool down, what do you with it?

\*What does Jesus want us to do with evil criticism? "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to

those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..." (Matthew 5:44)

Dealing with unrighteous critics can be lethal. But S, M, and A didn't get caught up in playing games with them. They were more concerned with obeying God rather than with pleasing men. We've got to be the same way. Critics will say what they will, but what should our concern be? "As for me and my house I will serve the Lord." Let's move on.

\*Read Daniel 3:13-15

\*Fireproof formula #2: Fireproof faith isn't afraid to stand out from the crowd.

Picture the scene.

\*The music starts up. (Majora's Mask)

Picture the scene though. This music starts up and hundreds of people begin bowing down to this idol and worshipping.

\*It's easy to spot those who aren't participating, isn't it? What are some ways that Christians can choose to stick out from the crowd?

Evolution. Praying at the lunch table (my shame). Really want to shake things up? Guys, offer to lead a prayer for those around you before you eat.

\*Ever heard of David Robinson? I read a long time ago somewhere that he just refused to watch the cheerleader's routines...he just decided that it wasn't something he needed to be paying attention to, so he wouldn't watch.

I remember thinking that that was a really cool concept. And so I tried it out. You want to stick out? Look down when the cheerleaders are shakin' it at a pep rally...

So many times, I think we as Christians can be crippled by fear. So many times, I'm afraid that we allow to fear to affect our faith.

\*Read Daniel 3:16-18

\*Alright if we want to have fireproof faith number 3: we must remember that fireproof faith isn't based on circumstances.

I LOVE, LOVE THIS. Look back with me at verses 16-18. This is so good.

\*16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.

Alright, they're confident that God is going to deliver them, but look then at verse 18.

18 But if not, (whoa! Are you saying they're doubting God? No! Keep reading.) But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

\*Do you know what a fair-weather fan is? (They're only on board when things are good. When things are convenient.)

We know what a fair weather fan is, but what about fair-weather faith? Do we talk to God only when it's convenient or when we need something?

S, M, and A had deep faith, not wishy washy, fair-weather faith.

Look at what they say: "Hey, we know God can do it, and we know that He will. But even if He does not deliver us, we'd rather die than worship another god." Wow. That's not a fair-weather faith! That is a powerful, steadfast faith to admire, because it doesn't waiver even when the circumstances change.

\*It's easy to be faithful when things are good...but what about those times when we face our own furnaces?

Ever had a time in your life when your faith really felt the heat and was put to the test?

We thank God for good times, but do we thank Him for the times when we were put to the test? The Bible says that these are the times when we are given the opportunity to glorify God in the most powerful way.

\*James 1:2-3

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

\*1 Peter 1:6-7

<sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though

it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

\*Read Daniel 3:19-30

\*Number 4, if we want to have fireproof faith, we must grasp God's hand as we walk through the fire.

Check this out. I saw something in verse 27 that I'd never seen before. Cool, cool stuff.

\*Verse 27 And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies [check out this awesome phrase] the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

Man, I love that phrase. When we face the fire, when we go through trials, we have a decision to make. Are we going to allow the fires to have power over us or are we going to fully lean on God's power?

\*Isaiah 43:1-3a

<sup>1</sup> But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob,

And He who formed you, O Israel:

“ Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

I have called *you* by your name;

You *are* Mine.

<sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you;

And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,

Nor shall the flame scorch you.

<sup>3</sup> For I *am* the LORD your God,  
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

\*(Do not Fear.)

\*We can face the fires of this life, and we can walk them with greater faith because He who is in us is greater than He who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

\*Let me ask you guys a question: Why do you think we see this angel, this fourth individual in the fire?

We're not told why. But could it be that God wanted us to know that He is right there beside us even when things are at their very, very worst?

\*To those of you who've been through something hard (and that's probably everyone in here in some way), looking back now, where are you able to see God standing by your side?

Think about how true that this point is though: a fireproof faith, a faith that won't burn up, is one that holds onto God's hand. How much more fireproof could we be if we would only hold on to the hand of God daily?

\*Fireproof formula number 5 tonight: A promotion awaits those with fireproof faith beyond the fire.

After King Nebuchadnezzar witnessed the three young men pass through the fire unharmed, he was impressed both by their character and by the power of the God they served. Did you catch that his immediate reaction was not only to restore their positions, but also to promote them?

This is also a picture of what happens when we successfully pass through the fires in our lives. God is waiting to promote us, not with riches or fame, but he promises to make us more and more like Him.

Three responses...