

DAY 1 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

Are you "thriving" or "surviving" in your faith?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young— a place near your altar, LORD Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka [this literally means the "Valley of Weeping"], they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty; listen to me, God of Jacob. Look on our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one.

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. LORD Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you. **Psalm 84:1–12 NIV**

Sermon Insights:

It's no secret that we inevitably lose physical strength as we age, but the same is not true with regard to spiritual strength. The reality is that when it comes to the inner life, we can continue to grow in strength of soul for as long as we live. So, are you thriving in your faith right now, or just surviving?

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

What are your "sights" set on? Where do you long to be?

What would you consider a "valley of weeping" in your own life? What have you learned about yourself and God as you have gone THROUGH it?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, as I go through my ordinary days, teach me to long for my real home in Heaven—your house—for eternity. Help me worship you in a way that increases my longing for what is real, true, and good.

DAY 2 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

Can you name people who are intimately close to you, close friends, casual friends, and casual acquaintances? Are you missing any of these key relationships in your life?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.

Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else. For we are each responsible for our own conduct.

Those who are taught the word of God should provide for their teachers, sharing all good things with them.

Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith. **Galatians 6:1–10 NLT**

Sermon Insights:

Your life and mine will never be any richer than our relationships!

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

While you have a God-given responsibility to care for yourself and maintain your personal boundaries, humility involves thinking of others as more important than yourself. Whose "burden" do you need to share today—and how will you reach out to them?

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Comparison is the thief of joy." Thoughts?

"You will always harvest what you plant." How have you seen this in your life?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, as I grow from "strength to strength," help me humbly let trustworthy people close to me. Use me to share other people's burdens so that we together can experience your blessings.

DAY 3 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

What is your definition of "strength"?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

How long, Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, my precious life from these lions. I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among the throngs I will praise you. Do not let those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause; do not let those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye. They do not speak peaceably, but devise false accusations against those who live quietly in the land. They sneer at me and say, "Aha! Aha! With our own eyes we have seen it."

LORD, you have seen this; do not be silent. Do not be far from me, Lord. Awake, and rise to my defense! Contend for me, my God and Lord. Vindicate me in your righteousness, LORD my God; do not let them gloat over me. Do not let them think, "Aha, just what we wanted!" or say, "We have swallowed him up."

May all who gloat over my distress be put to shame and confusion; may all who exalt themselves over me be clothed with shame and disgrace. May those who delight in my vindication shout for joy and gladness; may they always say, "The LORD be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant."

My tongue will proclaim your righteousness, your praises all day long. **Psalm 35:17-28 NIV**

Jesus said, "Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." **John 10:9-10 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

In what ways (or areas of your life) do you need God to defend and protect you?

Have you let distrust and bitterness from past wounds cause you to avoid getting close to anyone—including trustworthy, loving people?

Do you have a rich and satisfying life from Jesus? Why or why not?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, thank you for protecting me from my enemies. Thank you for settling my heart and protecting my mind as I wait for you to make all things new. It's hard to wait...help me to focus on Jesus, the author and perfecter of my faith.

DAY 4 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

Was there ever a well-meaning person in your life who gave very bad advice?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

Due to the rebellion of God's people, this warning was given:

This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: "Even the few who remain in Israel will be picked over again, as when a harvester checks each vine a second time to pick the grapes that were missed."

To whom can I give warning? Who will listen when I speak? Their ears are closed, and they cannot hear. They scorn the word of the LORD. They don't want to listen at all. So now I am filled with the LORD's fury. Yes, I am tired of holding it in!

"I will pour out my fury on children playing in the streets and on gatherings of young men, on husbands and wives and on those who are old and gray. Their homes will be turned over to their enemies, as will their fields and their wives. For I will raise my powerful fist against the people of this land," says the LORD.

"From the least to the greatest, their lives are ruled by greed. From prophets to priests, they are all frauds. They offer superficial treatments for my people's mortal wound. They give assurances of peace when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their disgusting actions? Not at all—they don't even know how to blush! Therefore, they will lie among the slaughtered. They will be brought down when I punish them," says the LORD.

This is what the LORD says: "Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls. But you reply, 'No, that's not the road we want!' **Jeremiah 6:9–16 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

For those who are willing and repentant, God pours out his Holy Spirit with the gift of new life, peace and purpose. For those who systemically reject God, he eventually pours out wrath—a sad and disastrous season for those who make little of God's offer of life and opportunity. Even in this, we find God's heart for peace and restoration as we see in the father who welcomed back the hungry and broken prodigal son with open arms. Do either of these responses from God remind you of seasons in your life?

Consider all of the action steps in God's words: "**Stop** at the crossroads and **look around**. **Ask** for the old, godly way, and **walk** in it. **Travel** its path, and you will **find rest** for your souls."

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, thank you for giving me the opportunity to walk the path of life. As Jesus taught me to pray: don't let me yield to temptation, but rescue me from the evil one.

DAY 5 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

In what areas of your life do you believe "the best is yet to come"?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things.

Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan!" he said. "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."

Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.

"And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?"

"If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." **Mark 8:31–38 NLT**

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka [this literally means the "Valley of Weeping"], they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion. **Psalms 84:5-7 NIV**

We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. **Hebrews 12:2–3 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

In what ways did Jesus find ultimate joy THROUGH the "valley of weeping"?

Is your heart "set on pilgrimage" – are you maintaining your longing for Heaven as your home even as you traverse the difficulties of this temporary life?

What can you expect when you keep your eyes on Jesus?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, keep my eyes focused on you!