

# PAUSE & PERCEIVE GOD

Week One | April 23, 2017 | Better Together: Pause

## PREPARATION

### MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Read through Genesis 28:10-22, Acts 16:16-34, and Mark 6:31-32. Pray the Holy Spirit would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

### THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Many questions have been included in this week's guide. Read through this lesson to determine which questions will work best to encourage, push, and grow your group.

### DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming weekend. Pray also for your time in this week's study.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

We pause and disconnect from other things for the purpose of connecting with God.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

As we pause to hear from God, praise him, and receive from him, we are filled by his strength and given opportunities to reach the lost around us.

### MEDITATE

*"Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.'" (Genesis 28:16)*

## OPENING PRAYER

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## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

*How can you tell when someone hasn't had a vacation in years?*

*What does the concept of "unplugged" mean in our culture?*

*How often do you think people spend checking their phones, email, or texts on a daily basis?*

## TAKING TIME AWAY

In a culture obsessed with progress and interconnectedness, pulling away seems to be more and more of an impossibility. More than that, taking times of solitude where you are completely unavailable to the outside world is seen as strange and maybe even freakish! While people used to go to work and come home, now our technological devices keep us plugged into the world at all times. We can check email at the dinner table, participate in a conference call on a plane, and scroll through the lives of others in our own beds. In a culture with boundaries that become blurrier by the day, people feel the pressure to always be available and interactive in some form or fashion. Being busy is no longer a problem, it's a badge of honor. Taking time away to engage with your family is no longer a noble thing, it's an annoyance to employers who want access to their workers at all hours of the day, even on vacation. Sometimes we see distractions as normal instead of things that drain our commitment and presence in other important things, like the Lord, his church, family, ministry, and so on. This culture of distraction and connectedness has even infiltrated the walls of the church, where the spirituality of pastors and congregants is evaluated based on their busyness. In this lesson we will see how the Bible directs us to deal with this type of culture.

*How often do you check your phone during times you know you shouldn't [dinner with family, a birthday party, during a work meeting, etc.]?*

*How do you think non-believers are impacted when Christians don't take time to hear from God?*

## ■ ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

These three passages teach us how to engage with God in a world that constantly jockeys for our attention and presence. Through the lives of Jacob, Paul, Silas, and Jesus, we see the value of pressing pause and pulling away to enjoy God, away from the distractions and constant interruptions in our daily lives. We will explore this idea in three ways:

### 1. PAUSING TO PERCEIVE GOD

### 2. PAUSING TO PRAISE GOD

### 3. PAUSING TO RECEIVE FROM GOD

## GOING DEEPER

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

## PAUSING TO PERCEIVE GOD

### ■ ■ GENESIS 28:10-22

*Where is Jacob when he perceives God speaking to him?*

*What does God promise Jacob?*

*Put verse 16 in your own words.*

Earlier in Genesis, Jacob is sent by his parents to find a wife. During his very long journey from Beersheba to Haran, a distance of about 550 miles, Jacob pulls away to rest. While sleeping, the Lord reveals himself in a most extraordinary dream. First, Jacob notices a ladder that creates a bridge between heaven and earth. God's point in revealing this to Jacob is clear: even though mankind rebelled against God in the beginning, cutting themselves off from his presence, he is still committed to dwelling with them on earth. God will not give up on dwelling with his people, no matter what.

After seeing the ladder, Jacob perceives God speaking to him in a promise. And what is God's promise? That he has big plans—plans much bigger than just finding a spouse! God promises that he will create an entire people group out of Jacob's line which would bless all the other nations of the earth, and also that Jacob's people would be given a wonderful land to live in. Finally, God promises that he will remain with Jacob until his plans are fully accomplished. In short, the ladder tells us what God's plan is—making earth his dwelling place again. The promises tell us how God's plan gets accomplished—through Jacob's family and land.

*Explain the significance of Jacob's response: "this is none other than the house of God."*

*What does Jacob do after he realizes that God was unexpectedly working in this particular place?*

One important lesson we can learn from this story is that God is always working—even in something as ordinary as our travel plans or romantic pursuits! While Jacob simply thinks this trip is about finding a spouse, when he pauses to perceive God, he realizes that the Lord is up to something much bigger behind the scenes—preparing a way to dwell with his people again! God is active and working both within us and all around us, yet sometimes we, like Jacob, can be unaware of it. We, too, must choose to pause and perceive when God is speaking to us, eager to see how he is working.

Another lesson we learn from Jacob's story is the value in responding to God when we do perceive him. Jacob responds by acknowledging God's presence, submitting to him as Lord, and promising that he will get to work on building the dwelling place for God, placing "this stone" (v.22) as the first part of the process. Once finally realizing that God had been at work in his life all along and hearing the Lord's big plans, for Jacob, there was no time to waste. God had spoken. It was time to intentionally adjust everything, making room for God's presence and plans. Like Jacob, we too must respond to God in tangible ways when we perceive his presence and direction in our lives, getting to work on what he has revealed to us.

*Explain how pausing and perceiving changed Jacob's life.*

*Share a time when God clearly met you in a time of solitude.*

# PAUSING TO PRAISE GOD

■ ■ ACTS 16:16-34

*What were Paul and Silas doing when this situation started? [v. 16]*

*Why were Paul and Silas' accusers so angry at them? [v. 19]*

*What were Paul and Silas doing in the middle of the night in the prison cell? [v. 25]*

*Who could hear what they were doing? [v.25]*

While most know that Paul and Silas experienced imprisonment for their faith, some forget an important detail—they were simply headed to pray when it all took place! On top of that, they freed a slave girl from an oppressive demon. On the scale of spirituality, most of us would applaud them on a good day of ministry. However, even in their obedience, prayer, and love for others, God allowed them to be persecuted for their faith. Once they are thrown in jail for ministering in Jesus' name, we are amazed at their response. While we might expect them to demand to get out of prison, they do something unexpected: they pause, pray, and praise. And they were not doing these things sheepishly—the Bible tells us that the whole prison could hear! Even in chains, they were unashamed of their faith.

We learn a great lesson here: sometimes our “solitary” time, or our “cave,” is not self-chosen. Sometimes we are purposefully ostracized or isolated, and forced on the periphery as an outsider. We must remember that even in these circumstances, we can still choose, like Paul, to pause and praise God. Pausing and engaging with God is not something we do only when life is going right, but something we do regardless of our circumstances. Remember that Paul and Silas had originally planned to pray and praise God on that day, and they were going to follow through with that plan, whether in the church or in chains!

*What happened to the jailer after he asked about salvation?*

*How did the character of the jailer change after his conversion? (v. 33)*

Another lesson we can learn from Paul and Silas is that sometimes God is at work when we least expect it, if we would only stop and look around! For Paul and Silas in that prison cell, they were just praising God as usual—as loud as they would have in a worship service. While they were likely just pausing to enjoy God, unaware of the impact it would have, we see that God was mightily at work around them! In all likelihood, one of the people who could hear them was the jailer. In that time period, the state would brutally kill a jailer if he lost an inmate, and many who lost a group of prisoners would commit suicide to avoid the cruelty of Rome. Knowing this, Paul and Silas choose to stay instead of enjoy their freedom when an earthquake opened all the prison cells. By witnessing Paul and Silas' intense worship of God and their selfless act to prevent him from committing suicide, the jailer converts to Christianity! Who would have imagined? By simply living out their faith, even in a jail cell, the testimony of those who are oppressed end up saving the oppressor! In this sense, as they were working to save the jailer's life, God was working in their worship to save their lives!

We must remember that God is always at work around us, even in something as difficult as persecution or prison. For Paul and Silas, they were just praising God as usual, not knowing how the Lord would work in the jailer right next to them. Pausing and praising in the midst of difficulty and hardship was the very means God used to save a jailer, and may also be a tool he uses to save the lost around us. May we, like Paul and Silas, simply pause and look for the ways he is working in others, even in the midst of our pain.

*Why do you think we don't like to pause and praise in our pain?*

*Explain the difference in how the Christian suffers and how the non-Christian suffers.*

## PAUSING TO RECEIVE FROM GOD

■ ■ **MATTHEW 14:10-14; MARK 1:32-35, 6:31-32;  
LUKE 5:16, 6:12-13, 22:39-44;**

*Where would Jesus go to pray? (Luke 5:16, Mark 1:35) Why do you think that's important?*

*What does Jesus invite his disciples to do? Why does he think they need this?*

When it comes to pausing our lives long enough to richly engage with God, there's no one better to learn from than Jesus himself. Jesus' entire ministry is covered with examples of him pulling away to "desolate" places—places that are deserted, void of people, events, or even buildings in some cases. For him, being in a distraction-free environment was incredibly important, and the same should go for us, given that he instructed his disciples to pull away as well. More than being distraction-free, the desolate places carry great symbolism and help communicate to believers our true condition—void and empty, needing to be filled. While we can fill our lives with a plethora of distractions—email, phone, texts, events, and so on—desolate places help us see our souls as they really are, stripped away of all the things we wrongly use as "fillers" for God. Like Christ, we should pause throughout our life and choose to go to empty places in order to be filled up by the Father. Only there can we refuel on the strength from God that we desperately need. If Jesus himself needed to pause, pull away, and receive strength from the Father, how much more do we need to do this?

*Jesus pulls away to engage with God after doing what? (Mark 1:32-35)*

*Why did Jesus pull away in the case of Matthew 14:10-14?*

*Jesus prays before doing what, according to Luke 6:12-14?*

*How far away is Jesus from his disciples when he prays in Luke 22:41? Why do you think Jesus does this?*

More than showing us that we should pause and engage with God, Jesus shows us how often and under what circumstances to do this. First, as the gospels show us, Jesus took time to pause and receive the Father's strength after intense ministry seasons, usually after performing miracles (Mark 1:35). We, too, can experience draining seasons of ministry and need to pull away, run to the Father, and receive strength to be restored after such exhausting seasons. Second, we see that Jesus paused and prayed in times of grief (Matthew 14:13). When he

learned that his cousin, John the Baptist, had been killed, we see Jesus pull away to process with the Father alone. In his humanity, he needed to pause and deal with heartbreak and loss that we all, in some form or fashion, have had to face in our lives. While he does not let this deter him from continuing to minister afterward, the fact that Christ needed to withdraw with the Father for a time should challenge us to do the same when we face great heartbreak and grief. Next, we see Jesus seek out solitude before choosing his twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-13). It should humble us all to see that Jesus assumes he needs the Father's wisdom and strength before choosing leaders. We, too, must pull away to seek God's face before assuming either that we are proper leaders for the church or can properly choose them.

For Jesus, pausing and praying is a non-negotiable when it comes to leadership decisions. Finally, we see Jesus pull away immediately before his time of suffering on the cross to hear from the Father and gain strength for what's coming (Luke 22:39-44). This time, he does not choose to pull away to a remote place, but allows his disciples to watch at close proximity. They, too, will face suffering for the cause of God and they need to see how to prepare for it: pausing and praying with everything they've got. In summary, when it comes to pausing and receiving God's strength, Jesus' life shows us that it should be frequent, and under every type of circumstance!

*Do you ever pause to engage with God in desolate places? Why or why not?*

*How often do you pause and run to God for strength?*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

*How can you, like Jacob, tangibly respond to God when you perceive his direction in your life?*

*Pause to examine your weekly schedule and the lost friends associated with your commitments. In which events/commitments do you think God may be working in the lives of the lost around you?*



*Of many, we saw that Jesus assumed he needed to pause and pray in the areas of ministry, grief, leadership, and suffering. Which of these do you most neglect his example of pausing?*

*Make a list of a few “desolate” places nearby that you could use to pause and engage with God.*

## PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week’s focus.*

*God, give me a desolate place where I can hear you speak to me in the quiet, away from distraction.*

*God, help me perceive when you are speaking and stay alert for ways you are working when I least expect it.*

*God, help me remember to pause and praise your name even in pain. Use this to reach others around me.*

*God, remind me to pause and run to you for strength in every circumstance of life.*

## CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK

**SOLITUDE** | *Choose one hour this week to be alone—not merely away from other people but also away from all the other distractions of texts, emails, calls, television, radio, internet, news, and noise. But don’t just be alone; be alone with God. Read His word in Scripture. Talk with Him. Listen to Him. Take a walk with Him. Thank Him. Worship Him. Simply be with Him, recognizing that He is always with you.*

**GENESIS 28:13-15:** The phrase “the LORD stood above it” could also be translated “the LORD stood beside him.” Jacob’s reaction in v. 16 suggests that he perceived God as being with him on earth rather than in heaven. The Lord’s words loudly echo the divine promises made to Abraham (12:3, 7; 13:14–16; 17:7–8; 18:18; 22:17–18) and Isaac (26:4). In an act of grace, God states that he will not abandon Jacob but will fulfill these promises to him.

**GENESIS 28:16–17:** When Jacob says “surely the LORD is in this place,” Jacob affirms that he considers God to be actually resident in this physical location. Because of that, he describes it as “the house of God.” Since Jacob names the location “Bethel” (v. 19), which means “house of God,” the idea of God’s being present on earth is clearly dominant in his thinking.

**GENESIS 28:22:** Jacob promises that he will construct a sanctuary for God, the consecrated stone being the first part of the process. Temple building becomes an important part of the duties undertaken by the royal line descended from Jacob. “I will give a full tenth to you” reminds us that centuries later, Israelite worshipers give a tenth of their income to God as an expression of their commitment to him; this is regularly referred to as a tithe.

**ACTS 16:30:** When the jailer asks what he must do to be saved, he most likely refers to being saved from the judgment of God, which he would have heard about through listening to his prisoners’ prayers and songs.

**ACTS 16:32-33:** The jailer seems to have called forth his whole household to listen to Paul’s message. Christians disagree as to whether the baptism of household members included infants or was confined to older members of the household who were capable of believing, though the text seems to purposefully state that the entire house heard the word of the gospel, not just the jailer.

*\*All commentary resourcing for Lesson 1 was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and the NIV Compact Bible Commentary.*

