

# PAUSE & EVALUATE YOUR LIFE

Week Two | April 30, 2017 | Better Together: Pause

## PREPARATION

### MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Read through 1 Kings 11:1-13; Psalm 119:57-64, 139:23-24; & Hebrews 2:1. 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.

## OPENING PRAYER

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

We should take time to pause and examine our lives on a regular basis.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

Since our lives tend to drift from what's most important, examining our lives—and inviting God to examine our lives—helps us get back on track.

### MEDITATE

*"I pondered the direction of my life, and I turned to follow your laws." (Ps. 119:59)*

## 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 does it feel when you're on a road trip and you've strayed from the right directions shown on the map?*

*What happens to ships or planes that go off-course?*

*How does a captain or a pilot ensure that his vessel is staying in alignment with the proper course of travel?*

## STAYING ON COURSE

Can you remember the last time you were on open water? Perhaps you were in a boat, a ship, or a kayak. Once reaching your destination, you probably stopped to enjoy the view, watching the waves and the sunset. After the boat motor had been off for a while (or the paddles had been lifted), you probably noticed something else: you weren't in your destination any longer! Little by little, the waves sent you drifting away somewhere else. This gradual drifting experience is usually not an intentional thing; in fact, more often than not, it goes on unnoticed. But regardless of good intentions or honest ignorance, the boat drifts on all the same, putting those on the water in grave danger the further out they float. We know this principle to be true whether it happens to a little child at a local beach, or to a massive ship like the Titanic. When it comes to the water, staying on the right path is a matter of life and death, and even something as seemingly easy as staying in the same place requires a lot of effort. In order to stay on course, boat drivers (or paddlers) must keep their destination in view at all times, keeping close attention to their coordinates and travel instructions at all times. Every phase of the journey requires regular evaluation. As we will see, the same is true for our life as believers. Drifting from the Lord is an easy thing to do, and we must evaluate ourselves often to see if we have gone astray.

*How often do you think about the general direction of your life?*

*How do you usually respond if you sense yourself drifting from God?*

## ■ ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

This week, we will study a few places in the Bible where God teaches us how to pause and evaluate ourselves. When it comes to our walk with God, staying on course is a matter of life or death, and requires us to actively examine our hearts and the direction of our lives, making necessary course corrections as we go. In order to do this well, God teaches us three steps in our evaluation process:

### 1. DRIFTING FROM GOD

### 2. RETURNING TO GOD

### 3. STAYING IN 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.

## DRIFTING FROM GOD

### ■ ■ 1 KINGS 11:1-13

*Compare verse 1 Kings 11:1 with 1 Kings 3:3. What has changed in Solomon's heart?*

*According to v. 4, turning to other gods does what to our hearts?*

*To not wholly follow the Lord is considered what to God, according To verse 6?*

*What does Solomon eventually build in service to his wives? [v. 7-8]*

King Solomon is widely known for starting strong in his service to the Lord, full of love for God and unparalleled wisdom in leadership. However, King Solomon is unfortunately also known for something else: finishing poorly. At one time in his life, Solomon desired God's wisdom more than riches or influence. He loved God with his whole heart, only made sacrifices to the Lord, desired to follow in his father's faithful footsteps, and showed great humility

in his leadership (1 Kings 3). For this king, God was his truest and first love. In virtually every way, Solomon embodied how we all desire to walk with God.

But over time, one of Solomon's other "loves" started to compete with God's place in his life—foreign women. Though God repeatedly told Solomon not to marry women who worshipped other gods, Solomon made little compromises to entertain his interest in them. By the time we reach 1 Kings 11, we see that those little compromises added up to a massive shift in Solomon's life—these women had completely taken the place of God as Solomon's truest and first love. And more than just a few of them! Solomon had to accumulate more and more wives to fill the gaping hole where God used to be in his life—700 in fact! And when those weren't enough, hundreds of concubines.

*How can you see God's justice in God's response to Solomon?*

*In what ways can you see God's mercy?*

As Solomon lost touch with God, we can easily see that he lost touch with the valuable things God provides, like good judgment, humility, morality and conscience. With his judgment and morality compromised, Solomon's love for these women drove him to set up high places for their gods and worship them—something God considers evil. At this point in his life, Solomon is unrecognizable compared to who he was at the start.

Solomon's story is one we all can learn from. No matter how well we start in the Christian life, all of us are susceptible to getting off track. If we're not careful, we will stray from God in pursuit of our "lesser loves," allowing them to take God's place in our lives, just like Solomon did.

*What lesser loves in your life most compete with your love for God?*

*In what ways do you "set up high places" for these things? In what ways do you sacrifice for them?*

# RETURNING TO GOD

PSALM 119:57-72

*What must we do to return to God, according to v. 59?*

*After we evaluate our lives, how quickly should we return to God? [v. 60]*

*What keeps the author from being ensnared or trapped in wickedness? [v.61]*

Thinking on Solomon’s story, we wonder, how did he end up drifting so far from God? What would have restored him? Psalm 119 gives us a clear answer in verse 59: the discipline of evaluation, or as the Psalmist says, “I pondered the direction of my life .” Solomon’s problem was not that he was able to drift from God, for we all are able to do this. His problem was that he did not regularly pause to evaluate if he was drifting. He simply never stopped to examine the state of his heart—what he truly loved and how that was impacting his walk with God. To avoid drifting down Solomon’s path of idolatry, we must obey this verse by evaluating our own hearts on a regular basis. This means we should take inventory of what we deeply love, and compare that to our love for God. Is God our truest and first love in this season? Or is some other “lesser love” taking first place?

If the latter, we must be honest with God when we’ve “set up high places” in our hearts in order to worship other things. We may be like Solomon in worshipping romance. Or perhaps our idols are other things like money, success, comfort, or control. No matter the particulars of our idols, we must admit we are prone to worshipping them, pay attention to the sacrifices we make for them in contrast to God, and consistently examine the path our feet are walking.

*What other support system helps us return to God? [v. 63]*

*Has the author ever gone astray? What helped him return? [v. 67]*

*Explain how verse 69 relates with Solomon’s problem.*

Psalm 119 is known for its focus on the importance and value of the Word of God. When it comes to pausing to evaluate our life, there's no better place to help us see our missteps than Scripture. In order to evaluate our life, we need a standard to measure our lives against, and God's Word gives us this standard. When we've set up idols in our life, or run after other "lovers" instead of God, the Lord gives us a wonderful way to return to him: through keeping his Word (v. 67). Scripture gives us a place to run when we are ensnared (v. 61), when we are alone (v. 62), when we are with other believers (v. 63), when we need restored judgment and knowledge (v. 66), and when we need to remember God's character (v. 68), when we feel misrepresented (v. 69), and when we face hardship (v. 71). Given how well the Scriptures keep us on the path of the Lord and help us avoid disaster, it's no wonder why the Psalmist concludes by saying God's Word is more precious than silver or gold (v. 72)! We, along with the Psalmist, must think often on our ways. Should we find ourselves drifting, we must immediately return to the Lord and bring our lives in alignment to his precious Word, proving that he is once again our truest and first love (v. 57).

*We should view our struggles as an opportunity for what? [v. 71]*

*How important and valuable should God's Word be to us? [v. 72]*

## STAYING IN GOD

■ ■ HEBREWS 2:1; PSALM 139:23-24; & PROVERBS 4:25-27.

*We must pay close attention to what? [Heb. 2:1]*

*The Psalmist asks God to search his mind and heart for what? [Ps. 139:23-24]*

Once we've returned to God, we must strive to stay in him. After a time of repentance and returning to the Lord, it's easy to go on auto-pilot, assuming that you won't drift away again. After all, returning to God is a healing experience for us. We were straying, and now we've come back to the Father, running into his arms in repentance and safety. After enjoying the Father's restorative love, we can't imagine straying again. However, the Bible teaches us something important about remaining in God—it's not easy and it takes effort!

Hebrews 2 tells us we must pay very close attention to what we've heard—the gospel. Why do we need to be so alert?

Because the minute we forget, like Solomon, we drift! Like a car whose wheels are unaligned, the moment we take our hands off the wheel of God's Word, our hearts will inevitably drift into a ditch. Our sin nature naturally wants to lead us astray, so we must be diligent to stay in the truth of the Father's love for us. So how do we do that? Psalm 139 gives us the answer: by begging God to regularly evaluate us! Yes, we must consistently evaluate ourselves, but we are hopeless to do this without God's help. He has the eyes to see the truth about our hearts, even when we can't. Once we've returned to God, Psalm 139 teaches us that we must consistently ask him to help us stay there, and notify us when he detects even an inkling of unfaithfulness in us. This is how we stay!

*After examining his heart and mind for sin, what does the author ask God to do?  
(Ps. 139:24)*

*Where are we supposed to fix our eyes, according to Prov. 4:25?*

*Put Proverbs 4:26 in your own words.*

Proverbs gives us a great picture of the kind of person we will be when we pause to evaluate ourselves and return to the Lord when we've gotten off track. Our eyes will be directly forward, focused on the Lord (v. 25). Our minds will keep close attention to the direction of our life (v. 26), keeping it in alignment with God's Word. As a result, our feet will not stumble to the right or to the left into evil like Solomon. Instead, our feet will walk firmly in the path of righteousness that God has laid out for us. No matter where we are or how we started, we know that with the Lord's help, we don't have to end up like Solomon. We can finish strong by evaluating our hearts and direction of our lives, returning often to the Lord, and keeping our path in alignment with the Lord's desires for us.

## 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.*

*What specific idol in your life has God revealed during this lesson?*

*What little compromises do you make in order to keep idols in your life? How can you combat those compromises this week?*

*What Scripture passages can you use this week to help you fight your inclination to stray from God?*

*Share these things with another believer or mentor you trust, using one another as a means of accountability to stay in the Lord.*

## PRAY

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

*God, please protect me from finishing poorly and give me strength to continue in my love for you.*

*God, help me notice when I'm drifting away from you, and reveal any idols in my heart that compete for first place in my life. Give me the grace to repent from this and return to you.*

*God, give me clear places in your Word that help me stay in the path you have for me.*

*God, help me accurately evaluate the direction of my life and make whatever changes you tell me to change.*

## CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK

*Carve out a few hours from your schedule this week and remove distractions. Pray the words of Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Invite God to speak to you, and give him space, time, and quiet to do so. Ask yourself and ask God the following questions:*



- *In what direction is my life headed?*
- *In what direction do I want my life to be headed?*
- *What does God want for my life?*
- *In what areas does the reality of my life not match my truest desires?*
- *In what areas does my life not match up with God's intentions for me?*
- *God, how would you have me change direction in any area of my life?*

*Write down answers as you honestly consider these questions and listen for God's guidance. Go slowly, giving ample time to "ponder the direction of your life" and let God speak to you. Write a prayer thanking God for guiding you and asking for His help as you make adjustments to your life's direction.*

## COMMENTARY

