

September 2 — Ripple Effect

READ

1 Chronicles 5:18-26, 6:3-15, 49, 7:1-8:28

1 Chronicles 5:17, *“All these were entered in the genealogical records during the reigns of Jotham king of Judah and Jeroboam king of Israel.”*

THINK

Have you ever skipped a smooth stone across a glassy pond or thrown a big rock as far as you could into the lake? SPLASH! Then come the ripples. They spread as far as the eye can see and create a stir far beyond the point of contact. Your faith in God is like that rock or stone. It has a ripple effect on those within your sphere of influence.

You might be thinking, “What does this have to do with today’s reading — information on specific tribes and genealogy with names too difficult to pronounce?” Let’s consider one of the main reasons genealogies were so important to God. It shows us that He cares about history and the individual people and families who were a part of it. Likewise, He cares just as much about you and your family as He did those listed in Scripture. God wants families to thrive as each member lives out their God-given purpose and walks closely with Christ. And He wants to create a ripple effect as each generation passes their love for God and His righteousness down to the next.

Parents, your children's faith trajectory begins with you. But, you don't have to do it alone. That's what the church is all about! We want to partner with you to grow your already amazing kids into even more amazing future leaders and influencers. Remember, planting the seed of faith in their hearts while they're young is like tossing a stone into a still pond. You will start ripples that can impact generations to come!

PRAY

Father, Thank You for the people You placed in my life whose ripples of faith led me to have a personal relationship with Christ. Give me a hunger and thirst for Your Word, Your ways, and Your Church. Help me stand firm and flex my faith muscles so you can use me to influence others and glorify Your holy name. In Jesus 'name, Amen.

September 1 — By the Rivers of Babylon

READ

Ezekiel 32:17-33:20

Jeremiah 52:28-30

Psalm 137:1-9

1 Chronicles 4:24-5:17

Psalm 137:1-3, *"Beside the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept as we thought of Jerusalem. We put away our harps, hanging them on the branches of poplar trees. For our captors demanded a song from us."*

THINK

Imagine being abducted from your home after witnessing its destruction and the death of many of those close to you. Then, after being marched 900 miles away to be a servant, your captors taunt you to sing songs from home. This is exactly what happened to this group of Jews in Judah after the Babylonians destroyed their holy city of Jerusalem.

In Psalm 137, the Israelites were mourning and weeping over all the loss they had endured. They were in such distress that they couldn't even sing — especially when being taunted to do so by their cruel captors. Then the singer takes a sharp turn, asking God to judge the two nations that ravaged and plundered their land. His grief is palpable. His request is dark and gruesome. But his words are a reflection of the horror they had endured and the depths of their pain.

Although today's reading doesn't give off warm, fuzzy feelings, aren't you thankful that the Bible doesn't sugarcoat the real and raw of life? Just as much as God wants us to gain insight into His love, mercy, provision, and hope found in Jesus Christ, He also wants to open our eyes to the effects of sin and the consequences of our rebellion. So, heed the utter anguish reflected in this Psalm because God brought judgment upon His people only after giving them countless opportunities to turn from their sin. Also, have hope. God heard their prayers and, after 70 years, He lovingly restored His people to their land. This same love and restoration are available to you through Jesus Christ today!

PRAY

Dear God, Thank You for giving me the real and raw of life in Your Word to convict my heart and motivate me to do life Your way. Help me to include You in my daily decisions as I seek to remain on the right path. I want to bring honor and praise to You in everything that I do. Amen.

August 31 — These Bones Can Live!

READ

Ezekiel 32:1-16, 37:1-39:29

Ezekiel 37:10-12, "So I spoke the message as He commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army. Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, "We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished." Therefore, prophesy to them and say, This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel.'"

THINK

Are you good with plants? Certain people are gifted with a green thumb, but even they, at times, have plants that seem dead as the leaves turn brown and fall off. Yet, most of us keep tending to dying plants because we hope that they'll recover. As we notice signs of new life on the bare branches, it warms our hearts. Why, then, are we so apt to throw in the towel when life situations seem hopeless? Why are we so quick to give in to doubt and negativity when there's no foreseeable light at the end of the tunnel?

After the Babylonians conquered Judah, the Israelites were devoid of hope. So, God's Spirit took Ezekiel into a large valley covered in "dry" bones. God asked him, "Can these bones live?" And he replied, "Only You could know!" So, God told him to prophesy to them, and Ezekiel obeyed. Suddenly a loud clamor rippled through the valley. To his amazement, he watched as the bones attached to form skeletons and grew skin — but they still seemed lifeless (such as people that are alive physically but dead spiritually). So God told him to prophesy about breath, and as he did, there before him, he saw a massive army. Wow! What a sight to behold! God then told him that they represented the rebirth and restoration of Israel that finally culminated in the 20th century!

Do you have any "old dry bones" in your life currently? A situation that seems hopeless with no end in sight? Think about it like this. Just as you would tend to that dying plant because you won't give up hope that it'll revive, place your trust in the giver and perfecter of hope — Jesus Christ. When all seems lost, He alone orchestrates rebirth, renewal, and life transformation. He IS the light at the end of every dark tunnel! God always has a plan and purpose. He uses hopeless situations to grow you and shape you into who He wants you to be — better, stronger, and more like Jesus. So, next time you get down and lack hope, refuse to give in and declare, "Yes, these bones can live!"

PRAY

Dear Lord, Thank You for breathing new life into my heart through Jesus Christ. When I can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, I know that You are the giver and perfecter of hope when all seems lost. I trust in Your ability to make all things new. Amen.

August 30 — Grudge Match

READ

Ezekiel 34:1-36:38

Ezekiel 35:5-7a,9, “Because you nursed an ancient grudge, you handed the Israelites over to the sword in the time of their distress, during their final punishment. So now the Lord God proclaims: As surely as I live, I will prepare you for blood, and blood will pursue you... I will turn you into an eternal desolation. Your cities won’t be inhabited, and you will know that I am the Lord.” (CEB)

THINK

We’ve all heard of the decades-long feuds between certain rivals: The Hatfields and McCoys, Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, Al Capone and George “Bugs” Moran, to name a few. One can’t help but notice that the fate of such long-term bitterness is death and destruction. Each of the infamous clashes has a body count. Those who didn’t die never recovered from the collateral damage. They secured fates such as life in prison, mourning the loss of children, humiliation, and fallen graces in the annals of U.S. history. And how could really we expect anything different? They were all too focused on hate to notice the love of God.

Today’s reading talks about the result of “nursing an ancient grudge,” which translates in Hebrew as “everlasting enmity.” The conflict that began at the time of Jacob, the younger twin who stole his brother Esau’s birthright, continued to play out throughout the ages with their descendants Israel and Edom. The Edomites weren’t powerful, but they had a lot of hatred for the Israelites. So, when Judah was conquered by the Babylonians, the Edomites rejoiced and plundered the remains. But if you take from God’s people under duress, you’re taking from God Himself, and in the passage above, Ezekiel delivers God’s response. The Edomite’s hate-filled hearts and love for His people’s demise would be met with bloodshed and death — their people would eventually vanish from record in history.

Are you “nursing” an old grudge or harboring hatred towards another person or group? Don’t allow it to fester any longer! Even if they’ve wronged you, the pleasure gained from enacting revenge is fleeting and always ends in loss as it pollutes your relationship with God and others. Remember that the transformational power of God’s love and forgiveness allows us to share it with others — even our oldest enemies — and in the end, we win!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and grace. Convict my heart to extend the same to those who’ve wronged me and help me release any bitterness I’m harboring towards others in my heart. Amen.

Lord, I admit that I sometimes blatantly disobey Your commands even though I know Your Word forbids them. Convict my heart to obey You and do what's right in Your eyes. Amen.

August 29 — Criminal Minds

READ

Jeremiah 42:1-44:30

Ezekiel 33:21-33

Jeremiah 42:3,6, *"Pray that the Lord your God will show us what to do and where to go. ... Whether we like it or not, we will obey the Lord..."*

Jeremiah 9-11, 13, 16, *"You sent me to the Lord...and this is His reply. " Stay here in this land. If you do, I will build you up and not tear you down...for I am with you and will save and rescue you..." 'But if you refuse to obey the Lord...and ...go to Egypt ... the very war and famine will catch up to you and you will die there...'"*

THINK

You think you've come up with the greatest embezzlement scheme of all time. You have a few reservations because you're unsure of a couple of gray areas regarding the law. So, you seek the advice of an expert attorney. You say, "I have a 'friend'" who's planning to commit the following crime. If you say it's impossible not to get caught, my 'friend' promises to forgo their plans." The attorney shakes his head and begins to expound on the litany of problems you'll encounter should you proceed as planned. But you're determined in your heart to do it anyway.

Although far-fetched, the hypothetical situation above isn't that dissimilar to what was happening in today's reading. After the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, a remnant of God's people remained and were terror-stricken by the potential of further war and famine. Hoping for relief, they determined that their best course of action would be to escape to Egypt. But, to cover their bases, they seemingly sought the Lord's guidance through the prophet Jeremiah, agreeing to do whatever God commanded — and God said to stay. Here we can only shake our heads and wonder, "WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?!" They clearly heard Jeremiah's warning that if they went, they'd not only face what they feared most, but they'd die! Yet, they remained determined to do it anyway.

It's easy to judge their grave miscalculation and horrible decision to blatantly ignore God's command and seek safety elsewhere. But are we really that different? How often have we sought guidance in God's Word and then committed the very act that we felt a conviction to steer clear of? It's far worse to know something's wrong and do it anyway than it is when we sin unknowingly. Without excuse, we are subject to far more severe consequences. Therefore, heed this lesson. Obey God, and He'll build you up as you take root and soar!

PRAY

August 28 — We Need Help!

READ

Lamentations 5:1-22

Obadiah 1:1-21

2 Kings 25:22-26

Jeremiah 40:7-41:18

Lamentations 5:19-21, *"But Lord, You remain the same forever! Your throne continues from generation to generation. Why do You continue to forget us? Why have You abandoned us for so long? Restore us, O Lord, and bring us back to You again! Give us back the joys we once had!"*

THINK

Have you ever watched someone suffer? It's so unsettling. Whether it's from a medical condition, the loss of a loved one, severe depression, or their own choices, we want to help end their pain, but we're helpless.

Jeremiah, a godly man enduring an "ungodly" situation, was distressed from watching his people's grief. In today's passage, he lifts his weary thoughts up to God in prayer. First, he notes that God is and always will remain the same Sovereign Lord over all. This leads him to ask a very human question, "You are always in control. Why, then, won't You just end the suffering and restore Israel?" Quickly, Jeremiah remembers the answer: The people's sin led them there, and sin caused them to remain because they refused to repent. He knew that his people wouldn't just stop sinning one day and turn back to God. Therefore, Jeremiah wisely asks for God to turn them back to Himself.

We also need God's help. We could not save ourselves or others from paying the high cost of our sin — Jesus did it for us. And as we look at all the suffering it's causing in our world today, we cannot afford to be indifferent towards the havoc it wreaks in so many lives. Therefore, we should respond to sin as Jeremiah did by asking God to turn us and others back to Himself, to restore us and redirect us back along the right path.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, Keep turning me back toward You. I pray that You would help _____ (list of names) who are still suffering from the consequences of their sin. Only You can transform our hearts and direct us along the right path. Amen.

August 27 — Yield to the “Yet”

READ

Lamentations 2:1-4:22

Lamentations 3:18-24, “So I say, My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord. I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him.”

THINK

Is Lamentations your go-to book in the Bible when you’re seeking encouragement? Does it give you “God-bumps” as you find yourself in awe of His power? No! It’s quite a downer and a rather grim reminder of the fallout and destruction caused by sin and rebellion. But, it also shows us that it’s okay to cry out to God when we hurt, that He hears us, and that He is in control.

Here’s the backstory: Jerusalem had been conquered, and the Israelites were living in exile. They were utterly grief-stricken. Their entire societal structure was built on being God’s chosen people — who were they now? What was their purpose?

The author, likely Jeremiah, pours out his heart to God throughout the first few chapters, lamenting about all that has gone wrong and, at times, asking God to move in big ways. He’s so heartsick and grief-stricken that by the beginning of chapter 3, it’s hard to keep reading. But, suddenly, in verse 21, one little word is a huge game-changer! The word “yet” releases him from the bonds of despair as he suddenly remembers that God is in control, God is faithful, God is merciful, God is bigger than his circumstances — and hope is found in God alone!

It’s hard in times of grief or loss to cry out, “Great is Your faithfulness!” But no matter what trouble or trauma befalls us, we must remember that God can turn tragedy into triumph. His love never fails. So, if you find yourself overwhelmed by life’s circumstances, remember that it’s okay to cry out to God, to lament and release your feelings and frustrations. And then, yield to the “yet” as you claim the hope, peace, and joy that is forever yours in Christ!

PRAY

Lord, Great is Your faithfulness! No matter what I face, I place my hope in Your steadfast love. Thank You for mercy and grace. You are my everything! Amen!