

LifeGroup Study

Date: June 11, 2023

Text: Isaiah 49:8-16a; Matthew 6:24-34

Theme: Alignment...with the God of
All Provision

Belong Early in the history of America, shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, President Thomas Jefferson had a grand vision to explore parts of the country that were not yet known. Jefferson knew such a journey would take years to accomplish and selected Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to form the Corps of Discovery and start their famous Lewis and Clark Expedition.

With no highways or airplanes, Lewis and Clark had to carefully plan the provisions they would need for their journey. The success of the expedition, not to mention their very survival, depended on good planning, so they took time to align the things they needed for survival with the things they needed to study the places they were going. They packed food, clothing, journals, things with which to write, arms, ammunition, boats, medicine, camping equipment and scientific instruments.

Lewis and Clark also knew that they couldn't possibly carry enough food with them for the entire trip so they knew they would need to rely on the land and people they encountered to survive. This required a certain level of trust that food would be available. In the text this week, we learn that God not only provides us with all we need for life but also how we can experience the life God intended for us by aligning our lives with God.

Prayer... Heavenly Father, we know that our lives aren't always in alignment with you and that we lose sight of all that you've provided us. Help us recognize your work in the world and open us up so that we may be in alignment with you. Amen.

Believe Read Isaiah 49:8-16a. The prophet Isaiah lived in Jerusalem some 2700 years ago, during a very turbulent time in which the Assyrians and then the Babylonians conquered the northern kingdoms of Israel. The book of Isaiah can be divided into three parts, each representing a different historical period. This text is written about the period where the Jewish people were held captive by the Babylonians, a time when they felt abandoned by God and very anxious about their future.

- *Can you think of a time when you felt abandoned?*
- *Where was God for you at that time?*

This passage in Isaiah are words from God to those held captive and are just as powerful today. We are all held captive at times in our lives and God reassures us that we have not been abandoned.

- *In what way does God promise to provide?*

Read Matthew 6:24-34. This text opens with a warning from Jesus that we cannot worship two masters. The rest of the text seems to go off on an unrelated tangent by encouraging us to not worry

about our lives, yet there is a connection. When we align our lives with things, like money, and put so much time and energy in making sure we have enough, we can become full of worry and anxiety when things are not working out. Life can seem to spin out of control, causing our stress levels to increase to a point that we become disconnected and totally out of alignment.

- *What did Jesus mean by "serve two masters"?*
- *Can you think of an example where there are two or more masters in your life?*
- *What comes to your mind when you hear the word "despise"? How does that relate to Jesus' words?*
- *Are the masters in your life a source of worry? If so, how?*

Jesus knows what conflicts go on inside us. He encourages us to not worry about our lives; what we will eat or drink; what we will wear. Jesus acknowledges that God already knows that we need to eat, have water and clothes, but tells us that we should seek God's kingdom and righteousness first.

- *What does it mean to seek God's kingdom and righteousness? How do you think that helps us to not worry?*

The text ends with Jesus urging us to pay attention to how we live our lives in relation to God and one another. He assures us that as we begin to focus our lives on God and develop a deeper relationship with God, we allow ourselves to open up to God's possibilities and begin to align our lives with God. That alignment allows us to connect with the passions God has placed within us, leaving things that seemed so important before much lower on our "worry list."

- *Do you think it's possible to not worry about things that are coming up in our lives?*
- *How do we align our lives with God? How do you think doing so will change what's important to us?*

Become As we allow ourselves to listen to the longing within us to find meaning and purpose for our lives, we are able to recognize the source of that longing and open our hearts to the possibilities God has for us. When we allow our hearts to open to God we begin to understand and believe that God is loving us, forgiving us, comforting us, guiding us, and inviting us to align our lives with God. God's invitation is for everyone and only requires that we trust. Taking that first step can be scary but, as we find the courage, we begin to move into alignment with God and begin to see that God not only has provided us a place in which to live but the ability to interact with God and all God created on a deeper level. It's within those relationships that we are able to fully experience the life God intended.

Prayer... Lord God, we desire to live a life full of purpose and meaning and know that can only come from aligning our lives with you. We long to connect to the passions you've placed deep within us so that we may know your desire for us and have the confidence to take action in the world—actions based on love and generated from the alignment of our lives with you. Amen.

Devotionals: Daily Walk on the Rock

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Day 1: Monday —Remembering Jesus, the Suffering Servant of whom Isaiah spoke (*Isaiah 52:13-53:12*) and the Perfect Sacrifice (*Hebrews 7:26-27*), demonstrates the true nature of love, service, and sacrifice. Consider Jesus' life and our call as you read John 13:12-17,34-35; 15:9-14; Romans 5:6-8; 12:1; and 1 John 4:10,19. Hold these thoughts in your heart as, in the days ahead, we read of God's tender love and provision. Pray you will have the heart of a servant.

Day 2: Tuesday —The LORD's Tender Love

Read our theme texts, Isaiah 49:8-16a and Matthew 6:24-34, looking for evidences of God's love, compassion, and provision. Hear the cry of God's people (Zion), who feel forgotten and forsaken (*Isaiah 49:14*). Have you known the pain of feeling forsaken by God? Read Deuteronomy 31:8, then embrace the Lord's tender words in Isaiah 49:15-16a. Do you see this same intimate, caring love in the Matthew text? Jesus refers to God as "your heavenly Father" (6:26,32). Meditate on the LORD's words in Isaiah 49:16a: "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." Consider that Jesus' nail-scarred hands are also marks of God's eternal love. Worship the One who loves you.

Day 3: Wednesday —God Knows Our Every Need

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for "daily bread" (*Luke 11:3*). What does daily bread mean to you? Read Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 5:6; and John 6:32-35. How does this illumine our understanding of hunger and need for daily bread? God knows our every need, physical and spiritual. Read Isaiah 49:8-16a and Matthew 6:24-34, noting God's promises of provision. Even as we embrace the promises, we know many are starving, physically and spiritually. God knows our need and can provide miraculously (*Exodus 16:4; John 6:10-14*), but sometimes (often) God invites us into the miracle of provision (*John 6:5-9*). Think about this, and pray as the Spirit leads you.

Day 4: Thursday —Great and Precious Promises

Isaiah 49:8-16a is resplendent with great and precious promises for God's people, Israel. But grace-upon-grace, they are for Gentile believers too. Read Romans 1:16-17; Galatians 3:26-29; and Ephesians 3:4-6. Be asking in the wonder of this, read our Isaiah text. Consider how these promises echo other pictures of God's provision and grace (Psalm 23:1-6; 36:5-9; Revelation 7:16-17). What is your greatest need? Talk to your heavenly Father about it. Thank God all the promises are true (2 Corinthians 1:20). Make Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-20 your own.

Day 5: Friday —We Cannot Serve Two Masters

It's easy to confuse our needs and our wants. And how do we measure our wealth: against our richer neighbor's or against the poverty of the poorest of the poor? Is it wrong to be rich? Ponder these things as you read Matthew 6:24; Mark 12:29-31; Ephesians 1:18; 2:6-7; and 1 Timothy 6:6-10,17-19. How do you define "riches"? Notice the words "devoted to" in Jesus' Matthew 6:24 exhortation. It is, perhaps, easy to say we love God, but are we devoted to God? Do the objects of our devotion reveal the real leanings of our hearts? Into what do you pour your heart and soul each day? Do you delight in the LORD; is God your deepest desire? Read Psalm 37:4 and pray.

Day 6: Saturday —What Does Alignment Look Like?

Have you expended precious time and energy worrying about something that never happened? Are you content? Whose admiration do you seek; whom do you try to please? Jesus helps us focus our hearts and our priorities; read Matthew 6:24-34. We glean more insights as we read Ephesians 5:8-10; Philippians 4:4-7,11-13; 1 Timothy 6:6-8; and Hebrews 13:5. With these words in mind, ask yourself, "What does alignment with the God of all provision look like?" Do we trust God's heart; are we thankful; do we share what God has given us? Pray Psalm 100.

Day 7: Sunday —"Unto the Least of These"

On Day 3, we considered the reality that God invites us into the miracle of provision. Our theme texts don't address this directly, but the challenge to love God with total devotion (*Matthew 6:24*) is lived out only as we also love others. Read Mark 12:29-31; John 15:9-12; James 2:14-17; and 1 John 3:16-18. How might we provide bread for the hungry, truth for the spiritually famished, fellowship for the lonely, comfort for the grieving, hope for the despairing? No one can meet every need, but each can do something. Read Isaiah 58:6-7; Matthew 25:34-40; and 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-15. Spend time talking to God about how you might provide for another's needs.