BIBLE STUDY

CSI



RESONATE

CSI: Consuming Hate

In a nation of religious freedom we often forget that Christians all over the world are killed for their faith. This week we will study a man who was bent on destroying Christians, even calling for their deaths. Yet, this same man became the greatest Christian evangelist this world has ever known.

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DAY 1

The Word

Today’s Scripture: Acts 6:8-8:3

We are going to read about a man named Stephen. As you read this story I want you to imagine this man as someone you know, someone who is your best friend. I want you to experience the shock and the pain of the events so that you will be able to fully enter the feelings of the rest of the week. Do not skim these verses but allow yourself to be immersed into them. Be on the lookout for another name in this story: Saul.

Acts 6:8-8:3

8Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. 9Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, 10but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

11Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

12So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. 13They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. 14For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

15All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

1Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"

2To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. 3'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' 4"So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. 5He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. 6God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and

mistreated four hundred years. 7But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' 8Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

9"Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him 10and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

11"Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. 12When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit. 13On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. 14After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. 15Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. 16Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

17"As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. 18Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. 19He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

20"At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. 21When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. 22Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

23"When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. 24He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. 25Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. 26The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

27"But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? 28Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' 29When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

30"After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. 31When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice: 32'I am the God of your

fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

33"Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

35"This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert.

37"This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.' 38He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

39"But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. 40They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!' 41That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. 42But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: " 'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? 43You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

44"Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. 45Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, 46who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

48"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: 49" 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? 50Has not my hand made all these things?'

51"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! 52Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— 53you who have received the law that was

put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

54When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

57At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

1And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

DAY 1

Up Close and Personal

Pray for the Christians around the world who are forced to stand trial for their faith, many are sentenced to death just like Stephen. What stood out to you the most during the reading today?

Compare Stephen and Saul.

DAY 2

The Word

Today's Scripture: Acts 9:1-9

Most of us have played the game of hide and seek. One person attempts to find everyone hidden. While the game is fun living a life of "hide and seek" is a miserable experience. All over the world Christians hide from those who want to hurt them. Governments and other religious groups seek to find Christians to imprison them, torture them, or even kill them. Often entire villages are targeted if Christians are known to live in them. Thousands of innocent people are killed each year. Hide and seek is a frightening way to live.

Acts 9:1-2

> 1Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.
> He went to the high priest 2and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so
> that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might
> take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Verse 1-2: Saul was determined to play the game of hide and seek. Of course, it wasn't really a game. Saul was breathing out "murderous threats". He wanted all Christ followers to be dead. He was serious. He had been a part of Stephen's stoning and was amiable with the idea of more followers of the Way (Christians) to suffer the same fate. Determined to find the believers, Saul was willing to travel to the city of Damascus to bring them back as prisoners.

Acts 9:3-6

> 3As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around
> him. 4He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you
> persecute me?"
>
> 5"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.
>
> "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6"Now get up and go into the city,
> and you will be told what you must do."

Verse 3-6: Saul wanted to find followers of the Way, but Jesus found Saul, who did not know he was lost. Saul thought he was the seeker not the hidden. But from heaven's viewpoint, the followers of the Way were found and Saul was the one hidden from truth. In a radical game plan, Jesus Himself speaks to Saul and says "Tag, you're it." (That's a very loose paraphrase.)

Acts 9:7-9

> 7The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

Verse 7-9: The game switched from hide and seek to follow the leader. Saul who had led the way in persecuting Christians, now was being led by hand to the city of Damascus. With the loss of sight went the loss of mission. If you were suddenly struck blind, you would no longer care about persecuting other people. You would be focused on having your sight restored. Saul knew that Jesus had taken his sight which led to the conclusion that Jesus could restore it. In the darkness, his mind must have returned back to the road to Damascus. The last thing he saw was a bright light. What did it all mean? He would have to wait three days to find out.

DAY 2

Up Close and Personal

Praise God for the time that Jesus found you and brought you unto salvation. If you have not asked Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of your life, you can do that right now.

Write down your story of becoming a follower of Jesus Christ. It is just as amazing as Saul’s conversion.

DAY 3

The Word

Today's Scripture: Acts 9:10-22; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

I knew a lady who disliked the senior pastor at her church. She believed he was theologically inaccurate and thought he made decisions based on himself, not of the good for the people under his care. She gossiped about him and was irritated to be around him. But one day she felt like God told her to approach him in a humble spirit. She was prompted to go to him during the final hymn of the service and wash his feet. She ignored the Lord's word for a short time but then she finally obeyed. I was sitting on the same row as the pastor as she approached him with a basin of water and a towel. As she washed his feet, I saw people in the choir crying at her humble act. We were all moved by her obedience.

The Lord asks us to approach people with whom we disagree, with whom we do not get along with, with whom we may even fear. But when we are obedient, we experience tremendous blessings. There was a man who had to approach Saul, even while knowing that Saul was there to kill followers of Christ.

Acts 9:10-14

> 10In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.
>
> 11The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."
>
> 13"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

Verse 10-14: The Lord gave Ananias specific directions on where to go and what to do. Ananias was understandably cautious. The violent reputation of Saul had preceded him to the city of Damascus. Ananias may have been in hiding to prevent arrest. I can relate to the hesitation of Ananias but when God tells us to go, we need to go for He alone knows the future.

Acts 9:15-16

> 15But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Verse 15-16: Ananias only knew about Saul's cruel past. The Lord knew about Saul's future. He was calling the zealous Jew to be a witness to Gentiles. The former persecutor would be persecuted. Saul had seen others suffer for the Name of Christ and he would suffer one day as well.

The Lord sees who we will become. Often we see only the past and think "I could never be useful to God's kingdom. He would never want me because of what I have done". We dismiss ourselves because we know what we were. God does not give up on us. Who else would have thought that the leading abuser of the church would become the world's greatest Christian missionary? Only the Lord could orchestrate such an amazing turn of events. We need to stop focusing on our past but allow the Lord to transform us for the future.

The first person who was told about Saul's future was Ananias. The Lord shared with this disciple what he was getting ready to do in the life of Saul. We need to encourage one another spiritually. Because of Ananias, Saul would be placed on a path that would change the world.

Acts 9:17-19

> 17Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

Verse 17-19: "Brother Saul" is the introduction Ananias has with Saul. Saul had wanted to lay his hands on believers to throw them into prison; Ananias lays his hands on a new believer to have him receive sight. The first face that this former persecutor sees is the face of someone that only three days before he would have arrested. But the looks of hate was replaced with awe as the power of God is displayed. The blind can now see, not only with his eyes but also with his heart.

Saul's conversion was immediately evident. He was baptized publicly proving his faith. But beyond that, he began to prove Jesus as the Son of God.

Acts 9:20-22

> 20At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

Verse 20-22: Saul was thoroughly versed in Old Testament Scripture for he was a Pharisee, a learner and keeper of the law. From what he knew, he was able to effectively argue the case for Christ. The fiery personality that had wanted to squelch Christianity is now on fire to spread Christianity. His debate skills were unmatchable. His opponents knew they could not

match his wit, so they went for the kill.

Acts 9:23-25

> 23After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, 24but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

Verse 23-25: Saul came to destroy the believers, now the believers had to help him to keep him from being destroyed. It was a frightening experience as Saul's life became in danger. It would be the first of many attempts of the Jews to attempt to murder Saul.

Truly Saul would suffer for the Name of Christ. In his own words, he summed up his lifetime of pain:

2 Corinthians 11:23-28

> 23Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Verse 23-28: Saul faithfully followed Christ despite the hardships. Although we may not have the same experiences as he did, we also need to obey the Lord no matter what the consequences may be. Believers all over the world serve Christ although it may cost them their lives. Surely we can follow if it cost us an "inconvenience" for we really cannot compare our hardships with theirs.

DAY 3

Up Close and Personal

Thank the Lord that He is merciful enough to repeat His warnings. Ask for His help to respond to His Word today.

What are your thoughts about the response of Ananias to the Lord?

Who is someone you can encourage to follow the Lord?

What are some of the “costs” of following Christ that you have experienced?

DAY 4

The Word

Today's Scripture: Acts 9:26-27, 13:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Recently, I was able to see friends from college that I had not been around for over five years. It was amazing to see the changes. My one friend who rarely dated, was married and expecting a child. She had become an amazing social worker, though in college her original field dealt with nutrition. Another friend was thriving in the music community of Austin and living his dream of playing music, though he had considered becoming a lawyer. Another lady who had struggled through her undergrad was about to complete the program to receive her PhD. People change and it is amazing to see. Sometimes the changes are accepted by others but not always, especially if the change is radical.

Acts 9:26

> 26When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

Verse 26: When Saul had left Jerusalem, he was breathing "murderous threats" against the church. Upon his return, he claims to be one of them. Many probably believed it was a trick to discover believers and have them arrested. Out of fear, they stayed away. But there was one man who overcame his fear and overcame Paul's past. This man was named Barnabas.

Acts 9:27

> 27But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

Verse 27: The name Barnabas means Son of Encouragement (Acts 4:36). It was his nickname. His real name was Joseph but they called him Barnabas because he was such an encourager. I hate to wonder what people would nickname me if they based it upon my character. That is a scary thought! But this man was an encourager to the most rejected man in Jerusalem. Saul was not accepted by the devout Jews because of his new belief in Christ, yet he was not accepted by Jesus followers because of his past of persecuting them. Barnabas' encouragement dramatically impacted Saul's life. But at the time, Barnabas did know that his encouragement also impacted history. For here would begin the events which would set Saul up as the greatest missionary this world has ever seen.

Acts 13:1-3

> 1In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Verse 1-3: The events of Saul's missionary journeys are chronicled in the book of Acts. He healed people, struck a man with blindness, cast out demons, shared the gospel with countless people, raised a young man to life, and did too much to recount. Not only that, he wrote many letters which make up a large portion of the New Testament. For years he labored faithfully for the work of Christ. We know from church history that Saul was beheaded for his belief in Christ. Read the verses that he wrote in his last letter before his death:

2 Timothy 4:6-8

> 6For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Verse 6-8: Saul, who became known as Paul, was faithful to the end. He lived for Christ from the moment that He saw the bright light on the Damascus road until he stood once again in the light of the Lord after his execution. Saul is an example to us of what our lives can be if we surrender our past to the past and live faithfully in the present. How could our lives impact the world around us?

DAY 4

Up Close and Personal

Praise the Lord who changes us.

How have you changed in the past five years? In the past year? In the past six months? In the past week?

How will you let go of your past and live for Christ right now?

What proves that you believe that change in your life is possible?

DAY 5

The Word

Today’s Scripture: Hebrews 13:3

As we end this week, I feel compelled to share the truth about the persecuted church. Persecution did not just take place in Saul’s day. In fact, more people are killed for their faith today than at any point in history. I found this article from the year 2002:

On June 6, Martin Burnham, an American missionary, died in a battle between his Islamic kidnappers and Filipino troops sent to rescue him. Burnham, thus, becomes the newest member of what the Te Deum, an ancient hymn, calls "the white-robe army of the martyrs" -- an army that, according to a recent estimate, is a staggering 70 million strong.

But what's even more staggering is that, according to the same estimate, 45 million, or two-thirds of all Christian martyrs, died in the twentieth century. These estimates are contained in a new book, The New Persecuted: Inquiries into Anti-Christian Intolerance in the New Century of Martyrs. It's written by an Italian journalist, Antonio Socci. The estimates are derived from sources such as Oxford's World Christian Encyclopedia.

Many of the martyrs died in places like the former Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. But there are others, lesser known places where Christians were killed for their faith, like Turkey, where 1.5 million Armenian Christians were murdered.

And the killing continues. Socci estimates that an average of 160,000 Christians have been killed every year since 1990 in places like Algeria, Nigeria, Sudan, and Pakistan.

Socci writes that the "global persecution of Christianity is still in progress but in most cases is ignored by the mass media and Christians in the west."

Colson, Chuck. “A New Century of Martyrs: Anti-Christian Intolerance.” Berean Publishers. 2002. 15 October 2007 http://www.bereanpublishers.com/Persection_of_Christians/a_new_century_of_martyrs.htm>.

My mind cannot grasp 160,000 people. The Bristol Motor Speedway seats 160,000 people I recommend you look up the stadium. Imagine all of those people dead. It was an overwhelmingly gruesome thought when I did it. Yet, I cannot deny the truth. We are busy watching sports and entertainment while ignoring the thousands of people around the world who are being killed for their faith.

Hebrews 13:3

> 3Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Verse 3: We are called to remember prisoners of the faith as if we ourselves were in prison. We are to recall their sufferings as if we are being mistreated. For years, Western Christians did not even know that believers around the world were being persecuted. One man opened their eyes to the brutal truth.

The man's name was Richard Wurmbrand. He and his wife Sabrina had both been imprisoned and tortured for their faith while living in Communist Romania. Their son who at the time was only nine years old was left orphaned while they were in prison. Years later, Richard and Sabrina escaped to the United States where they were able to share the truth of their tortures. Richard showed the scars from carvings into his skin. They knew people who had died from the persecution. The Wurmbrands went on to found Voice of the Martyrs. I receive a monthly magazine from this ministry that details the arrests, torture, and murder of our brothers and sisters around the world. Sometimes I cannot even look at the pictures because they are so horrific, yet I cannot close my eyes to the truth.

"The Story of Richard and Sabrina Wurmbrand." Voice of the Martyrs. 2003. 15 October 2007 <http://www.persecution.com/about/index.cfm?action=WurmbrandStory>

We cannot ignore the persecution any longer. Please look up Voice of the Martyrs on- line and read about the persecuted church. They will send you e-mails about people who are arrested so you can pray for them, write the prisoners, and even write the government officials holding them captive. You can give money to people who are risking their lives to share the gospel in countries closed to Christ. There are other ministries that also support the persecuted church. Get involved. Don't close your eyes to it any longer. We have spent enough of our time and resources on pleasures for ourselves. We cannot forget our persecuted family anymore. We need to share in their sufferings.

DAY 5

Up Close and Personal

Pray for the persecuted church. Ask the Lord how you can remember them and share in their sufferings.

Look up Voice of the Martyrs on-line. Write your thoughts about what you learn here.

How will you remember the persecuted church?

How can you encourage others to join the cause of sharing in the suffering of believers around the world?

BIBLE STUDY

CSI



RESONATE

CSI: Unjust Justice

Everyone can look back on their life and name decisions they regretted. Although these decisions may have had consequences, they do not prohibit present and future service unto the Lord. This week we will study a murderer who became one of the greatest leaders ever known in Israel.

DAY 1 / DAY 2 / DAY 3 / DAY 4 / DAY 5

DAY 1

The Word

Today's Scripture: Exodus 2:1-10

He was born special. His parent knew that this baby was not like other children. Of course most parents think that about their little ones. But these parents took great risk in preserving their son's life.

Exodus 2:1-2

Verse 1-2: Most parents when they have a child show the baby off. Why would they hide their son? The pharaoh, leader of Egypt, had decreed that any male child born should be killed. He was concerned about the number of the Israelite slaves living in his land. He wanted to keep a handle on his slaves and killing babies by throwing them in the Nile was the Pharaoh's option for controlling the population. It was a difficult time; not only were the parents living as slaves, but they also were handling the fear of having their son possibly murdered. The mother devised an amazing plot to save her son.

Exodus 2:3-6

Verse 3-6: Pharaoh had ordered that every male baby be drowned in the Nile. Yet, Moses was saved by Pharaoh's daughter bathing in the Nile. The place of many deaths was the place of life for one child, one special child.

Moses was only three months old and had already experienced an amazing miracle of God. But the miracles did not end there.

Exodus 2:7-9

Verse 7-10: The mother of Moses was able to raise her own son. Due to the quick response of the sister of Moses, this brave mother would be able to spend more time with her special child. She would be able to instill in him the ways of the Lord. Later, she would turn him over to be raised in a safe, luxurious place instead of in slavery.

Exodus 2:10

Verse 10: Moses, born into slavery, is adopted as grandson of the Pharaoh. This child became the adopted relative of the very man who wanted him dead. What a turn of events. The Lord's hand is evident in the protection and provision for Moses.

The background for Moses is now set-up. You know his miraculous life and story at such an early age. It was evident that this man was heading toward greatness. But his way to God's calling took a drastic turn as we will find out tomorrow.

For now, I want to leave you with an incredible thought: you are a special child. Moses' parents risked their lives to save their baby. Jesus gave His life to save you. The miracles of Moses' first few months and years of life are no more amazing than yours. Your life is a miracle. The Lord chose to create you. Marvel in that truth.

DAY 1

Up Close and Personal

Thank the Lord that He created you and that He saved you.

What turn of events in the young life of Moses amazes you?

How can you apply this to your life?

Why is it important to know that our lives are God’s miracle?

DAY 2

The Word

Today's Scripture: Exodus 2:11-15; Hebrews 11:24-25; Luke 6:41-42

Crime Scene Investigation, or CSI, is very intriguing to many people. They want to figure out the "who dun it"? Of course, many people are used to the one hour television shows so they get their answer in a short amount of time. In reality, CSI takes months and even years before conclusions can be made. That is, of course, if there is no witnesses. With a witness, the procedure moves much faster. In our CSI we will have today, the witnesses give the criminal away.

Exodus 2:11-12

Verse 11-12: Is this the golden boy of yesterday's study? The one who was divinely protected by God? You would think to hear about Moses the Magnificent not Moses the Murderer. But it is true. He killed another man.

Moses had been raised in the household of Pharaoh but knew his bloodline was from the Hebrews. He could have ignored his people, but Moses instead identified with their suffering.

Hebrews 11:24-25

Verse 24-25: Moses knew that the Egyptians were wrong in their treatment of the Hebrew slaves. I am sure that Moses wanted to do something to help them. However, his sense of justice was sidetracked by his own unjust act. He unleashed his own vengeance instead of waiting upon the vengeance of God.

Have you ever taken matters into your own hands? Whenever we decide to take control of the matter, we are in the wrong. Even if our motives are "right", we are still wrong. Our course of action should be set by what the Lord calls us to do, not by our own idea of a quick solution. Look at the big picture: what did Moses accomplish? Was he going to try to kill one Egyptian at a time? His plan was rash and ineffective. Often our plans end up being a waste of everyone's time and energy, leaving more people hurt than helped. That person hurt may be yourself.

Exodus 2:13-15

Verse 13-15: A Crime Scene Investigator loves witnesses because they lead more often to a criminal's prosecution than just circumstantial evidence. A CSI would love this witness. He was willing and ready to condemn Moses.

The whole idea of criminal witnesses agreeing to a plea bargain irritates me. A criminal is given a lighter sentence in order to testify against another criminal. Why should a criminal be trusted to tell the truth especially since all they are interested is getting an easier penalty? It makes no sense. This Hebrew makes no sense to me either. He is beating another guy up and all he wants to do is to threaten Moses. The Hebrew is in the wrong but all he cares about is pointing out the wrong in Moses. While no violence is commendable, Moses was attempting to help the Hebrews. This man was just beating a fellow slave. Yet, at the same time, Moses had a lot of nerve to question this guy considering he had just murdered someone the night before.

The whole game of finger-pointing is wrong. We are so busy looking at the sins of others that we do not acknowledge the sins in ourselves. This whole syndrome could be called “plank eye.”

Luke 6:41

Verse 41: It is time for us to stop comparing ourselves to one another. All we do is prohibit the changes we need to make in our own lives. I think the church is guilty of doing this. We may condemn the sexually immoral, but we do not condemn our gossip. We condemn the divorced, but we do not condemn our degrading tone of voice to our spouse. We condemn teenagers on drugs, but we do not condemn emotional neglect of our children. We condemn abortion or homosexuality or a host of other things, but we do not condemn our own pride. It is time that we take the planks out of our eyes.

Luke 6:42

Verse 42: Did you ever notice the reason to take planks out of our own eyes? It is so we can clearly see to help others. It is not so that we can feel better about ourselves compared to the rest of the world. Instead, it is to take time to look in the eyes of others and speak truth to them in love. “Listen, brother or sister, I used to have a plank in my eye. I know what it is like. But I also know how to be plank free. If you want I can help you. I believe that with God’s help you can change.” That is why planks need to be removed, so we can work with others for life transformation.

Moses did not know this lesson, yet. He could not see clearly. Neither could the Hebrew slave. Both of them were missing out on life transformation. But we know that one was getting ready to experience it. But the removal of his “plank” would be a tedious process, just as it is for you and me.

DAY 2

Up Close and Personal

Confess your sins, your “plank eyes” to the Lord.

Who specific sin have you been judging?

How can you learn to stop condemning others?

What “plank eye” (sin) needs to be removed from your life?

How can you help others to move away from sin and move towards life transformation?

DAY 3

The Word

Today's Scripture: Exodus 2:14-21

I love old movies. After watching the musical, A Date with Judy, I had to look up one of the actors in the film. This young man was so sweet and charming; I wanted to know more about him. His name was Scotty Beckett. After reading his biography, I wish I had not been so curious:

Born Scott Hastings Beckett on September 30, 1929 in Oakland, California, he and his family moved to Los Angeles when Scotty was 3 years old. Shortly after arriving in LA, Beckett's father was hospitalized and Scotty would frequently entertain his dad by singing songs. During one such visit, a Hollywood casting director happened to notice the cherubic youngster and told his parents he had movie potential. Scotty made his debut in Gallant Lady (1933) starring Clive Brook and Ann Harding... Scotty appeared in fifteen Our Gang shorts in two years...After leaving Our Gang, Beckett emerged as one of the top child stars of his era, appearing in many films with the top stars of the late 30s and early 40s.

At around the same time, Scotty began to gain notoriety not only for his acting, but also for his nocturnal activities. Part of the young Hollywood jet set, Beckett was a fixture at parties and would frequently be seen with young stars like Roddy McDowall, Jane Powell, Elizabeth Taylor, and Edith Fellows. His nightlife seemed to become more of a priority than his burgeoning acting career, and it started a trend of reckless, irresponsible behavior which plagued Beckett the rest of his life

This behavior included drunk driving, abusing his wives (he was married twice), cashing bogus checks, addiction to pain pills, crashing two cars while intoxicated, serving time in a Mexican prison, smuggling dangerous drugs across the border, assault with a deadly weapon, and finally suicide at the age of 38.

Leonard Maltin summed it up best when he wrote, "It was a particularly sad end for someone who, as a child, had shown so much easy charm and talent." Scotty Beckett was not the first child-star casualty and he would not be the last. But his story was certainly one of the saddest.

(Internet Movie Database, Inc. 1990-2007. Amazon.com. September 3, 2007.)

Before Scotty Beckett ended his life he attempted to work as both a used car salesman and an ambulance driver. He went from being one of the top box office stars to a criminal and an occupational drifter. Mr. Beckett could not adjust to change in life. When he was too old to be

a child star, he simple drifted into confusion, pain, and despair.

Moses experienced a drastic change in his charmed life as well. He went from a relative of the Pharaoh to a fugitive. Like Scotty, Moses was guilty of his crimes. But unlike Scotty, Moses made necessary changes for his new life.

Exodus 2:14-15

Verse 14-15: Moses had to run away. He was one the people from the household of Pharaoh, an impressive kingdom at the time; now he is sitting alone by a well. He knew no one. He was not trained for life outside the royal court. Moses was not prepared to survive in Midian. But the Lord knew all of that. He turned the rejected “prince” into a local hero.

Exodus 2:16-16-17

Verse 16-17: That feisty nature of Moses appears again. The first time, he unleashed his sense of justice in an unjust way, killing an Egyptian. This time he is just in defending the shepherdesses and he is rewarded for his efforts.

Exodus 2:18-20

Verse 18-20: God takes care of our emotional needs. Moses was all alone and the Lord provides him with a new family. I am amazed by the mercy of God. Even when we find ourselves in a terrible place due to our sin; the Lord meets us exactly where we are. He did not say, “Moses, too bad for you. I had a plan for your life but you ruined it all. Good luck.” Instead, God opens a door for Moses so that he could begin a new life in a new place. Although the Lord showcases His mercy, Moses still remembers his past; the consequences did not just disappear.

Exodus 2:21

Verse 21: The royal one is now married into a shepherd’s family. The one who was served now works at a lowly profession. The life of Moses had radically changed. He remembered his past and his dreams; but he accepts his new life. He commits to being a shepherd in the land of Midian. He probably thought it was the end of the story. He had no idea that one day his life would make another radical change.

DAY 3

Up Close and Personal

Thank God that He shows us mercy.

How do you respond to change in your life?

When have you experienced God’s mercy in the midst of your consequences from poor choices?

DAY 4

The Word

Today's Scripture: Exodus 2:23-4:17

It was my birthday. I had to run into the grocery store so my friend dropped me off. He said that he would come back around and pick me up. I bought the snacks I wanted and came back outside. I waited. And I waited. And I waited some more. Then, I began to cry. Here it was, my birthday, and I was stuck outside of a grocery store. It was already one of those difficult year birthdays (I will not tell you which one) so this was enough to push me over the edge. I was standing in front of the store crying when he finally came around to pick me up. He apologized. He finally shared that he had run over to Target to buy me a card because he had forgotten to get one to go with his gift. I told him next time forget the card just don't forget me outside the store!

Have you ever felt forgotten? There was a nation of people who felt like God had abandoned them. In their misery, they cried out for help

Exodus 2:23-25

Verse 23: The Israelites were the people of God yet they were forced into slavery by the Egyptians. They had been slaves for four hundred years. I think it is understandable why they felt as if the Lord was ignoring them. All they could see was their misery. The Israelites had no idea of the Lord's plan for salvation. The plan included Moses, a man who also felt forgotten in the desert land of Midian.

Exodus 3:1-10

Verse 1-10: Moses the murderer, Moses the fugitive, Moses the shepherd, was called to go to Pharaoh, only the most powerful man on earth at that time, and say "Let the Israelites go." Usually, when people go through resumes, ex-murderers are not hired for public relation positions. Yet the Lord, knowing the past of Moses, said "you are the guy for the job." Our past does not limit our future with the Lord.

I do not know your past, as you do not know mine. But I want to speak encouragement to all of our hearts; we are not beyond the calling of the Lord. We have days of service in front of us if we would choose to follow Him now. Those who feel unqualified, unworthy, unwanted, and unimportant: you are just like Moses. He had reservations about God's calling on his life as well.

Exodus 3:11-4:17

Verse 11-31: I have to let you know: these are two of my favorite chapters in the Word. I love them because God used these Scriptures to radically change my life. I was working as a counselor with runaway and homeless youth but I was feeling more and more restless in my job. One Sunday I was at church when the music minister began singing a song about Moses. The song highlighted all of the reasons Moses told God “no” and all the reasons God said “yes”. Moses knew that he could not do the job. The Lord was saying “I’m with you and I will perform these miracles through you.” As I listened to the words I realized I was just like Moses. I kept telling the Lord why He could never use my life in a significant way. He reminded me that it had nothing to do with me but it had everything to do with Him.

Moses knew his past, his inadequacies, his station in life. But none of these were hidden from the Lord. He did not choose Moses because he had made a mark on the world. Instead, God was going to make a mark on the world and He chose to do so with Moses. The Lord knows your past, your inadequacies, your station in life. But He will determine your future. When he informs you of His plan, join His work and experience Him doing something amazing through your life as well.

DAY 4

Up Close and Personal

Thank the Lord that He does not discard us because of our pasts. Thank you for the future that you have because of Him.

What excuses keep you from fully following the Lord?

How will you choose to obey God instead of focusing on your excuses?

Has the Lord called you to something new? What is it? How will you obey?

DAY 5

The Word

Today's Scripture: Exodus 11:1-9; 14:13-31

Moses heard God speak through a burning bush. After much protest, he finally submitted to God's will to return to Egypt. This was not a heroic start for what would end up being a heroic career.

Moses witnessed the Lord breaking the strength of Egypt through the ten plagues. You can read in detail about the first nine plagues in Exodus 7-10: water filled with blood, frogs covered the land, gnats came upon people and animals, flies swarmed around the Egyptians, livestock died from a plague, painful boils festered on people and animals, hail fell that was large enough to kill people and livestock, locusts devoured all plant life, and three days of thick darkness took place. However, through it all, the Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. But there was still one more plague to come.

Exodus 11:1-9

Verse 1-9: The last plague would be a tremendous blow on an already wounded Egypt. The former plagues had damaged not only their population but their economy as well. But this plague, as the others, did not come without warning. Moses told the Pharaoh about the impending doom but the ruler refused to listen. His hard heart cost him the life of his firstborn son.

While Pharaoh displayed his arrogance, the anger of Moses was shown. In verse 8 it states that Moses left Pharaoh, "hot with anger". I love that. Moses' personality had not changed from who he was forty years ago. Remember, he killed an Egyptian; his anger at the abuse of the Israelites resulted in Moses taking another's life. That was Moses acting out of his own ways. Now, in obedience to God, he still had anger. He was mad at the refusal of Pharaoh to do what was right, causing so much pain for the people of Egypt. But now that anger was channeled through the Lord. He was allowing God to take vengeance, not himself. He went from independent (I'll take care of this unjust situation myself) to dependent on the Lord (I'll let God take care of this unjust situation in His own way and time). His dependence on the Lord saved the nation, for he followed the words of the Lord time and time again.

One of the most famous examples of Moses' dependence on God was in the incident of crossing the Red Sea. The Israelites had left Egypt. After they left, Pharaoh decided that he wanted to bring them back. He and his army went after them. The Israelites were penned against the sea. The former slaves would have been no match for the trained Egyptian military. Moses prayed and followed the guidance of the Lord.

Exodus 14:13-31

Verse 13-31: Moses, the murderer, became one of the greatest leaders Israel has ever known. He is still greatly revered for his contributions to religion, law, historical documentation, and so much more. He was a poet and a prophet and taught the people songs that he wrote. Moses was an amazing man, not because of who he was, but because Who he depended upon.

Our future and our present can be radically different from our past. This is only possible by our dependence upon the Lord, allowing Him to guide us through life's ups and downs. His journey is more amazing than anything we could imagine. Moses thought he would live the lonely life of a fugitive shepherd. The Lord made him the leader of over a million people. Moses thought his people were destined to remain slaves. The Lord allowed him to not only witness their release but be an instrumental part of it. Moses felt washed up. The Lord knew he had better years ahead.

Take your cue from Moses. Depend on the Lord. Let Him lead you into the future He has planned for you. It will far outshine your past mistakes.

DAY 5

Up Close and Personal

Confess your independent ways. Ask the Lord to help you depend upon Him.

How does the story of Moses encourage you?

In what ways do you need to depend upon the Lord?

How have you allowed your past to keep you from living fully for God now?

What changes will you make today?