

Section 5, Week 39  
Home Page Summaries, Days 2-5

Day 2

God's Identity

The God Who Closes and Opens

No Christian gets confused by the open doors in life—we take them as a sign of God's blessing. But let a door close in our path and we suddenly think in terms of God's will being thwarted. In Acts 16:6-10 (p. xxx), the apostle Paul's life provides a beautiful illustration of how closed and open doors can combine to accomplish God's will.

Day 3

My Identity

Stop, Look, and Listen

Nothing is easier in our modern world than to view Sunday as the only spiritual day of the week. Or our morning devotional time as the only spiritual part of the day. But in the kingdom of God, every place and every moment is sacred. Learn how a young Jewish woman discovered this—and saved a nation!—in Esther 4:13-14 (p. xxx).

Day 4

Impact

The God Who Arranges

To encourage their small children along the path of discovery, parents often assist behind the scenes. And they do the same to shield them from danger. Such arranging is part of a parent's job—and joy. The Bible indicates that God is at work behind the scenes as well. Peter exposes the most shocking example of it in history in Acts 2:23 (p. xxx).

Day 5

Implication

Life's Toughest Question

Fortunately, the tough questions children ask—"Why can't I see the wind?"—don't require as much precision as others—"Why was my child born disabled?" When life's "accidents" come close to home, we need answers that work. Jesus' gave his disciples an answer to one of their tough questions that is foundational for the spiritual life (John 9:1-3; p. xxx).

Section 5, Week 39, Day 1

Genesis 50:20

374 words

The Promise

No Accidents with God

Genesis 50:20 History is filled with ironies which stand as a worthy defense for the idea that Someone is at work behind the scenes. Consider a young Jewish zealot named Saul, who took part in the persecution of the early church. By helping to kill Stephen, the church's first martyr, he only caused the church to flee, go underground, and grow (Acts 7:54-8:3). As the church father, Tertullian, later observed, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The same could even be said for how Hitler's persecution of the Jewish people only strengthened their resolve to persevere and retain their identity. God has demonstrated an uncanny knack, to use human terms, for turning the evil intent of some people into that which is good for others.

Or consider the story of Joseph. Next to the death of Christ (Acts 2:23), Joseph is history's greatest example of evil being turned into good. Joseph was hated by his eleven brothers (sons of Jacob) and was sold as a slave to Midianite traders who took him to Egypt. But there, God raised him to a position of authority second only to Pharaoh. When there was a famine in Israel, God used Joseph's authority to provide "the Hebrews"—the 70-odd members of Jacob's family—with a place to live in Egypt. Thus, God's chosen people survived. But the irony increases.

The Hebrew shepherds were so detestable to the sophisticated Egyptians that Jacob's family was stuck off in a corner of Egypt so the Egyptians wouldn't have to intermingle with them (Gen. 43:32; 46:34). Later, when the Hebrews were made slaves, they grew untouched racially for 400 years into a nation of several million people by the time of the Exodus. What eleven brothers meant for evil, God turned into good for the whole world. For from a people that would have perished had Joseph not been in Egypt eventually came the Savior of the world.

Have you experienced anything, especially something ill-intended, that made you wonder, "Where is God?" If you are his child, rest assured—because there are no "accidents" with God, there are none with you either. Keep your faith and confidence in the God who causes all things to work together for good.

God's Promise to You: "You have never been in an 'accident.'"

Section 5, Week 39, Day 2

Acts 16:6-10

372 words

## God's Identity

### The God Who Closes and Opens

Acts 16:6-10 A “STOP” sign in the middle of a road you thought was God’s will can be perplexing for a Christian. Perhaps it’s the road to a relationship: You think you have found the right person to marry, and then the relationship ends. Maybe it’s a career road: you interview for the “perfect” job, but the offer never comes. Or perhaps your road is leading to long-sought happiness—and your dream vanishes like a mist.

Life is filled with “STOP” signs. And lest we think that it is our immaturity or lack of wisdom that results in God changing our direction, we need to remember how God abruptly closed the door on the apostle Paul—but quickly opened it again in a new direction.

Paul and his missionary band were on his second journey to spread the gospel throughout Asia Minor—or so he thought. Heading up through what is now modern-day Turkey, they turned toward the Roman province of Bithynia—“but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.” Slam! That door was closed to the chief apostle. What happened? Had he misread God’s will for their trip? Paul had no idea. He was exactly where we are at times—perplexed about the circumstances he faced. But he didn’t mope or pout. Doing what seemed reasonable, he and his companions went to the nearby port city of Troas for lodging. And one night (we don’t know how long they were in Troas wrestling with the issue of direction), the reason for the closed door became evident. A man from Macedonia (northern Greece) appeared to Paul in a vision pleading for Paul to “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Paul’s conclusion was that God had called them to preach the gospel in Macedonia, not Bithynia.

Paul did the right thing. When he discovered a closed door, he looked for an open one. He knew God had called him on the journey, and he *expected* God to show him the directions and destinations as he went. You serve the same God, and are on the same faith-journey, as Paul. So when you encounter a closed door, look to the God who both closes and opens doors to show you your next step.

God’s Promise to You: “Closed doors are a sign of my presence, not my absence.”

Section 5, Week 39, Day 3

Esther 4:13-14

371 words

My Identity

Stop, Look, and Listen

Esther 4:13-14 The non-biblical distinction between secular and sacred views most of life as “secular.” The spiritual dimension of life is not denied, it is only recognized as small—an addendum to the real business of life. One of many problems with this false dichotomy is that may desensitize us to God’s leading. He may have an extraordinary work for us to do in what seems like an ordinary moment in life.

The experience of a young Jewish woman named Esther illustrates that there are no accidental appointments in life, no moments that are not set apart (sacred) for God’s purposes. At the end of the Jewish captivity in Babylon (it became Persia while they were there), God began returning his chosen people to their homeland in Israel. When the first of three contingents left under Zerubbabel, and most of the Jews were still in Persia, king Xerxes chose Esther to be his queen (though he did not realize she was Jewish). However, an official of Xerxes, Haman, hated the Jews and convinced the king that they should all be killed. This would have destroyed the Jewish nation, the children of Abraham through whom the Messiah would come.

When Esther hears of this plan, she is torn. As the queen, she could possibly influence king Xerxes to spare the Jews. But by revealing her Jewish identity to Xerxes, she might end up losing her life along with the rest of her people. Esther’s wise uncle, Mordecai, convinces her that God had called her to a royal position in Persia for just this moment in time—to save the Jews. In an Oscar-worthy plot filled with point and counter-point, Esther rises to the occasion. Haman is put to death and the chosen people of God are saved. For Esther, there was no distinction between her secular position and her sacred obligation—God used one to make possible the other.

The believer in Christ should treat every moment of every day as a divine appointment. With spiritual senses tuned to hear and see what God is doing, you may discover that he has put you in an ordinary place for a surprising purpose. Stop, look, and listen for what he wants to do through you.

God’s Promise to You: “When I am with you, every place you go becomes holy ground.”

Section 5, Week 39, Day 4

Acts 2:23

373 words

Impact

The God Who Arranges

Acts 2:23 Lots of things parents do with their small children occur on two different levels of reality. There is the child's level of discovery—innocent, concrete, and excitable—and the parents' world of guiding a child into lessons which explain, illustrate, and bring joy. It is the parents' privilege to stoop to the level of their children—to accommodate their limited understanding—until they can see more maturely.

Take the traditional Easter egg hunt planned carefully by parents in earlier generations. With frilly frocks, Easter bonnets, seersucker suits, and wicker baskets, children launched out to “find” the eggs “hidden” by their parents. In a child's mind, the eggs really were hidden—meaning they were beside a rock, in the fork of a small tree, underneath a shrub, or partially covered by a leaf. But, in the parents' mind, the eggs were not hidden at all—they were “arranged” so as to be found. The goal of the hunt, after all, was to find the eggs. Squeals of delight would erupt as parents' called out hints: “What's that in the birdbath, Anna?” One person's arrangement was another's accomplishment.

While no human illustrations ever suffice in matters divine, the divide between God and humans is similar (but even greater). God's footprints in history, while not always seen before the fact, are plain to the observant after it. Take the death of Christ, for example. There was undoubtedly much pious back-patting that took place in Jerusalem's inner sanctums when Jesus was finally killed. It took, after all, no small amount of civil, religious, and human skullduggery to pull it off. However, a few weeks after the fact, Peter shocked the Jews by telling them, “You didn't catch and kill Jesus at all. He 'was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge.’” The Jews' creative cornering of the carpenter from Nazareth was about as complicated as a child “discovering” the golden egg perched on top of a rock.

Regardless of how complicated or perplexing the events of life become, we must remember that they are not so to God. He is moving ahead of us—ahead of the whole world—working out his plan and purposes in all things, for all people, for all time.

God's Promise to You: “What I arrange for my glory is also arranged for your good.”

Section 5, Week 39, Day 5

John 9:1-3

376 words

Implication

Life's Toughest Question

John 9:1-3 A busy traffic intersection handles thousands of vehicles without incident until, without warning, the next two cars collide in a fearsome crash. If we're in one of the cars we want to know, "Why? Why not the cars before me or after me?" A category four tornado hopscoches through town and takes only three houses out of a neighborhood of fifty. If ours is one of the three, we ask, "Why? Why my house?" A high school scholar-athlete-leader gets struck down by leukemia and we ask, "Why? Why someone with such great potential?"

"Why?"—life's toughest question—has been asked for as long as humans have lacked understanding. And while we think it is a question only children ask ("Why did my gerbil die?"), even spiritually mature adults ask it frequently as well (and they probably wonder it even more often than they are brave enough to ask). The more perplexing or painful the event, the more likely the answer is found rooted in the purpose and plans of God.

Jesus' disciples asked him once about a man who was born blind. The rabbinic theology of the day required that the cause be found in either the man's sin or that of his parents. But Jesus told them such simplistic reasoning was not behind the "Why?" of the man's blindness. Rather, Jesus said, the answer is deeper: "This man is blind so that God's work might be displayed in him." And then Jesus proceeded to do God's work and restore the man's sight. If we drew the conclusion that God's work is always to heal the infirm, we might miss other works which he does in difficult circumstances—like giving supernatural grace to accident victims to fight for life; like moving neighbors to reach out with love and generosity to tornado victims who've just lost everything; like taking away the fear of a cancer victim who is walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

God's works are many. For every "Why?" that is asked, if no specific answer is known, a work of God will probably be revealed. Our challenge is to remember that there are no accidents with God—only divinely-orchestrated opportunities by which his works of grace and power are revealed.

God's Promise to You: "I allow the 'Why's' in life to reveal my ways and my works."