TO BABYLON

unit 15 | session 4

CHRIST CONNECTION

God righteously punished His people for their sin, but He remained faithful to them and kept the promise He had made to David to preserve a remnant and provide a king. Ultimately, God punished sin through His Son, Jesus, and made Him our King forever.

STUBBORN HEART

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

2 Chronicles 36

A STUBBORN HEART IGNORES GOD'S WARNINGS

2 CHRONICLES 36:11-14

11 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in
Jerusalem. 12 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. He did not humble himself
before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. 13 He also rebelled
against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and
hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel. 14 All the officers of the
priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of
the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that he had made holy in Jerusalem.

GOD LOVES US EVEN IN OUR REBELLION

2 CHRONICLES 36:15-23

15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because
he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. 16 But they kept mocking the
messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the
LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy. 17 Therefore he brought up against
them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of
their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave
them all into his hand. 18 And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the
treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these
he brought to Babylon. 19 And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of
Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. 20 He
took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants
to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word
of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days
that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. 22 Now in the first year of Cyrus
king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD
stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all
his kingdom and also put it in writing: 23 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God
of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a
house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD
his God be with him. Let him go up.'"

MAIN POINT.

Rebellion will carry us to places we never wanted to go.

THEOLOGY *CONNECTION*

SIN AS REBELLION

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

DISCUSSION

A STUBBORN HEART IGNORES GOD'S WARNINGS

2 CHRONICLES 36:11-14

- **Why do we harden our hearts toward people? What does this look like spiritually?**
- **When have you been thankful for someone warning you? How can you tell when God is warning you?**
- **Can you remember the first time you rebelled against someone? How do you think spiritual rebellion begins?**

GOD LOVES US EVEN IN OUR REBELLION

2 CHRONICLES 36:15-23

- **What do you notice about the exile (v. 21)? How do we see that God hadn't forgotten His promises to Israel?**
- **What does Judah's fall show you about rebellion?**
- **What motivated God's warnings (v. 15)? Why don't we recognize this in God's warnings for us too?**

WHO DO YOU HAVE TO WARN YOU WHEN YOU'RE MOVING AWAY FROM THE LORD? WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

CULTURAL *CONNECTION*

Movements in our culture often paint God as only a God of love. Honestly, at the core, this isn't wrong because what God does is rooted in His love for us. But when people say things like, "The God I follow is a God of love," they're typically resisting the truth that He is also a God of justice. He is also holy and righteous, and He hates sin because it separates us from Him. In fact, God hates it so much that He took it on Himself to defeat sin and death through sending His Son. So, somehow God's love and all His other attributes intertwine and are not at war with one another. God's justice is rooted in His love for His creation—in His desire to care for us and to save us from sin and its effects. Many times, people are willing to accept only that God is loving, but He can't be truly loving if He allows sin to go unchecked. Sin, when it grows and matures, leads to death (James 1:15). Because God is loving, He doesn't sit back and do nothing; instead, He warns us—over and over—and He convicts us of our sin, allowing us to feel the guilt of it so that we'll return to Him.

DAY ONE

PROVERBS 12:15

Have you ever been convinced you were right about a situation but then turned out to be wrong? Maybe you even argued with a friend about it and later had to admit you were wrong. It's a humbling feeling! For example, you were convinced that the next football game was a home game, but you were wrong. Or maybe you were sure that you knew the way to someone's house, but you actually had no idea where you were going and led everyone in the wrong direction. More seriously, maybe you were certain that a party would be safe to attend and even ignored someone's advice not to go, but they were right.

We are often convinced we're right, and in our pride, we struggle to accept when we're wrong. Our pride blinds us from seeing it. Proverbs is a book full of wise sayings. In the verse today, the speaker cautioned us against thinking we're always right. Instead, whoever listens to counsel, or godly advice, is wise. What does it mean to listen? Well, it means we're willing to really hear someone's words. We reflect on them and put them next to God's Word to see if they hold truth. If we're honest with ourselves, many times, we know we're wrong when it comes to sinful choices. We can sense the Holy Spirit urging us to go another way. But it comes down to obedience. It involves us laying down our sinful desires and choosing wisdom instead—even when we really want to choose what seems fun or logical. Listening to someone's godly advice is difficult when it goes against what we want to do. Though we don't *want* their advice to be right, we usually know when it is. In those cases, we would be wise to follow it instead of stubbornly holding to our own way.

- **WHEN HAVE YOU IGNORED GODLY ADVICE? WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM DOING SO?**
- **WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM ADMITTING WHEN YOU ARE WRONG?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME WISDOM. WHEN I STRUGGLE TO KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT, PLEASE SPEAK TO ME THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOUR WORD. HELP ME TO FOLLOW GODLY ADVICE EVEN WHEN IT ISN'T WHAT I WANT TO HEAR.

DAY TWO

GENESIS 2:15-17; 3:1-6

Yesterday, we read about ignoring wise advice. Though many of us struggle with this area, we aren't the first to do so. In fact, it started in the garden of Eden with the first man and the first woman—Adam and Eve. God clearly explained the boundaries in the garden. Adam and Eve could eat from any tree except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God explained that eating from this tree would lead to their death. Those were pretty clear consequences, right? But Eve was deceived by the serpent with just a simple question: "Did God actually say?" She and Adam took the bite—literally!

Aren't we similar? God's commands are clear in His Word. We know sin leads to death ultimately, but it also leads to pain and suffering, to separation from God. Our sin can even lead others into sin. But we so often find ourselves doubting God's commands and asking, "Did God *actually* say?" And we typically ask this question because we want to justify our desires. We wonder if profanity is *really* that big of a deal because everyone else uses it. We wonder if certain websites are *really* that bad because everyone else looks at them. We question if dating someone who doesn't know the Lord is *really* that serious because our friends date unbelievers and seem happy. We're tempted by our own sinful desires, and we allow doubt to enter our minds. We question God's Word even though it's clear, even when the Holy Spirit urges us to listen, even when God uses a godly friend, parent, or mentor to warn us. And this is how we slip; this is how we compromise what we know is true. Here's something to ask yourself: Do you *really* have any reason to doubt the Lord? Has He ever *not* been faithful and true? So, when it comes to sin, why would you doubt His guidance then?

- **WHAT SIN OR HABIT DO YOU FIND YOURSELF ASKING, "DID GOD ACTUALLY SAY"?**
- **WHERE CAN YOU TURN TO FIND TRUTH? WHO CAN YOU TRUST TO LEAD YOU IN A GODLY DIRECTION?**

PRAY

GOD, YOU'RE SO FAITHFUL. YOUR WORD IS TRUE. YOU DO WHAT YOU SAY. I HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT WHAT YOU'VE SPOKEN. HELP ME TO CHOOSE TRUTH WHEN I WANT TO CHOOSE A LIE.

DAY THREE

PROVERBS 27:6

Has anyone ever criticized you? Maybe you were in charge of a group project, and someone in the group pointed out something you did wrong. Criticism stings, but is it always bad? Not at all. We can think of criticism in two ways: One form tears you down for the sake of making you look or feel bad and another form that's rooted in truth lovingly builds you up and helps you improve. We'd be foolish to run from the second type, right?

Here are some difficult truths you may need to hear right now (truths we all need to hear at some point): Real friends will make you better. Your real friends will help you see your sin. Your real friends won't agree with your sinful decisions to keep the peace. Your real friends will risk making you upset to speak godly truth when you're slipping. And they'll do all this in a spirit of love—not to tear you down, but to call you up and to help you walk toward God. It will still sting. Even the verse today described this type of criticism as "wounds of a friend" because accountability hurts. But we can trust this type of correction. We can trust God's Word to correct us, and we can trust those who live according to His Word. Those friends who lead you away from God though? Those are the "kisses of an enemy." It seems like a gesture of love, but it's fooling you. We see Christ model loving criticism; He spoke truth even when it cut deeply. He spoke truth because He was motivated by His great love for people. Pay attention to your friends who are willing to speak truth. Don't reject it because you stubbornly want to go your own way. Listen, and be grateful for God's kindness to put people like them in your life.

- **WHEN HAS SOMEONE LOVINGLY POINTED OUT YOUR SIN, BUT YOU RESPONDED BY BEING OFFENDED? WHY?**
- **WHY DO WE OFTEN REJECT "WOUNDS OF A FRIEND"? HOW CAN YOU TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LOVING ACCOUNTABILITY AND CRITICISM ONLY MEANT TO TEAR YOU DOWN?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR CRITICISM THAT'S MEANT TO CALL ME UP AND HOLD ME ACCOUNTABLE. HELP ME NOT TO REJECT THIS TYPE OF ADVICE AND TO FOLLOW IT INSTEAD OF BEING OFFENDED.

DAY FOUR

PROVERBS 27:17

Blades become dull over time. They can be sharpened in a few ways, but all methods involve some force and another piece of iron—another tool. A blade can't sharpen itself. Sharpening a blade effectively requires skill and action; if done incorrectly, the blade can actually become more dull.

Yesterday we talked about how loving criticism is a gift that calls us up and makes us better. We talked about how we can trust "wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6). Just a few verses down, the writer went on the explain one major purpose of friendship: "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (v. 17). What does it mean to sharpen someone or for someone to sharpen us? Think about a blade on a knife. This verse captured the method of rubbing one blade across another blade, and in the process, both blades are sharpened. Both blades become more useful for their intended purpose. Sometimes, blades require heat and the pounding force of a hammer to be sharpened or straightened; they may require a file to shave away dull edges. Spiritually, we can't sharpen ourselves; we need another tool. And one of the many tools God uses is our friendship with other believers (God also uses His Word, trials, hardships, and so on). Sharpening takes effort. It can be exhausting work. Sometimes, it makes us uncomfortable. It takes time. But when we sharpen one another, we will find that we're shaped for God's purposes. We're sharper and more useful in reaching others with the gospel. But like blades dull with use and without care, time and apathy make us dull. The sharpening process is ongoing. We need a community of other believers if we're going to stay sharp.

- **WHAT FRIENDSHIP IS SHARPENING YOU SPIRITUALLY?**
- **REMAINING SPIRITUALLY SHARP TAKES EFFORT. WHAT STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO SHARPEN YOURSELF OR SOMEONE ELSE?**

PRAY

GOD, PLEASE SEND FRIENDS INTO MY LIFE WHO ARE WILLING TO SHARPEN ME, AND HELP ME TO SHARPEN THEM. NOT CARING AND BECOMING SPIRITUALLY DULL IS EASY, BUT I WANT TO MAKE EFFORTS TO GROW.

DAY FIVE

HEBREWS 10:24-25

We've talked a lot this week about listening to the right advice and the importance of having people in our lives who are willing to tell us difficult truth. But listen, not everything about our relationships with other believers needs to be based on helping each other see what we're doing *wrong*. Our relationships and friendships with other believers should be grounded in helping each other do and celebrate the *good* too.

Today's passage comes from the book of Hebrews, which was likely written during the church's persecution by Nero. The writer (most likely Paul) encouraged believers to think about how they could push one another toward love and good works. In other words, Paul reminded them to consider how they could help one another do good things in this world out of love for other people. The writer went on to explain that they shouldn't give up being together consistently because their relationships gave them the encouragement they needed. During a time of hardship and persecution, Paul reminded believers that they needed one another, not only to point out sin, but to push one another toward what's good. To lift one another up. To offer one another encouragement. Many studies show that people are more likely to respond to encouragement than criticism. If this is true, then your encouragement could do more for someone than you realize. Their encouragement probably motivates you too. Take Paul's advice: Don't give up on being with godly community in your local church, and look for ways to encourage one another as often as possible.

- **WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF YOU CONSISTENTLY MEETING WITH A GODLY GROUP OF PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH? DOES SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR PRIORITIES OR SCHEDULE NEED TO CHANGE?**
- **WHO HAS ENCOURAGED YOU IN YOUR WALK WITH GOD? WHO CAN YOU ENCOURAGE THIS WEEK?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE CHURCH. THANK YOU FOR A COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS WHO LOVE ME AND ENCOURAGE ME. HELP ME TO PRIORITIZE MEETING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS AND ENCOURAGING THEM IN THEIR WALK WITH THE LORD.