# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passionate Pursuit (Introduction)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua (Lesson 1, September 13)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David (Lesson 2, September 20)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther (Lesson 3, September 27)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel (Lesson 4, October 4)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary (Lesson 5, October 11)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul (Lesson 6, October 18)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus (Lesson 7, October 25)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua 1:1-11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel 6:1-28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 1:26-38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 20:17-24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrews 12:1-3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Passionate Pursuit
(Introduction)

The Lion and the Gazelle
A number of years ago a video of a gazelle running away from a lion made the rounds on the internet. The video showed an amazing chase as the gazelle sprinted at full speed, making one sharp turn after another, passionately pursuing its freedom. Meanwhile the lion would not be deterred as it pulled out all the stops to catch its prey. The gazelle was pursuing its survival. The lion was pursuing...its lunch. The chase went on and on. Both animals were determined not to give up their pursuit.

The fact is that the video could have been much shorter if either animal decided to take things casually. The gazelle could have said, “Well, I’ve lived a full life. I probably won’t escape from this lion. Even if I do, I will eventually die from disease or injury or some other predator. I’m just going to stop fighting and let this happen.” The lion could have said, “I am exhausted. I can probably find a decent meal elsewhere. This could take forever. I’ll just let this gazelle go.” The chase would have been over in seconds if not for the fact that both animals passionately pursued their goals.

Settling or Reaching
The greatest things in life are only available to those who are willing to pursue them passionately. It takes passion to build a successful and growing business. It takes passion to train to be an Olympic athlete. It takes passion to have a rich and wonderful marriage. The best rewards come not to the casual, but to the passionate.

This is true also when it comes to a relationship with God. Many Christians lament the fact that they do not experience the transformation and joy and peace that seem to be promised in Scripture. Most of the time, however, this is because they are treating their Christianity as if they were a weekend warrior hoping to make a professional sports team. The greatest gifts of God will always be beyond our reach unless we are willing to passionately pursue them.

Words and Pictures
God has created us to respond more to pictures and stories than to concepts and commands. This is one of the reasons why there is much more narrative than straightforward commands in Scripture. As we consider what it means to passionately pursue life in Jesus, it may be that a picture is worth a thousand words. It may be that seeing an example of someone passionately pursuing life in Jesus will impact and help us more than a principle or method.

The seven lessons in this packet will look at the lives of seven men and women in Scripture who serve as examples of a passionate pursuit of the life that God offers us in Jesus. Each lesson will also highlight a specific characteristic that is shown by the man or woman whose story is being told.

We will encounter Joshua and see his courage. We will see David and marvel at his heartfelt affection. We will meet Esther and grapple with her expectation of what God would do. We will read about Daniel and his profound devotion. We will focus on Mary and her willing surrender to God’s plans for her. We will look at Paul and his laser focus. And we will end with Jesus Himself, who is both the object of our pursuit, and also the ultimate example of it.

As you engage with these lessons, use this as an opportunity to examine your own life. Where has complacency crept in? How can you personally learn from the examples of the men and women in these stories? How can you make Jesus Christ your ultimate passion and your ultimate pursuit?
Main Point

A Passionate Pursuit of Jesus requires courage.

Introduction

Take a minute to think of yourself when you were a kid. Think of all the things that you planned to accomplish with your life. Most of us look back on those goals and realize that we have accomplished very few of them. There are a number of reasons why, but one of the core reasons is probably fear. When we got older we realized the risks involved with those childish goals and we abandoned them. For most of us, the older we get, the more we play it safe.

There is no life without bravery. There is no vitality without risk. And there certainly is no passionate pursuit of Jesus without courage. Following Jesus always involves risk. Will He fulfill His promises? Will He provide? Will He protect? Will He empower? We live by faith, not knowing for sure if our risks will pay off. It takes courage to pursue life in Jesus.

This lesson will look at Joshua, a man who was called to step forward with courage. God called Joshua to do some amazing and risky things. Joshua knew that the only way to play it safe was to disregard God’s calling for his life. The same is true for each of us today. There is no passionate pursuit of Jesus without courage.

Question for Family Discussion

1. Name a person (real or fictional) that you think is brave, and share why.

Digging In

Read Joshua 1:1-6.

3. What is the connection between faith and courage?

4. In light of Moses’ role with the people of Israel, what do you think were some of the difficulties that Joshua was facing in this story?

5. The promises in verses 3-5 are not meant to be taken as promises to every single person, but rather promises specifically given to Joshua. How would you summarize the impact of the promises that God makes to Joshua in these verses?

6. What do you think is the relationship between the command in verse 6 and the promises in verses 3-5?
Read Joshua 1:7-9.

7 “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

7. God gives Joshua the same command in verses 6, 7, and 9. Why do you think God places such an emphasis on Joshua’s need to have courage?

8. What connection do you see between God’s commands about the Law in verses 7-8 and His commands about courage in verses 7 and 9?

Read Joshua 1:10-11.

10 So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: 11 “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.’”

9. Verses 10-11 show how Joshua responded to God’s commands. What do his words in verse 11 reveal about how he responded to God’s commands?

10. Joshua went on to lead the Israelites into the land that God promised to them. He consistently showed courage and God consistently fulfilled his promises. Read Joshua 24:14-15. How do Joshua’s words at the end of his life reflect a passionate pursuit of God?

Wrestling With Issues

11. It is possible to be courageous, but also foolish. How can you make sure that you practice not only courage, but also wisdom?

12. Courage is connected to confidence. How can you tell the difference between being confident in yourself and being confident in God?

Taking it to Heart

13. What are some fears that keep you from following Jesus more passionately?

14. What promises of God speak to the fears that you experience when you think of giving your full self to the pursuit of life in Jesus?

15. What is one faith-filled risk that you can take this week, in order to more fully pursue life in Jesus?

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Main Point
A Passionate Pursuit of Jesus requires affection.

Introduction
When I was in high school, I was on the water polo team. Each fall, a group of new players joined the team. They would be welcomed by brutal and exhausting practices twice a day. Inevitably, within the first few days a number of newcomers would quit. The reason they didn’t follow through was not because they lacked the physical abilities. The reason was simple: Their hearts weren’t in it. They were unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices because the sport had not captured their heart.

Many of us have moments when we get really excited about following Jesus in a fuller way. Shortly afterward, though, we find ourselves reverting to a more casual connection with God. This is not because we don’t have the capacity to follow Jesus. It is not because following Jesus is not worthwhile. It is simply because our hearts aren’t in it. We have yet to give our full affection to Jesus.

In this lesson, we will encounter David. David was by no means a perfect man, but he was a man who truly gave his heart to a passionate pursuit of God. As you read David’s words in Psalm 63, you will get a picture of what it means to follow Jesus whole-heartedly. And you will be challenged with the fact that there is no passionate pursuit of Jesus without affection.

Question for Family Discussion
1. Name three things that you regularly do simply because you love to do them.

2. Share a memory of a time that God brought you great joy by doing something in you or through you.

3. Are there certain activities related to your relationship with God that you find especially joyful and life-giving? What has it been like for you to approach those activities?

4. What is the difference between pursuing God based on obligation and pursuing God based on affection?

Digging In
Read Psalm 63:1-5.

1 You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my soul thirsts for you,
like a dry and parched land
where there is no water.

2 I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.

3 Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.

4 I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.

5 I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.
5. Verse 1 is packed full of content and of emotion. Write down every observation that you can make from verse 1 alone.

6. Focus on verse 2. What is the connection between David’s beliefs about God and his experiences with God?

7. What do you think David means when he says that God’s love is better than life?

8. In verses 4-5, what does David intend to do in response to what he has come to believe about God?

Read Psalm 63:6-11.

6 On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.

7 Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.

8 I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.

9 Those who want to kill me will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth.

10 They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals.

11 But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God will glory in him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

9. In verses 6-8, what truths does David express about God, and how does he respond to these truths?

10. Do verses 9-11 seem out of place to you? Why do you think David includes this section in the midst of a psalm of love and trust to God?

Wrestling With Issues

11. David demonstrates great affection for God. Is it possible to choose to give your affections, or are our affections out of our control?

12. If you believe that it is possible to give your affections to God, how can you go about doing this?

Taking it to Heart

13. David’s affection for God is largely based on his memories of things that God has done. Think of ways that God has worked in your life. What are some memories that you can call to mind in order to build affection for God?

14. How can you build closeness with God through spending personal time with Him?

15. Write your own psalm to God, praising and thanking Him for what He has done, and expressing your desire for Him.

Notes

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Main Point

A Passionate Pursuit of Jesus requires expectation.

Introduction

Some people love surprises. Some people hate them.

Surprises can be scary because they deal with the unknown. If a surprise is coming, then this means that something terrible may be on its way. Sometimes we’re surprised by a devastating diagnosis, or an emergency call, or the loss of a job. It is no wonder that some people hate being surprised.

On the other hand, sometimes we are surprised with something wonderful. We get a surprise party, we get a surprise promotion, or we get surprised with the announcement of a child. Surprises deal with the unknown, and sometimes the unknown is wonderful.

When it comes to the risky faith that is required to passionately pursue life in Jesus, each of us must ask what kinds of surprises we are expecting from God. When we pursue Jesus, we are walking into the unknown. This will be too daunting for us if we expect that bad surprises are around the corner. However, if we expect God to come through and bring wonderful surprises, we will be emboldened.

In this lesson we will see a woman named Esther brought to the crisis point where she must decide whether or not to step forward in a profoundly risky faith. As she wrestles with fear, we each will be challenged to ask what kind of surprises we expect from God when we passionately pursue the life that He offers us in Jesus.

Question for Family Discussion

1. Name one good thing that you expect God to do in the future.

Getting Started

2. Are you more prone to expect the worst or expect the best? How do these expectations impact how you approach life?

3. How does hope relate to courage?

Digging In

Read Esther 4:1-8.

1 When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. 2 But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. 3 In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

4 When Esther’s eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. 5 Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king’s eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

6 So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate. 7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king’s presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.
4. In this section, Mordecai – Esther’s uncle – is grieving because the king of Persia has just issued an edict that puts all Jewish people in grave physical danger. How does he respond to this edict?

5. What do you think was Mordecai’s goal in his strange actions?

6. What was Mordecai’s proposed solution to the problem in which the Jewish people found themselves?

Read Esther 4:9-17

9Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, “All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”

12When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, 13he sent back this answer: “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

15Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” 17So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.

7. According to verse 11, what is the risk involved with Esther carrying out Mordecai’s plan?

8. According to verses 13-14, what were some of Mordecai’s expectations for what would happen to the Jewish people?

9. Esther, a Jewish woman, is the queen of Persia during a time when the Jewish people are in great danger. What does Mordecai suggest about the reason behind her ascension to royalty?

10. Esther decides to courageously move forward with the plan. As you read verses 15-17, how do you think her expectations about what God will do impact her courage?

Wrestling With Issues

11. Esther pursued the fulfillment of her calling, even though she knew that she might perish. In the end, both Esther and her people were delivered. Many times, though, believers courageously fulfill their calling and they are not spared from suffering. Why do you think God works in different ways in different situations?

Taking it to Heart

12. Think about your life. What are some unique opportunities that you have to pursue and serve God because of your role in your family, your community, and beyond?

13. How would it impact how you respond to opportunities to serve God in risky ways if you expected God to do wonderful things?

14. What is one way this week that you can passionately pursue the unique calling that Jesus has for you at this time in your life?
Main Point
A Passionate Pursuit of Jesus requires devotion.

Introduction
Most Americans have never experienced political danger for being a Christian. We think it is only in centuries long ago that people were politically persecuted because of their faith.

On August 5th of this year, two disciples in Indonesia experienced persecution for their faith. They are incarnational Christians living in a Muslim context, which means that they are still doing the outward actions of a Muslim—being teachers in a Muslim boarding school, praying at the mosque, and wearing the appropriate clothes. What makes them different, however, is that they are doing these things for Jesus in order to reach people with His love. One of the Muslim leaders found these men’s Bibles and proceeded to capture the two Christians. After putting them in prison and—after possible torture—the Muslim leaders gave these men 3 options: stop teaching at the school, renounce Jesus, or be beheaded. Political persecution for Christians is still very much a reality.

In this lesson you will encounter Daniel, a devout Jew who is living in captivity in Babylon. Daniel ends up facing a choice between living in safety and remaining devoted to God. As you read, you will be challenged to examine how devotion is a prerequisite for passionately pursuing life in Jesus.

Question for Family Discussion
1. Was there a time in your life when obeying God meant disobeying the rules?

Getting Started
2. Share about a time when your devotion to God was tested.

Daniel
(Lesson 4, October 4)
Daniel 6:1-28

3. What do you think is the connection between devotion and obedience?

Digging In

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2 with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. 3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

6 So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: “May King Darius live forever! 7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. 8 Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.

4. Verses 1-5 set the stage. In these verses, what were the characteristics and actions that made Daniel stand out?
5. In verses 6-9, what methods did the advisors use in order to get Darius to make the decree?


10Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. 11Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

13Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.”

14When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

15Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”

16So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”

17A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed.

18Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

6. Reflect on verse 10. What would you expect Daniel’s reaction to be? What would your response be?

19At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. 20When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?”

21Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! 22My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.”

23The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

24At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions’ den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

25Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth:

“May you prosper greatly!

26“I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

“For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.

27He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.”

28So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

8. It is interesting that there is no account of Daniel while he is in the den. We read on in eager expectation like the king. How do you imagine the night was for Daniel?


9. In verse 20, Darius calls Daniel “servant of the living God.” How did Darius come to understand Daniel’s God as “the living” one?

7. In verses 11-18 we have two very different inter-faith interactions. Compare how the satraps and king Darius – who is not a God-follower – treat Daniel. Are you surprised by the king’s reaction?
10. Daniel gives his big response in verses 21-22. What reasons does Daniel give as to why he is alive?

11. What stands out to you about the decree that Darius gives in verses 25-27?

12. This passage is very political because it deals with authority, true obedience, and justice. Is the king ever in authority in this passage? Which verses in Daniel 6 show that God is truly in charge?

Wrestling With Issues

13. In verse 22, Daniel says he has never done anything wrong before the king. Yet he is in the lion’s den specifically because he did break a law. Should people who break a law due to obeying a higher standard not be held accountable for their disobedience?

14. Are readers supposed to rejoice at verse 24 when the advisors are thrown into the lions’ den? Explain your answer.

Taking it to Heart

15. Daniel’s unwavering devotion to God led him to costly obedience and courage. What might an unwavering devotion to Jesus cost you today?

16. Daniel didn’t suddenly wake up one morning and find himself utterly devoted to God. As you look to passionately pursue life in Jesus, what is one specific way that you can order your life to reflect your devotion to God?
Main Point

A Passionate Pursuit of Jesus requires surrender.

Introduction

Consider two pictures of surrender.

The first picture is of a soldier who has vowed to fight for his country. In the heat of the battle, however, he throws down his weapons, puts his hands in the air, and says, “I’ve had enough! I give up!” This is a kind of surrender that few would admire and most would despise. This kind of surrender is the opposite of courage and nobility.

The second picture is of a child who is being carried by a parent. The child thrashes and screams and fights, trying to get away the entire time. Finally, the child stops fighting, puts both arms around his parent, and relaxes. This is a very different kind of surrender. It is not the surrender of cowardice. It is the surrender of trust. The child finally decides that it is time to stop fighting, and to trust his parent with where he is going to be taken.

A passionate pursuit of Jesus is impossible without surrender. But the kind of surrender to which Jesus calls us is not the surrender of cowardice. It is the surrender of trust. We can only experience the life to which He is leading us if we stop fighting Him and trust Him to take us where we need to go.

In this lesson you will encounter Mary, the mother of Jesus. As she receives the announcement that she will be pregnant with God’s Son, her life is turned upside-down. Her response, though, challenges each of us to discern whether or not we are in a battle of the wills with God. We can only embrace His calling for our lives if we are willing to surrender.

Question for Family Discussion

1. When is it good to surrender?

Getting Started

2. Share about a time when you were in a battle of wills against God.

3. If you are passionately pursuing life in Jesus, what will be the role of flexibility in your life?

Digging In


26In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 35But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 36You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 37He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 38and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

4. Considering what verse 27 says about what was going on in Mary’s life at the time of the angel’s visit, what kind of a life do you think she was imagining for herself?
5. What initial good news did the angel give Mary in verse 28?

6. In verses 30-33, what are some of the things that the angel says that God is about to do?

7. As you think of your own relationship with Jesus, how do the promises in verses 30-33 relate to you today?

8. As you read Mary’s response in verse 34, what do you think was the main emotion that she was experiencing?

9. While we may be accustomed to seeing verses 35-36 as a wonderful promise, how was Mary’s miraculous pregnancy going to impact her life and her plans?

10. What strikes you most about Mary’s response to the angel in verse 38?

11. Read through Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-55. What attitude do you see reflected in Mary in her words of praise?

Wrestling With Issues

12. Mary, like anyone else, had plans for her life. God dramatically interrupted those plans and put her on a completely different life path. What do you think it looks like for a Christian to make plans, while maintaining an attitude of surrender toward whatever God might want to do?

Taking it to Heart

13. What are some areas of your life in which you will need to surrender if you want to pursue Jesus with more passion?

14. What scares you most about the idea of surrendering your plans to God?

15. Think of the promises given to Mary in this passage, and think of the amazing things that God did through Jesus, the Son born to Mary. How do God’s good promises impact your attitude toward – and practice of – surrender?

Notes
A Passionate Pursuit of Jesus requires focus.

Introduction

In 2009 Pixar released the beloved movie Up. A sideplot in the movie involves an adventurer who creates a device that allows dogs to speak their thoughts. Comically, the dogs will frequently be in mid-sentence and then suddenly become distracted by something—typically a squirrel—and completely lose track of their thoughts. It is a hilarious picture of what it is like to be easily distracted.

If we are forced to examine our lives, some of us would have to admit that, while we might not be easily sidetracked by a crossing squirrel, we easily lose our focus. We start a task, and then we find ourselves checking something on our phone. We resolve to eat healthy, and then we find ourselves at Coldstone Creamery. We vow to read the Bible each day, and we find that plan quickly abandoned. In our culture, we struggle with focus.

In this lesson, you will encounter Paul. While he was not a perfect man, he was a man marked by focus. He utterly gave himself to the fulfillment of what Jesus had called him to do. As you read his words in Acts 20 you will be inspired by the focus with which he lived, and you will also be challenged to follow his example of living with focus and shunning distractions. This is profoundly important because it is impossible to passionately pursue life in Jesus without focus.

Question for Family Discussion

1. Name an activity to which you find it easy to give your full focus.

2. Think of someone you know who tends to be very focused. Describe what you observe about how they maintain their focus.

3. What are some factors that make it difficult for you to focus?

4. When you decide to focus in on something important, what do you do in order to make that focus practical?

Digging In


17From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 18When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. 19I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. 20You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. 21I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

5. In verses 17-19, how does Paul indicate the single-minded focus that he has for serving the Lord?
6. In verses 20-21, how is Paul’s focus reflected both in how he taught and also in what he taught?

7. What were some of the sacrifices that Paul must have made in order to conduct himself the way that he did in these verses?


22“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 24However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given to me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.”

8. According to verses 22-23, what does Paul expect to happen on his trip to Jerusalem?

9. According to verse 24, what drives Paul to follow the Spirit’s leading, even though he knows that he will face profound difficulties?

10. According to verse 24, what is Paul’s basis for making life decisions?

11. When you think of the task that Paul speaks of, is this a task that was given only to Paul? How does his perspective apply to you?

Wrestling With Issues

12. Is it possible to be so focused on a Christian task or calling that it ends up having a negative impact? Explain your answer.

Taking it to Heart

13. While God has not called each of us to be apostles, he has called every believer to devote himself or herself to the mission of Jesus to bring new life to people. What are some specific ways that you think God has called you to participate in this mission?

14. What keeps you from being more focused on fulfilling your calling as a servant of Jesus Christ?

15. What is one practical step you could take this week in order to combat distractions and be more focused on fulfilling God’s calling?
Main Point  
Jesus is not only the object of our pursuit, but also the example of a Passionate Pursuit.

Introduction  
Throughout this series of lessons, we have looked at the lives of six men and women who are examples of a passionate pursuit of God. They are men and women who were imperfect, and yet still inspired us and challenged us to follow Jesus with a risky, bold, and heartfelt faith.

This lesson will focus on Jesus Himself. After all, Jesus is the object of our pursuit. We want to know Him, to love Him, to follow Him, and to trust Him. But Jesus is not simply the object of our faith. He is also the ultimate example of a faith that passionately pursues God. When we focus our eyes on Jesus, we are looking at both our target and our model.

As you walk through these words about Jesus in the book of Hebrews, you will be challenged to fix your eyes on Him. As you seek to passionately pursue the life that Jesus brings, consider what it looks like to make Him the full focus of your life.

Question for Family Discussion  
1. When you are facing something difficult, how do your thoughts about Jesus impact how you handle it?

2. Share about a time when you were able to accomplish something difficult because you held onto an image or vision of your goal.

3. When you think of Jesus, what are some images or characteristics that come to your mind?

4. Take some time to read through Hebrews 11 in order to gain context for this passage. What is the author speaking about when he refers to “a great cloud of witnesses”?

5. The author makes a distinction between “everything that hinders” and “the sin that so easily entangles.” What are some things that can hinder us, even though they are not sinful?

6. The author speaks of running with “perseverance.” What does the encouragement to perseverance imply about this race?

Digging In  
Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1-3
7. While running, we are encouraged to fix our eyes on Jesus, who is called the pioneer and perfecter of faith. What do you think is meant by each of these descriptors of Jesus?

8. When Jesus is called the pioneer and perfecter of faith, it seems to be implied that He Himself practiced faith. How does it impact your view of Jesus to think about Him having to exercise faith?

9. According to verse 2, what empowered Jesus to endure the cross?

10. According to verse 3, what impact will it have on us if we fix our eyes on Jesus?

Wrestling With Issues

11. Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man. How do you think it is possible that He, as the Son of God, had to exercise faith?

12. Since Jesus is divine, can He truly be an example for us? Explain your answer.

Taking it to Heart

13. Think of the biggest distraction or difficulty in your life right now. Then take a moment to consider Jesus. Specifically consider how much He endured in order to complete the work that God gave Him to do. What impact does this have on your perspective toward those distractions and difficulties?

14. When things get difficult, where – other than Jesus – are you tempted to “fix your eyes”?

15. What is one practical way that you can focus your attention on Jesus this week as you passionately pursue life in Him?