

life groups

NorthStar Church

Relentless! Week 3

Exodus 32:30-32, Rom. 9:2-3, Luke 19:10

December 18, 2016

Main Focus – In week 1 we looked at this reality; “Before you ever pursued God, He was pursuing you.” God, the creator of this universe, had a plan and a purpose for your life before you were ever born. He so loves you that He pursued you even when you did not recognize that He is there.

In week two the main focus was OUR response to such a loving Heavenly Father. When we realize, God is who He says He is; When we understand that He loves us and knows our name; When we see that no matter what the sin is in our past that he still cares; then we run towards Him with full surrender of everything we are and all that we have. We respond with Relentless pursuit towards God because of God’s Relentless pursuit of our lives.

THIS third week in the RELENTLESS! series we look at the next step. WE have experienced God’s grace. We know people who need HIS grace. We relentlessly pursue those in this world that God loves so much that need to experience His grace in their lives.

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do you find more or less motivating to be effective and productive at work when your boss is in the office or out of the office? Explain?

How did people’s conduct change when the authority figure was absent? When does this lack of restraint become a problem?

Moses led the people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, but he had been up on Mount Sinai for 40 days. Moses left the people waiting in the wilderness with Aaron in charge. A lack of faith and a loss of leadership led to an idolatrous act, but one which the Lord would forgive.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Ask a volunteer to read Exodus 32:1-4.

What assumption did the Israelites make about Moses? How did this affect their subsequent choices?

What did the Israelites ask Aaron to do for them? How did Aaron respond? Why do you think all of them fell so quickly into the sin of idolatry?

How did Aaron falter in his leadership? What factors may have contributed to Aaron's faltering? What factors often lead to our faltering in our faith today?

How can we know whether this incident was a momentary lapse of good judgment or an act of deliberate rebellion? Does it really make any difference which it was? Why or why not?

Faith and wisdom rarely follow the crowd, so we must learn to recognize attitudes and conditions that lead to compromising our faith in God. As we wait for Christ's return, we model wisdom when we quickly reject these attitudes and encourage others to remain patiently faithful to God's Word.

ask a volunteer to read exodus 32:30-34.

God's book (verses 32-33) signifies that God keeps a record of those who are His people. The righteous are remembered and delivered to life (Dan. 12:1), while the wicked may be blotted out (Ps. 69:28). This theme continues in the New Testament, where the Lamb's book of life contains the names of all who will escape the final judgment and enter the heavenly city (Rev. 20:15; 21:27).

How did Moses respond when he heard about the people's idolatry?

What did Moses ask God to do if He was unwilling to forgive the Israelites? What does God's answer in verses 33-34 teach us about God's view of sin?

How do God's words here about the people's accountability for their sin relate to His forgiveness and grace?

How do we receive the forgiveness God offers?

What are we to do when we falter in faith and sin? What does God do when we falter and deviate from His commands? How does God respond to repentant believers who have sinned?

Living by faith involves learning to faithfully follow God even though we cannot see Him physically or may not fully comprehend what He is doing. We falter if we allow our fears and uncertainty to lead us to abandon God and to place our faith in our own plans. The Lord knows when we have faltered, and He holds us accountable for our sins. We need to be quick to admit our failings, to repent, and to ask for the Lord's forgiveness.

have a volunteer read exodus 34:6-9.

What terms are used to describe God in verses 6-7? Which of them do you find the most compelling? How do these character traits relate to God's willingness to forgive us?

How would you explain to a young child what forgiveness is?

Why did God say He was willing to forgive the people even though they had sinned greatly? What characteristics of God can we count on when we falter? How do we know He takes sin seriously, even though He is merciful?

God sees sin as sin, but His nature is to completely forgive any sin and sinner who turns to Him. We can be thankful that the Lord is compassionate and gracious, loving us through faltering faith and forgiving us when we repent. God invites us to come to Him when we fall into sin. Knowing His compassionate and gracious nature, we believe we will find forgiveness when we confess our sins.

Pastor Scott also referenced Rom 9:2-3. Here we see Paul's heart to respond to God's relentless pursuit by pursuing others who need to know Him.

In Luke 19:10 we see the heart of Christ towards those who are far from God.

What does it mean to you to live "on mission" for Christ?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

We can demonstrate godly wisdom by quickly rejecting attitudes and watching out for conditions that tempt us to falter in faith. Since the Lord knows when we sin and holds us accountable, we should be quick to admit our failings, to repent, and to receive the Lord's forgiveness. We can be thankful the Lord is compassionate and gracious, loving us although we falter in faith and forgiving us when we repent.

What are the most vital truths in this passage for unbelievers? For Christians?

Who do you know without Him? What will you do about it? When will you move?

Pray

Thank God for His mercy and forgiveness. Thank Him for revealing His grace more fully in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. Ask Him to strengthen learners to trust His faithful love and to stand firm when tempted to doubt or to fall into sin.

Ask God to use you to reach those around you that are without Him today.

Commentary

exodus 32:1-4

32:1. The Israelites believed they had good reasons for demanding that Aaron create an idol. First, Moses had remained on the mountain for the lengthy period of 40 days and nights (Ex. 24:18). From the beginning of God's delivering His people from Egyptian slavery and leading them to their new land, God had worked through Moses to care for, encourage, and guide the Israelites. As days became weeks and Moses still did not return, the Israelites became worried.

32:2. Aaron commanded the men to remove the earrings from their wives, sons, and daughters. The verb translated take off typically means "tear away" or "snatch off," implying a violent act. Perhaps Aaron spoke in anger at their sin or encouraged them to act hastily so he could create what they wanted and thus calm them. Some Bible students believe the men were allowed to keep their earrings as a sign of status. Other Bible students suggest only the women and children wore earrings to indicate their dependence on their husband or father. Either way, Aaron had ample gold to create an image.

32:3. While all the people participated in the collection of gold earrings, not everyone agreed with or participated in the idolatrous worship. The Levites apparently did not participate in the idolatry because they later gathered around Moses, proclaiming their allegiance to God and punishing the unrepentant idolaters (32:26-28). People sometimes feel pressured to respond to a request but do not engage in subsequent disobedient action.

32:4. Aaron took the gold and, using an engraving tool, created an image of a calf. Aaron probably hammered or melted the gold earrings into sheets and shaped the sheets around a wooden form, fashioning a representation of a calf. His work would have taken time, perhaps several days. When Aaron finished the calf, he presented it to the Israelites declaring it to be the God who brought them out of Egypt.

exodus 32:30-34

32:30. Moses did not accept any excuses from Aaron or the Israelites. Neither did he gloss over their sin. While 3,000 unrepentant idolaters had been killed, the people's sin continued to affect their relationship with God and their future. The following day Moses stated that the people's actions necessitated his return to the top of Mount Sinai to again meet with God in an effort to atone for their sin. Moses suggested he might be able to

pay for the people's sin. The Hebrew word translated pay means to "cover" or "make atonement." Moses hoped God would accept some action by him and forgive the Israelites.

32:31. Moses acknowledged the Israelites' sin to God, stressing the magnitude of their disobedience. Having been clearly commanded not to make any images, the people had done exactly that. Their blatant disobedience indicated a serious lack of faith.

32:32. Neither Moses nor Joshua had participated in the idolatry. If God destroyed the Israelites, He might allow Moses and Joshua to live and begin a new community with them and their descendants. As a good leader, Moses cared for his people. He asked God to forgive them, stating that he was prepared to share their fate. If God refused to forgive the Israelites, Moses asked God to remove his name as well from His book. God's Book of Life contains the names of those who will enjoy eternal life with Him (see Rev. 13:8). Moses declared that he wished to share the fate of his people, either forgiveness or eternal damnation.

32:33. God explained that He only blots out the names from His book of those who persist in their rejection of Him. Moses, who was innocent of the sin of idolatry, could not take the place of the guilty Israelites. Moses realized that the people needed to confess their sin, to repent, and to seek forgiveness. He planned to act for them, but his plan was not God's plan.

32:34. Although the Israelites had broken the covenant, God maintained His covenant with them. God instructed Moses to continue leading the people to the promised land and declared that He would send His angel to lead them. They had forsaken Him, but He would not abandon them. However, God told Moses that He would hold the people accountable for their sin. While the plague that struck the people provided an immediate punishment (Ex. 32:35), centuries later God punished His people's persistent disobedience and idolatry by sending the Assyrians to conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Babylonians to conquer the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In His grace God delays punishment hoping His people will repent. If they do not, eventually judgment must come.

exodus 34:6-9

34:6. As God began to speak, He twice proclaimed His name "Yahweh" [YAH weh], the name He had earlier revealed to Moses. God had introduced Himself to Moses as "I AM WHO I AM." This was the same God who had been with the Israelites' forefathers, who was with them now, and who would be with them always (see 3:14-15). Although the people might fail to keep the covenant, God never would.

God described His essential nature, listing five of His characteristics. First, He is compassionate. God consistently loves and tenderly cares for His people even when they sin against Him. Second, He is gracious. Despite our unworthiness, God acts to bless and provide for us. Third, God is slow to anger. While God will judge sin and those who consistently reject and disobey Him, He provides opportunity after opportunity for people to return to Him. Fourth, God is rich in faithful love, maintaining loyalty to His people even when their sins strain the covenant to the breaking point. Finally, God is rich in truth. We can depend on what God says because He is completely reliable. We can confidently place our lives and eternal destiny in His hands.

34:7. Though God's people may strain their relationship with Him through sin, God remains faithful in His commitment to guiding, caring for, and nurturing His people. "Wrongdoing" generally refers to acting based on a bending or distorting of God's commands. "Rebellion" refers to knowing God's commands but intentionally disobeying them. Sin refers to missing the mark. Combined, the three terms refer to any and all sins. No matter what God's people do, they can find forgiveness through repentance (see 1 John 1:9).

God's willingness to forgive does not mean that He doesn't take sin seriously. He judges those who persist in rebellion to the third and fourth generation, not to make children and grandchildren suffer unjustly but because sin's consequences persist so strongly, passing from one generation to the next. By contrast, He

displays His forgiving love to a thousand generations on those who seek to follow Him. God delights in saving, not destroying.

34: 8. In response to God's gracious words, Moses responded appropriately. He prostrated himself and worshiped God. Bowing down indicated his realization of his unworthiness and his submission to God. Moses' pleas for his people paled in comparison to God's graciousness and faithful commitment to His people.

34:9. Moses appealed for God to go with the Israelites as they journeyed to the promised land and to continue to accept them as His holy people. He admitted that the Israelites had a strong inclination toward rebellion but asked God to continue to forgive their sins.