



WHAT CAN **GOD DO?**

LIFEGROUP **STUDY GUIDE**

May 4 - June 1



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LIFEGROUP STUDY GUIDE

by Dan Franklin

This study guide follows along with LBF Church's current Sunday message series and is intended to be a supplement in your daily passionate pursuit of Jesus.

- *Watch last Sunday's message video:*
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Is your group stumped? Did you come to a question that you feel needs clarification? Our church isn't too big. Contact Pastor Dan with your questions.

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WHAT CAN GOD DO WHEN THERE IS NO WAY OUT?

Lesson 1 • May 4

MAIN POINT

When we have no way forward, God is always able to make a way.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you are standing at the edge of a large sea. There is no way for you to go forward. But then you look back and you see a hostile army behind you. There is no way for you to go backward. You seem to be stuck with no way out. What do you do?

This is the situation the Israelites faced in Exodus 14. And while this story took place thousands of years ago, it somehow feels familiar. We all face times when we don't see a way out. There is danger everywhere we look and we can't figure out what to do. We exhaust our intellect, our resources, our money, and our contacts. We conclude that we are stuck.

Suddenly we remember God. And we ask, "What can God do when there is no way out?" The story that accompanies this lesson not only tells us about the deliverance that he brought to the people of Israel. It also tells us about the kind of deliverance that God is able to bring when there seems to be no way out.

GETTING STARTED

1. What are some different ways that people feel stuck, with no way out?

2. How do you normally respond when you feel stuck in a bad situation?

DIGGING IN

Read Exodus 14:5-22.

5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" 6 So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. 7 He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. 8 The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. 9 The Egyptians—all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.

10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. 11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

15 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. 16 Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through

the sea on dry ground. 17 I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18 The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

19 Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, 20 coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

3. What struck you most about the passage—or about the sermon, if you heard it?

4. As the passage begins, describe the danger that is facing the people of Israel?

5. Summarize the complaint of the Israelites in verses 11-12?

6. According to verses 15-18, what were God’s motivations in what he planned to do to save the Israelites?

7. In verses 19-22, what stands out to you about how God protected and delivered the people of Israel?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. Look at Moses’ words to the people of Israel in verses 13-14. When we seem to be stuck, how much of the path forward depends on God’s actions versus our actions?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. Reread verses 13-14 and consider them in light of what Jesus did for us through his sacrificial death and resurrection. How do these words connect to Jesus and the deliverance he accomplished?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. Think of a situation you are facing where you don’t see a good path forward. How does the story in Exodus 14 impact your heart and your perspective?

11. As you look to the future, think about the past. Share a story about how God brought you deliverance in a situation when you couldn’t figure out a path forward.

WHAT CAN GOD DO WHEN THE ENEMY IS STRONGER?

Lesson 2 • May 11

MAIN POINT

God loves to win victories through weak people, in order to show his power.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you are living under the thumb of a massive and powerful army. Things are so dangerous that you have to hide in caves in the mountains just to stay safe. And anytime you make any progress in accumulating some food and shelter, the army comes in and takes all that you've gathered. And then imagine that God appoints you to be the leader of an army that is meant to deliver you and your people from this enemy. You reluctantly agree, and 32,000 soldiers join you in the fight. But then God says, "Your army is too big." Shocked, you try to figure out what to do and what to think.

This is the situation that Gideon faces in Judges 7. He is about to fight a daunting enemy, and God shrinks his army down to a laughable size. While the odds were already stacked against Gideon, now no one would ever dream of betting on him.

Sometimes today we find ourselves up against daunting odds. We have opponents, both spiritual and physical, who seem so much stronger than we are. On top of this, Christians seem more and more like the harassed minority in many circles. Secularism is on the rise, the Bible-believing Christians seem to be on the decline. What do we do when we face odds like this?

In the passage that accompanies this lesson, we will see how God loves to bring victories that show his strength in spite of our weakness.

GETTING STARTED

1. Do you think it is good to be self-sufficient? Why or why not?

2. What are some ways that believers in Jesus today face enemies or opponents who seem daunting?

DIGGING IN

Read Judges 7:1-8.

1 Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. **2** The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.' **3** Now announce to the army, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

4 But the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

5 So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink." **6** Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

7 The Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home." **8** So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites home but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

3. What struck you most about the passage—or about the sermon, if you heard it?

4. Read Judges 6:1-6. How is the nation of Midian described in that passage?

5. In verse 2, what is God’s concern about Gideon having so many men to fight the Midianites?

6. Why do you think God chose to have Gideon keep the 300 men who lapped the water?

7. In Judges 6:14, God calls Gideon to save Israel from the Midianites. How does Gideon’s response in 6:15 relate to what happens here in chapter 7?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. In Joshua 1:6 God calls Joshua to be “strong and courageous.” How does this call to be strong relate to the idea that God seems to prefer to win victories through people who are weak?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. Read 2 Corinthians 13:4. How does Paul’s description of Jesus in this verse reveal how weakness and strength relate to how God saves us through Jesus?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. At times when you feel like the opponents of God (and his people) are too strong for us, how can you respond in both your heart and your actions?

11. In what areas do you sense that God is calling you to let go of self-sufficiency in order to depend more upon him?

WHAT CAN GOD DO WHEN ALL HOPE IS LOST?

Lesson 3 • May 18

MAIN POINT

It is always worth taking the risk to place our hope in God.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine that after years of painful infertility, someone predicts that you will have a child. You get mad at them because you don't want your hopes to be raised, only to be dashed once again. But, to your delight, less than a year later you have the joy of welcoming your first child into your household. You are over the moon. It is truly a hope fulfilled. But then the unimaginable happens. Your child starts a day normal, then feels sick, and then is dead by day's end. You are devastated and angry. Why would God grant this desire only to take it away? Your hope is lost.

This is the situation faced by a Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4. She faces a hopeless situation. But then Elijah, God's prophet, enters into the situation and there just might be hope.

Hope is tricky. And hope can feel risky. Sometimes it feels safer just to resign ourselves to our fate. It feels safer to accept that we will never be healthy, that our marriage will never improve, or that our nation or community will never reflect the kingship of Jesus. We abandon hope because we've been hurt too many times.

In the passage that accompanies this lesson, we see what God can do in a situation where all involved have lost hope.

GETTING STARTED

1. Describe a time you faced a situation that seemed to be beyond hope, and yet you saw God bring good in that situation.

2. How can having hope in God seem risky?

DIGGING IN

Read 2 Kings 4:8-37.

8 One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. **9** She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. **10** Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

11 One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. **12** He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. **13** Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'"

She replied, "I have a home among my own people."

14 "What can be done for her?" Elisha asked.

Gehazi said, "She has no son, and her husband is old."

15 Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. **16** "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms." "No, my lord!" she objected. "Please, man of God, don't mislead your servant!"

17 But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son,

just as Elisha had told her.

18 The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. 19 He said to his father, “My head! My head!”

His father told a servant, “Carry him to his mother.”

20 After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. 21 She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out.

22 She called her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.”

23 “Why go to him today?” he asked. “It’s not the New Moon or the Sabbath.”

“That’s all right,” she said.

24 She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Lead on; don’t slow down for me unless I tell you.”

25 So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, “Look! There’s the Shunammite! 26 Run to meet her and ask her, ‘Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?’”

“Everything is all right,” she said.

27 When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, “Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why.”

28 “Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” she said.

“Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes?’”

29 Elisha said to Gehazi, “Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. Don’t greet anyone you meet, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy’s face.”

30 But the child’s mother said, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So he got

up and followed her.

31 Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy has not awakened.”

32 When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. 33 He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord. 34 Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy’s body grew warm. 35 Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

36 Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite.” And he did. When she came, he said, “Take your son.” 37 She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

3. What struck you most about the passage—or about the sermon, if you heard it?

4. Verses 8-17 provide the background for the story that follows. How do these verses make verses 18-21 especially devastating?

5. Look at the women's words to Elijah both in verse 16 and in verse 28. How do these statements relate to both the longing and the pain that can be connected to hope?

6. Why do you think Elijah has his servant Gehazi lay his staff on the boy before he himself goes to raise him?

7. What stands out to you most in the manner of how the boy was eventually healed (verses 32-35)?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. We know that we don't always get what we hope for. How can Christians discern the difference between solid hope in God and uncertain hope for what we simply want?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. This is a story about a situation that seemed to be beyond hope. Read Romans 5:6-8. How does the gospel of Jesus relate to the idea of a situation being beyond hope?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. Are there any areas—personal or societal—in which you have lost hope in God? If so, how can you reengage your hope in him?

11. How is God calling you to (1) pray and (2) act in a way that reflects that God brings hope into situations that seem to be hopeless?

WHAT CAN GOD DO WHEN THE WICKED HAVE THE POWER?

Lesson 4 • May 25

MAIN POINT

God works his eternal purposes in spite of, and even through, the actions of ungodly leaders.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine that the leaders of your community are opposed to Jesus. They not only aren't believers, but they want to shut down any mention of Jesus and any proclamation of his message. In fact, they respond to you with threats to try to keep you from telling others about Jesus. You're sad and frustrated, and also a little bit afraid. And you start to wonder what God can do when the people with the power are opposed to Jesus.

We find the apostles in this situation in Acts 4. How they respond not only shows how they intended to move forward. It also showed how they understood something very important that God had revealed in the past. It had to do with what God is capable of doing when a community's leaders are ungodly.

As we face situations today in which we have political leaders, bosses, parents, teachers, or influencers who are ungodly, the passage in this lesson gives us both hope and guidance for how we can respond.

GETTING STARTED

1. Do you ever feel discouraged because of the sorts of people who tend to hold positions of power in society? Explain your answer.

2. What are some ways you typically respond when you find yourself impacted by the leadership of ungodly people?

DIGGING IN

Read Acts 4:23-31.

23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

26 The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord

and against his anointed one.'

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

3. What struck you most about the passage—or about the sermon, if you heard it?

4. Read Acts 4:18-22. How does this context impact your perspective on this passage?

5. In verses 25-26 the prayer quotes Psalm 2:1-2. How does this quote describe the consistent relationship between earthly nations and God?

6. Focus on verses 27-28. What is said here about the relationship between the actions of evil people and the purposes of God?

7. In light of their perspective on God's power and purpose, what did the people pray for God to do in verses 29-30?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. Evil people conspired against God, but they only ended up accomplishing his plan. How then should we think about the guilt or responsibility of people who act in evil ways?

9. Sometimes believers suffer for their commitment to Jesus. Read Romans 5:3-5. How does this passage demonstrate how God works through suffering—even when the suffering is the result of the evil actions of others?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

10. What are some dangers that can accompany efforts by Christians to obtain worldly power in order to combat ungodly authorities?

TAKING IT TO HEART

11. How has God worked positively in your life even in spite of ungodly actions by other people?

WHAT CAN GOD DO WHEN SOMEONE REJECTS JESUS?

Lesson 5 • June 1

MAIN POINT

God is able to save even those who are most hostile toward him.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you know of someone who is extremely hostile to Christ and to Christians. This person not only personally rejects Jesus, but even goes so far as to think that Christians are dangerous to society, claiming that they should be removed or, at the very least, silenced.

This was the attitude of a man named Saul of Tarsus, and we see his story in Acts 9. But this also could be a description of people who each of us know personally. When someone is hostile toward Jesus, it can be difficult to hold out any hope of a change of heart. After all, if someone rejects Jesus so violently, what can God do?

In the passage that accompanies this lesson we get to see Jesus work a powerful miracle in the life of one of his fiercest enemies.

GETTING STARTED

1. Name someone who you think is very unlikely to become a believer in Jesus. Explain your answer.

2. In your experience, what normally leads someone who was once hostile toward Jesus to have a change of heart toward him?

DIGGING IN

Read Acts 9:1-19.

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and 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. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He 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."

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

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 The 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. 12 In 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 holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

17 Then 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.” 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

3. What struck you most about the passage—or about the sermon, if you heard it?

4. Look at verses 1-2 and then verses 13-14 How would you describe Saul’s attitude toward Jesus and his message?

5. What stands out to you about the way that Jesus revealed himself to Saul in verses 3-6?

6. In verses 15-16 how does God describe his purpose for saving Saul?

7. In verses 17-19 we read of Ananias healing Saul from his blindness. What does Saul’s response to this say about his change of heart regarding Jesus?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. Jesus obviously does not reveal himself to everyone in the same dramatic way that he revealed himself to Saul. Why do you think he chooses to reveal himself in different ways to different people?

9. Read what Romans 5:9-11 says about God saving his “enemies.” In what sense are we all enemies of God before we are saved?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

10. In light of what Jesus does with Saul in Acts 9, how is God calling you to pray and act toward those who currently seem unlikely to become believers?

TAKING IT TO HEART

11. Take some time (either on your own or as a group) to pray by name for people that you are tempted to think are beyond God’s reach.