

VICTORY-1 Corinthians 15:57

This year's theme consists of Victory with verse 1 Corinthians 15:57:

⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please be aware when in fellowship to look at what devotion you are doing and to prepare what you are doing. You have guides that you can see and use but feel free to change it up the way you would want to. This is only a guide that you can follow but if it seems too hard or too easy you can use it in a way that is appropriate. Helpful tips are getting to know the other team ahead of time so you know what their team is about. For the younger teams this is especially helpful. Being prepared is the key to a successful fellowship.

Moses and the ten Plagues – Exodus 14: 29-31

Background:

Moses was born in trouble times. The Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt because the Egyptians feared their growing numbers. All the Hebrew sons born were ordered to be thrown into the river by the Pharaoh. Moses' mother hid Moses and made a basket to float him down the river to save him and told his sister, Miriam, to watch over him. Pharaoh's daughter found him and rescued Moses. Miriam approached her to ask her if she needed a Hebrew nurse for the baby and got her mother to be the nurse. Moses was raised and educated as a prince in Pharaoh's palace. One day, he saw a Hebrew slave being beaten by an Egyptian guard. He came to his rescue and killed the guard in the process. He ran away when he was discovered into the desert. There he meets and defends Zipporah, daughter of Jethero, at a well. He eventually, marries her and hid from Pharaoh there raising sheep and had 2 sons. One day near Mt. Sinai, while he was pondering about his sister, brother, and the Hebrew slaves and whether the Pharaoh was still alive and after him, he encounters a burning bush that is not consumed. He approaches to investigate this strange phenomena and a voice calls out from within the bush his name, Moses! The voice tells him he is on holy ground and that he was the God of his fathers and that he has heard the cries of his people. Moses is told to go to the Pharaoh and tell him to set the Hebrews free.

Moses is afraid-afraid of the Pharaoh; afraid he cannot speak properly- afraid his people would not believe to him. But God reassures him and will send Aaron, his brother, to speak for him and that He will be with him.

Scene:

Moses sets off to Egypt with his wife and sons. Moses meets Aaron on his way because God has sent for him to meet Moses. They approach the Pharaoh to ask him to release the Hebrew slaves so that they can go and worship their God. 10 times Pharaoh Refuses and each time Moses prays to God for help to convince Pharaoh and each time God sends a plague to convince Pharaoh that He is mightier than his gods. First, Moses tosses his staff on the ground and it turned into a serpent. The Pharaoh only laughed b/c his magicians were able to duplicate the feat until Moses' serpent devoured magician's serpents. Next God helped Moses change the Nile River into blood but pharaoh still refuses to let the Hebrews go. Then came the infestation of frogs, the lice, flies, diseased cattle, boils on people and animals, huge hail storm, and locusts that devour the crops, then 3 days of darkness. Pharaoh agrees to let the people go but once the plague was lifted he reneged on his word. The last plague kills all the firstborn son of the Egyptians, including pharaoh's son, but bypassed the Hebrew sons. Finally, Pharaoh relents and allows the Hebrews to go.

The next day the great exodus from Egypt began to the land God promised their forefathers. A bright cloud guided them by day and a pillar of fire by night. When they reached the Red Sea pharaoh realized that it was a mistake to let his slave work force go. He commands his army to overtake the Hebrews while the sea and mountains on two sides trapped them. The Hebrew people were afraid and asked Moses for help and blamed him for their predicament. Moses prays to God for help and the cloud envelops the army hiding the Hebrews. Then Moses holds out his hands, as God had told him. A strong east wind blows all night and rolls back the waters of the sea. Awed by the sight, the Hebrews crossed the path in the sea. Pharaoh charges but the Hebrew camp is empty! The Egyptians race after them across the sea floor but the sand clogs their chariot wheels and before they could turn back...the wind

dies and the waters return. All of pharaoh's men were caught in the rushing sea. The Hebrew was safe on the other and praises God.

Moses proves to be an able leader with God's help. He was a great man of God – prophet, leader, and lawgiver to God's people. He teaches the Hebrews God's laws, gives instructions for worshipping him, and interceding for his people when they encounter difficulties and when they strayed.

Discussion Questions (more than one answer is possible, discuss each answer that applies and some choices are provided to get the discussion going if you need it).
Begin with an ice-breaker question if you can come up with one.

- i. Who saves Moses' life? (a) Mom (b) sister Miriam (c) Zapporah (d) Aaron (e) God. Do you think it was divine intervention? Why or why not?
- ii. Was Moses very obedient to God? What qualifications did he have to do God's work?
- iii. Did he have doubts? What persuaded him to obey? (a) Fear (b) faith that God is good (c) trust that God is good on his word as shown throughout his people's history (d) he had a death wish to return to the scene of his crime (e) he was bored with life
- iv. How did he do in persuading Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go? Would you have had the courage to return to face pharaoh not once but 10 times?
- v. What would convince you to obey God in something as drastic as Moses confronting pharaoh (confronting a powerful world leader) or Pharaoh letting his slave work force go (as a CEO of a big company or president doing the right thing but costing your company a lot of money)?
- vi. Who are the victors in these stories? (a) The mother in hiding Moses in defiance of Pharaoh's law, a capital crime (b) Miriam for watching out for his brother (c) Pharaoh's daughter in her compassion for a Hebrew baby against his father's wishes (d) Aaron for backing Moses in his confrontation with Pharaoh (e) God for creating all the wonders and plagues to convince Pharaoh and the Hebrews that he was an awesome God and is to be feared (f) God for not giving up on Moses when he had doubts and his people when they complain and lose faith and when they stray.

Israel Captures Jericho – Joshua 6:1-16

Background:

Joshua was chosen by God to lead the Israelites after Moses died. This is the Israelites' 2nd visit to this area. First time they lacked faith in God to attack the occupants to enter the Promised Land. The enemy was too big, fierce, evil, and they were afraid. God punished them for their lack of faith and disobedience and they had to wander the wilderness for 40 years before leading them again into the promise land. During these 40 years, God instructed Moses-and he his people.

Scene:

This time, they were not afraid and followed Joshua into battle. Even the Jordan River did not deter them, Joshua brought the arc of God's covenant and placed it in the river the water receded as they did for Moses in crossing the Red Sea to escape the Egyptian army. They crossed the river and marched 6 days around the mighty fortress surrounding the city of Jericho and all the people inside the city walls were filled with fear. On the 7th day they marched and blew their trumpets, banged the drums, and shouted until the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.

Discussion Questions (more than one answer is possible, discuss each answer that applies and some choices are provided to get the discussion going if you need it). Begin with an ice-breaker question if you can come up with one.

- i. Why did the Israelites fail the first time?
- ii. Do you think they were ready the first time? Why or why not? From their perspective? From Moses' perspective? (a) A wise general knows when to retreat (b) they were no match for the occupants. (c) They were afraid? (d) they lacked faith in God and in Moses (e) not worth the sacrifice
- iii. Instead of killing the Israelites for disobedience and lack of faith even in face of all the miracles and power God demonstrated in the 10 plagues released in Egypt forcing the Pharaoh to release them, parting of the Red Sea, the pillar of cloud leading them by day and the pillar of fire by night, providing them food and water, what did God do during the next 40 years they were wandering the wilderness? (a) Making them roam aimlessly as punishment, (b) making them suffer for their lack of faith, (c) kill off the generation that were disobedient, (d) Continued to provide for them, (e) Continue to lead them, (f) Continue having compassion on his people when they stray, (g) Building up the people to face their fears and have faith in their God (h) saving his people from themselves.
- iv. What was the victory here? (a) The Israelites won the battle w/o firing a shot. (b) The Israelites' faith was restored. (c) The Israelites must have been great geologist and scientist to know about the foundation of the fortress and the power of resonance and sound/vibration energy (d) God fulfilling his covenant to Moses to lead his people to the Promised Land. (e) God is good even when we're not.
- v. Would you like this kind of relationship with God? Why if you do? And what kind of relationship you would like instead before you would believe?

Gideon Wins the Battle over the Midianites – Judges 7:1-25

Background:

The Book of Judges tells us about a rocky time in Israel's history. Life was like a roller coaster. When Joshua, God's prophet, dies, the Israelites turn from God and fight with each other and their neighbors. When things get bad, they cry out to God and He sends a judge to straighten things out. When the judge dies, Israel forgets about God, and the whole cycle repeats. Israel's fortunes and relationship with God goes up and down, just like a roller coaster!

When times were good, the Israelites forget all that God has done for them and turn to worship the idols of their neighbors and become weak and can't even protect their fields from Canaanite raiders. When the farmers couldn't take it any more they take their story to Deborah, who is the judge of Israel. She tells them that God will help us if we trust him. She tells them to send for Captain Barak in the North Country and tells him of God's plan to defeat their enemies. But Captain Barak didn't like the odds and would only attack if Deborah goes with them. She goes with them and the battle is won but because he did not have the faith to lead by himself, he was not given the credit for the victory. God deliver the enemy's general, Sisera, into the hands of a woman, Jael, who kills him in his sleep. Deborah sang to the Lord praising the Lord God of Israel as the people rejoiced and sing their praises, too. And for 40 years there is peace in Israel. Families work in their fields and harvest their crops.

Scene:

In the years of plenty that follow Deborah's victory over the Canaanites, the Israelites again forget God. One by one they join their neighbors in worshiping the idol, Baal. At last only a few Israel remember that it was God who had rescued them from their enemies. Roving bands of desert tribesmen begin to terrorize the Israelite villages, and raid the fields. For 7 long years the Israelites suffer at the hands of the desert tribesmen. Then the Midianites came like swarms of grasshoppers over the Israelite fields ... stealing grain, cattle, and sheep.

One day a young Israelite is secretly threshing his grain when an angel appeared to him saying, "God has chosen you, Gideon, to save your people". That night Gideon and his servant break down the altar of Baal and build an altar to God. But he is still not sure that God has called him. He asks for a sign... "If in the morning this wool is wet with dew and the ground is dry, then I'll know that I am the one chosen by God". The next morning it was so. But Gideon is still afraid and asks for another sign. "If in the morning the wool is dry and ground is wet, then I'll know". The next morning it was so.

Gideon calls the leaders of Israel together and raises an army of 32,000 men and marches to the hills surrounding the Midianites camp. They were vastly outnumbered and Gideon let anyone who is afraid to fight to leave. Only 10,000 remain. Gideon watches the men who were left as they drink from the brook. Most of them are careless and put their faces down into the water, but some keep their heads up, their eyes alert- on the watch for danger. Gideon chooses those who are alert- and sends the rest home. Only 300 men are left. Now the Israelites know beyond all doubt that only with God's help can they defeat the enemy. They attack before dawn blowing their trumpets and waving their torches and yelling their battle cry. The stillness of the night is suddenly broken by the blare of 300 trumpets and crashing sounds. Startled from their sleep, the Midianites rush out to find their camp ablaze with flaming torches. In their panic they even attack one another. But Gideon and the 300 Israelites surround them on 3 sides. The Midianites think a giant army has attacked them... and in terror many tried to escape to the river only to be met by the Israelite soldiers waiting in ambush. Gideon chases the remaining army across the Jordan River...and at last all of the Midianites forces are defeated.

Discussion Questions (more than one answer is possible, discuss each answer that applies and some choices are provided to get the discussion going if you need it). Begin with an ice-breaker question if you can come up with one.

- i. What are idols? What idols do we have today? (a) Different gods (b) different philosophies, (c) things we worship (d) love of money (e) peer pressure (f) status (g) material possessions (h) good grades (i) trophies (k) being in the “in crowd”, (l) having the latest and best toy, (m) power (l) the rich and famous.

Why is it not wise to worship idols? (a) It is, that’s what all the commercials and ads tell us (b) that’s what life is all about, just look at any TV show or movie (c) idols are temporary and fads, it does not last (d) it changes us for the worst (e) it does not bring out the good that we are capable of doing for each other and the world (f) there is only one God (g) it’s not the real me, only what I want others to think.

- ii. Does God promise us a good life? (a) Yes if we believe (b) yes but our good and God’s good may not be the same; we see only what is good for us and can’t see what the greater good for all those around may be. We have a very limited perspective and are too self-centered (c) yes in the long-term if we have faith we will see it (d) no we all suffer like everyone else and the only good is that God suffers alongside us and supports us. (e) No life is just a roll of the dice – anything goes. (f) Neither, like karma; what goes around comes around.

- iii. Is it ok to question God? Is it ok to have doubts? What about in these stories? (a) No, doubt is bad (b) yes, God will still honor his covenant to bless his people (c) no, there are bad consequences in doubting God, he’s a mean one (d) yes, God is a compassionate God (e) doesn’t matter; God’s going to do what he’s going to do. (f) Yes and pray that God will use this time to build us up to do the job and so we can trust him more and be stronger

- iv. How did God treat Captain Barak and Gideon when they had doubt?

- v. Who wins in both stories? What did they win? (a) Nobody, lots of people died (b) both, they were victories in their battles and their enemies were defeated and peace was restored (c) both, each build up their trust in God and got to know him more in a closer relationship (d) everyone, the enemies learned to fear God and the Israelites renewed their covenant with God and knows that God always keep his word. (e) God because in each case he was victorious in winning the hearts of the people he called and restored their relationship with his people and his name was acclaimed and feared. Everyone knows what an awesome God he is.

David and Goliath – 1 Samuel 17:32-50

Background:

David grew up in Bethlehem. He is the youngest of Jesse's eight sons. He was charged with tending his father's sheep. He writes songs, plays the harp, and is efficient in using a sling. In the process of protecting his sheep he killed a bear and later a lion when they attacked the herd using only his sling. He was not afraid and always had faith in God. When King Saul was disobedient to God, Samuel, the prophet of God, came and blessed David and anointed his head with oil and announces that he will be the next king of Israel.

David was brought into King Saul's palace to sooth the king's rage, madness, and paranoia with beautiful music and song that he composed praising and affirming God. He was very effective in calming the king.

Scene:

When the Philistines were prepared to attack Israel, King Saul sent his army to meet them. Goliath, a giant of a man, was the biggest, strongest, and most feared of all the philistine soldiers. No one dared take up his challenge to fight him.

David accepts the challenge and refuses the king's armor and sword. Instead with only his staff and a sling, David goes out to meet the Philistine giant. Goliath mocks David for going at him with sticks and stones. David replies that you come with a sword, a spear, and shield –but I come in the name of God who will give me victory.

The giant laughs but David whirls his sling, takes careful aim --and lets the stone fly ... hits its mark and falls the Giant.

Later, he becomes King.

His greatest sin was his lust for the beautiful Bath-Sheba, the wife of Uriah, a soldier in his army. David had the loyal soldier lead a frontal assault against the Syrians and Ammonites in which he is killed. He marries Bath-Sheba and has a son. The Lord, thru his prophet, Nathan, accuses David and takes away his son and foretells trouble in his family. David, upon hearing the accusation, realizes his sin and repents and anguished over his deeds.

He is blessed and ruled for 40 years with compassion, unites his kingdom, moves the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, organizes the worship of God, writes at least 73 Psalms, continue playing his harp and singing praises to God, organizes priestly singers for worship of God, and followed God's lead.

He was called a man after God's own heart.

Discussion Questions (more than one answer is possible, discuss each answer that applies and some choices are provided to get the discussion going if you need it). Begin with an ice-breaker question if you can come up with one.

- i. What possessed David to fight Goliath? (a) He was young and naïve. (b) He was ashamed that all the soldiers were so cowardly towards the Giant. (c) The soldiers lacked faith in God and he had faith in God. (d) He was anointed to be the next king and this was his chance. (e) He was on a roll, first a bear, then a lion, and now a giant. (f) He was insanely over-confident. (g) He was too young and thought it was a game and did not think he could be killed.
- ii. Why didn't David armor up to protect himself? (a) The king's armor didn't fit. (b) He didn't look cool in it. (c) The armor would only slow him down; he wanted to be fast in case he needed to run. (d) It was better to depend on the gifts and talents that God gave him and it has served him so well. (e) He only needed God on his side and God always provides.
- iii. What is the triumph here? (a) Young vs. old, (b) balls (courage) vs. over-confidence, (c) small vs. big, (d) skill vs. power, (e) brains vs. brawn, (f) its karma. (g) Its just luck, you either have it or you don't. (h) Relying on God vs. relying on one's own abilities.
- iv. Why did David commit such a great sin? (a) Well, love is blind. (b) Well, a man's got to do what a man got to do. (c) Its a dog eat dog world out there. (d) I have the power and I used it. (e) I'm the king and all is mine. (f) I wanted her and she wanted me so how can love be wrong? (g) In such a life-changing event, God was not consulted- to resist temptation or how to love or to do the right thing.
- v. Where is the victory in this example of sin? (a) There is none it was all bad (b) none, his son died and his family turned on him (c) David was still a great king (d) he got away with it (e) he repented and though punished, he was still able to carry out God's covenant for his people. His heart was still after God's in spite of his own failings. (f) God was compassionate even when he strayed.

Jesus is tempted in the wilderness

OPENING ACTIVITY

Divide everyone into groups of 3 with at least one person from the other team. Have each person think of 2 truths and one lie. Share this with the group and take turns guessing which the lie was. To debrief this activity, ask the group which was harder, telling the truth or telling a lie.

BIBLE VERSE: Matthew 4:1-11 (NIV)

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD

Every day we are placed in situations where we are tempted. A student is tempted to cheat if he or she did not study for a test. A person taking public transportation is tempted to sneak on from the back if he or she does not have the fare. An athlete is tempted to bend the rules if it helps the team to win an important game. We might be tempted to over indulge even though we know too much of most things is not good for us. Satan is waiting in the wings trying to tempt us so he can pull us away from God.

Have you ever been tempted to do something you knew was wrong but you went ahead and did it anyway? We cannot escape temptations because it is part of our lives. However, we need to learn from the examples above of how Jesus conquered these temptations and was victorious. Jesus used God's Word to defeat the devil. He relied on the Spirit of God to persevere against the evil one. We need to rely on the Scriptures to do the same for us. Here is a passage that is a good reminder for us.

I Corinthians 10:13 (The Message)

"No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it."

Next time you are tempted to do something that you know is not right, pray to God to give you the strength to overcome it. Then use your friends and family to hold you accountable not to fall prey to the allure of these temptations.

PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive our trespasses as forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Victory over worldly authority – Daniel 3:1-30 (NIV)

²⁸ They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

Sharing question:

Give an example of when you defied authority (home, school, work, etc.). Why did you do it? What was the result? How did other people feel about your actions?

Discovering the Word:

Whose authority do you submit and pledge your allegiance to? Daniel chapter 3 takes us to a time where three faithful men refused to submit to King Nebuchadnezzar's order to bow to an idol/statue created by the King. Nebuchadnezzar was a very powerful king, conquered many nations, and was the most powerful man in Babylon. Any disobedience to the king could result in punishment by death, yet these men still defied his orders and refused to worship the idol, even though the King gave them a second chance to submit to his order.

What would cause these men to defy the King's order? The three men (Jews) were, above all else, faithful servants of God. God had specifically instructed the Jews not to make idols or bow/worship them (Exodus 20:4-5). The men knew that while King Nebuchadnezzar might be the most powerful man in Babylon, God is the one who has ultimate authority over everything, Babylon included.

When pressed by the king, the men answered "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:17). What a bold and perfect response! In the end, God miraculously delivers the men from the burning furnace, Nebuchadnezzar praises God as the Most High, and God is ultimately glorified.

Applying the Word:

In today's society, many forces are at work to hinder, challenge, and oppose what Christ stands for. While not every battle will be as dramatic as the above event, we face choices in our everyday lives that demonstrate to others of whose authority we submit to, whether we realize it or not. Whether it is the father who chooses to spend time with his family instead of working overtime, or the student who chooses to do morning devotional instead of sleeping in, it is through these everyday choices and actions that we become reflections of Christ. There is simply no better evidence that will show others that a relationship with Christ is far greater than anything else this world has to offer.

What evidence in your life, outside of organized church activities, demonstrates to others that you are a Christian submitted to the authority of Christ?

Response in Prayer:

Pray that God will make you more aware of opportunities and provide courage to demonstrate to others in your everyday choices and actions that you are submitted to the authority of Christ.

Victory over Tomorrow (Matthew 6: 19-21, 24-34)

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life [c]? ²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Warming Up

Break up into small groups of 4-5 people and spend about 5 minutes (about 1 minute per person) on the below sharing questions:

- 1. Where were you on the morning of 9/11? (in the event someone in the group is not familiar with the events of 9/11, do a brief summary of that day to your group)**
- 2. How did you feel when you heard about what happened that day?**

December 7, 1941, “a day which will live in infamy”, famous words uttered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. June 6, 1944...often known as D-Day. December 7th was the day Pearl Harbor was attacked...which caused United States to become an active participant in World War II. D-Day was the day when the Allied forces (America, Britain and other countries) landed in Normandy, France to stop Adolf Hitler and Germany from taking over the world. This landing was the largest land/sea invasion in world history. These two dates may not mean much to the under 60 crowd...but for people of that generation, these two dates forever changed the way America lived at that time.

As a 40-something person, four events is forever burned into my memory. I was sitting in the computer lab on the 3rd floor at Lowell High when the image of the Space shuttle Challenger exploding after takeoff flashed across the TV screen in 1986. Seven crew members perished along with Challenger. Three years later, on October 17, 1989, I was in the audio/visual checkout area in the basement of San Francisco State library when the whole building started to move for what seem like an eternity... That was the 1989 Loma Prieta 6.9 earthquake. 63 people died that day...41 of them crushed in the double-deck freeway Cypress structure in Oakland. Twelve years later, on the morning of September 11, 2001, as I was preparing to go to work by turning the TV on, was shocked at the image of a commercial airliner

flying into a high rise building in New York City. I never made it to work which was the case with many others as we all stayed home to reflect on the terrorist hijacking and crashing of 3 airplanes. That day, over 3000 people lost their lives. Fast forward 10 years later to March 11 this year. It was late evening and the news was on. Suddenly, a news flash came on saying a large earthquake had struck in Japan.

Footage started to come in showing a gigantic tsunami building off the coastlines. Soon, the tsunami reached the shore and headed into mainland. The waves washed over farmlands, houses, bridges. What I was watching was no movie. Suddenly, I came to the horrible realization as I watched the footage that there were human beings down there being swept away and dying before my very eyes. Between the 9.0 earthquake and the tsunami that ensued, over 15,000 people lost their lives that day with another 8000+ people still missing. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina killed at least 1836 and the 7.6 Kashmir earthquake near Pakistan killed 75,000+ people. In 2008, a cyclone touched down in Myanmar, near China/Thailand, 100,000+ people perished. 10 days later, in Sichuan, China, a 7.9 earthquake struck and killed over 68,000 people. In 2010, a 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti, killing 230,000+ people and leaving over 3 million homeless.

Minutes and hours before each of these disasters, the people that perished were probably doing things that you and I do every day. They could have been sleeping or just going about every day business. They could have been brushing their teeth, waiting for a bus/train to take them to school or work, hanging out with friends, planning what they want to do for the rest of the day. And then it happened...life ends. Why them? Time was up and Death was calling. Each time I hear the passing of someone, I am reminded on the fragility of life. In my earlier days, I felt invincible and lived that way...but God started to show me how fragile life is. Some people do know this...and do their best to "control" their destiny. They put up security measures to prolong their lives. They planned for the future, hoard their money so that they can live safely and comfortably. They invest much time and effort into fortifying the place they call "home". No matter how hard we try to control our destiny though, none of us can escape death. Sooner or later, that time will come. We are all living on "borrowed" time. It could happen to me as I'm riding a bus and be a victim of a random bullet fired from a dispute that I had nothing to do with. I could be following all the rules of the road, but because someone else chose to intoxicate him/herself, my life may end. Or just maybe, the next BIG earthquake will strike in my lifetime. The finality of life can be a paralyzing thought. So much so that some people stop living life...drowning themselves in fear.

Digging Time

In this passage from the **Matthew 6**, Jesus talks to the people about where to store up their treasures and worrying about life. People back then was not very different from us today huh? Today, we are putting our money into retirement accounts, into our homes, the latest/greatest electronic gadgets and the hottest fashion. Some of us are constantly worrying. We worry about how we look, what's for our next fancy meal, how high of a score we can get on our favorite video game, who our friends are or how many friends we have on Facebook. We worry about why someone "unfriended" us on Facebook. And most importantly, we spend minutes, hours, even days, worrying about whether the picture we chose as our profile picture on Facebook is the perfect picture.

If you are a true follower of Jesus Christ, when your time on earth is over, you know where you are headed. Despite that knowledge, many Christians still suffer from daily worrying. By living in this world, we may have forgotten about our eternal promise and instead, are caught up with the things of this life. In **1 Peter 2** and **Philippians 3**, the Bible talks about how, as followers of Jesus, we are "aliens and strangers in the world" and that "our citizenship is in heaven". So our final destination is not here. When we are buried in the ground, that is not the end of our story...not our final resting place. If we know where our final destination is, why should we then worry about the future? Yes, we need to eat, to have clothes

on our body, to live. But as Jesus said in **Matthew 6**, God will take care of our basic necessities. Now that's not a license to be lazy and do nothing either. We still need to do our part...we need to work hard and labor and toil (**Proverbs 14 & 28**).

With our final destination secured, we should be freed to do things during our time on earth. In **Jeremiah 1**, the Bible talks about how God knew each one of us BEFORE we were even born. That before each one of us were formed in our mother's womb, God knew us. Before we were even born, God had set us apart...that each one of us has a special purpose/mission upon entering Earth from our mother's womb. God appointed each one of us as "a prophet to the nations". Our purpose in life is not to randomly consume the Earth's natural resources. Rather, God had it in his mind a special purpose and plan for each one of us. Isn't it exciting to know that we're here for some greater purpose than to wake up each morning and repeat the same old routine day after day? Instead of being caught up with the everyday worries of the world that so many people are, life can be exciting and fresh each and every day.

Takeaway

Going back to Matthew 6, in verse 20, it talks about "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven". I believe that is related to what was said in Jeremiah 1. The treasures that we can seek after while on earth are those very things that God had in mind for us to focus and work on while on earth. As we accomplish those things, God is pleased. In itself, the process of discovering God's purpose for each one of us is an "epic" journey. There is no time to waste either in seeking and living out God's plan for each of us, as the return of Jesus will come in a manner similar to how a thief comes in the night (**1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10**).

If time allows, one takeaway question for everyone to ponder/commit/share:

"At this very moment, the one thing that I am positive that God wants me to change or do is:
_____"

Close in prayer and pray for any commitments that may have been shared. Encourage those that shared to go back to the leaders of their team and also share their commitment so that their leaders can pray for and support them.

(Leader's notes: the other verses highlighted in this devotion may be alternate "focus" passages in the event this passage has already been covered. The main theme is about not needing control of tomorrow because we have God's promises. God is our "security" blanket. Feel free to replace the personal story with your own story of a day that's burned into your memory and the memory of others. It could be the sudden/surprising passing of someone.)

Victory through Godly Success 1 Corinthians 15:57-58

Characteristic: Victory through humbled success/thanksgiving

Title: "To the Victor Go the Spoils"

Verse: 1 Corinthians 15:57-58: "But thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Optional activities: 1) *Human alphabets*: Split group into 2 teams. Every player on each team spells out words using their bodies. You can also have the theme word: "victory" as a part of the activity. Make this a contest with some reward system to spark success.

2) *Relay race*: organize a relay with reward.

Sharing Questions:

1. Imagine you just won an award at a major awards event (ex: Oscars, Academy, GMAs, MTV music awards, etc.). Who honestly is/are the first people you thank (yes, God counts)? Why?
2. Think of a time when you worked hard at/for something. What was your motivation for working so hard? What were you trying to achieve?

Devotional

"To the victory go the spoils". In the old days, anytime an army wins a battle, they take the spoils from the other side—the rewards, benefits, the winnings. They'll take it all and won't leave anything behind: wealth, women, harvest, you name it. Here in the contemporary civilization, this saying symbolizes the prize that comes after being victorious in something. In team sports, a trophy or medal is rewarded when a player or team wins a sports competition. In education, students receive a scholarship, recognition, and/or honors when one works hard and strives for success. In the work place, someone's "trophy" might be a promotion, a materialistic recognition (i.e. cup, pen, etc.), an appreciation, if he/she has been working hard for many years with a company. Auto insurance companies have rewards for being a good/safe driver. Stores come up with a rewards program for patrons who frequent the business. Somehow, someday, people are rewarded.

As Christians, we are reminded that we too are rewarded when we are victorious. We see a clear example with David as he followed God's instructions: "In everything he did, he had great success, because the Lord was with him (1 Sam. 18:14). As David continued on to becoming king, God blesses David when he followed instructions, and "destroys" him when he fails. Where do our victories lie? Who is the first person we thank after we have succeeded in something so laborious? Every time, before playing the field in a softball game, I am reminded that the game is for God, and that I am victorious if I have played my 110%. God doesn't reward us with materialistic objects; He gives us other opportunities to serve and preach His message in other capacities. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21)." Our victories should always be humbled and given up to God!

Victory Over the World

Bible Verse: 1 John 5:3-5:

³For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. ⁴For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. ⁵Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Each one of us has a story. Each one of us has a testimony. Stories are powerful. We all enjoy listening to stories. Sad stories. Funny stories. Dramatic stories. Heroic stories. Victory stories. As children of God, we have powerful stories to tell. Sharing how we came to Jesus and the difference He's made in our lives can help others discover how they, too, can know God personally. Sharing what God has done in our lives can also help others discover that our God is a living God.

We would like to encourage you, the spiritual leaders, to share your testimony and your stories during fellowship time. Please use the following format as you prepare for the fellowship:

1. Start the fellowship with an opening activity. It could be a game, an ice breaker activity, a sharing question where the players can meet and greet one another, etc.
2. Ask an opening question. Hopefully a question that is related to your story or with the bible verse. i.e. If you are going to share about how you gave your life to Christ during a camping trip, maybe your opening question can be: Share a favorite moment during a camping trip.
3. Share your story/testimony
4. A follow-up question. Please keep in mind who your audience is.
5. Prayer

Warm Up Activity:

1. Get the group to split up in partners and have a game of arm wrestle, thumb war, rock, paper, scissors, etc

Sharing Questions:

1. What's your favorite battle board game?

Lesson:

1. INSERT YOUR OWN STORY HERE
 - What did you battle with before you came to Christ?
 - What does it mean when God won the battle for you? Site examples.

Follow-up Question:

1. Is there something that is hindering you to keep his commandments?

Closing Prayer

Victory through Faith

Warm up questions:

How many times have you been disappointed by your favorite team?

How many of you have been on teams that have disappointing seasons?

Response:

If you have said yes then you are like everyone else. We all have had disappointments and feel like we believed that our teams can't win and when our teams can't win then we either follow losers or are losers. We can't stand to lose we need to do something about it. We feel that we need that feeling of being a champion. At times we think how we can win. Some of us want to win so bad that we try to build super teams. Others just quit and don't want to play the sport anymore.

I can recall a recent time where a team that I played for had no chance of winning. We were a bunch of rag tag misfits that don't seem to fit in the scheme of things. Some were good but as a team we were not as talented as the rest. Somehow we ended up winning some games. We even got to the championship game for some reason. We all looked at each other and couldn't believe that we were winning. We didn't have too much talent. We were less skillful than other teams. We were smaller than other teams. We even had less experience than other teams. For some reason we were successful. We backed each other up. We made sure that we encouraged each other. There was nothing we gave off that we were negative. We felt that we didn't need to be champion to be victorious. There was a larger feeling of something else. What we accomplished was being together as a team and supporting each other. From day one we had faith in each other and did not let things get us down. We did lose some games but we always had faith that we would win. Having faith in winning is not always about being champions at the end. Before we played in our last game and before the championship game we already knew that whatever happened, we felt victory was accomplished. We won already because we believed in each other and had faith in each other.

Bible Verse:

1 John 5:4-5 (New International Version)

⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Application:

Faith is a word that comes from believing and in believing, there is only one person I can think of. Jesus! In sports there can be one victor at the end, but believing in Jesus we can all be victorious. He cared for us to do the impossible. If we have faith in him, he will always be there for us.

Questions:

Have you ever had a time where belief has helped you succeed?

Do you believe in Faith and what it can do?