



LIFE GROUP MATERIAL

JUNE 2, 2019

When I first heard him, I was more than a bit unsettled. I was hiking alone through the heart of bear country in southeast Tennessee, making my way up the Benton Mackaye trail toward the foundation of an old burned out sanitarium I was going to call home for the night. I was working through some things in my own spirit and I knew I could hear the voice of God more clearly when my distractions were limited. I was looking forward to a few days away from cell service, social media and the busyness of life. That's why the noise of his presence was so startling to me. There weren't any people around for miles, and I had made up my mind if I heard something bigger than a squirrel in the brush (which he clearly was), it had to be a bear or a wild boar, neither of which I was keen on meeting with nothing more than the Ruger Mark IV .22 pistol I was carrying. As I tensed for the inevitable encounter with whatever was just beyond the mountain laurel beside the trail, I heard a small whimper...bears and boars don't whimper...and waited breathlessly! Moments later, poking his friendly head out between the wide flat leaves, I saw the smiling face of a beagle mutt trotting toward me. I exhaled deeply when I saw his wagging tail and not the tusks or teeth I had anticipated, and he contented his wiggling self with snuggling up next to me and licking my hand.

A profound realization came over me in that moment, something I didn't put my finger on until much later. Even as I walked the next several miles with him by my side, the electronic hunting collar dangling around his neck no doubt getting farther and farther from the range of his owner, I didn't understand. Even when I offered him a few precious ounces of water from my Camelbak, as he was obviously thirsty from his long night out chasing whatever his target was intended to be, it didn't dawn on me. It wasn't until hours later, just before dark, when he wandered back down the path we had just plodded along together, back into the thick brush of that Tennessee mountainside, that I realized...IT'S NOT GOOD FOR MAN TO BE ALONE!

Right then, I would have traded my gun, backpack, sleeping bag, and all the cash in my pocket to keep my little white flag tailed partner with me. His absence was what made me so keenly aware of how much I valued his presence. And isn't that so often the truth; we don't realize how much we value something until its gone.

I don't want to over-spiritualize a walk in the woods with a random stray dog, but I've often thought about the spiritual implications of that moment for me. It reminds me a bit of that time, way back in the beginning, when another guy was walking around in the woods by himself. Take time to read the creation account in Genesis 2:4-24 and pay careful attention to God's observation of Adam's situation in the Garden of Eden.

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Discussion Questions

1. **Read Genesis 2:4-24:** Why do you think God declared “It’s not good for man to be alone?”
2. **Read 2nd Samuel 11:1-27:** What was the pivotal issue in the interaction between David and Bathsheba? How might the situation have turned out differently?
3. **Read 1 Kings 19:1-18:** What was the chief reason behind the despair of Elijah, immediately on the heels on him defeating the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel? How did God choose to comfort him?
4. **Read Matthew 14:22-23:** When are some appropriate times to be alone, as demonstrated by Jesus?
5. **Read Colossians 3:12-14:** What is one of the key reasons God has chosen to put us together in families/close connection to others?

Take Away:

Having strong relationships whether with family or friends takes effort and sometimes a whole lot of the Fruit of the Spirit. Spend some time this week thanking God for the relationships He has given you. Thank Him for the family and friends He has placed around you. Then read through Philippians 2:1-11. Be intentional this week in imitating Christ’s humility/attitude in all your relationships and see how your attitude improves your relationships.



LIFE GROUP MATERIAL

JUNE 9, 2019

Think about the best ones. The ones that stand out above all the rest. It might be on a beach in Florida, building a skyscraper out of sand. It might be watching the sun set over the mountains from the mesh wall of a tent. Or maybe in a camper, laughing with your siblings until your sides hurt. Or maybe it was that last fishing trip you ever took with your grandpa? I'm not sure for you, but I'd be hard pressed to nail down my all-time favorite summer trip. And what is it about summer anyway that always makes those trips better? Maybe the weather...or the freedom? Or maybe the season doesn't really matter. Maybe it's not about the WHAT at all. Maybe it's about the WHO.

Because let's be honest, if it weren't for the people you're with, no trip would be as memorable. I'll never forget my brother John, when I was about 8, as he held a chubby version of myself vertical, face down toward the pool at some random park in Florida, trying to teach me to dive. The end result was concrete rash from my nose to my navel as he dropped me a bit too close to the edge! Not a fun experience, but certainly a memory I'll never forget. I also remember an incident hiking in the Rockies and watching my brothers and dad throw on their rain gear as a hail storm blew in, only to discover dear old dad had forgotten to buy any for me! Dime sized welts and near hypothermia are what I remember about that little walk. What about you? What are some of your best, or at least most memorable, moments on trips with your family? Didn't vacation with family? What about memories made on any trip anywhere with anyone?!

There's a story in the Old Testament about a trip with family. Although it wasn't just with brothers and sisters and mom and dad. This trip included cousins, aunts, uncles, in-laws, out-laws, and everyone else in between. In this story, as long as Abraham was your relation somewhere down the line, you were invited. This trip included lots of good times, lots of bad times, and even a few ugly times. But, in the midst of it all, this family stayed together, and for centuries has still been telling their story. Today, spend some time talking about your own memories, looking at their memories, and discussing what God might want to teach us.

Discussion Questions

1. Spend some time sharing with the group about your favorite vacation memory. What made this experience so meaningful?
2. **Exodus 14:10-32**: Imagine being present for such an amazing miracle! What, do you think, would be the first detail you told others about this event? Why?

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3. **Exodus 16:1-15:** How would you explain the miracle of food appearing every morning to your children that you didn't have to work to prepare? What did this miracle show about the nature of God?
4. **Exodus 32:1-8, 19-35:** Not all memories are good. Some are incredibly painful. What can we as the people of God learn about the mistakes made by the Israelites in this story?
5. **Deuteronomy 6:1-9:** Why do you think, just before the end of their time in the wilderness, God chose these words as His final commands for the Israelites? What does this mean about the esteem in which He holds families?

Take Away

As we launch the "Best Summer Ever" use the bucket-o-resources that you are given to make your journey with family or friends more intentional this summer. It doesn't matter what season of life you are in we all have people we are journeying through life with so pick some things on the bucket list or make some goals on spiritual growth and see what God will do through you this summer.

Join us each week through the "Best Summer Ever" as we memorize and hide God's Word in our hearts!

Best Summer Ever Week 1 Memory Verse:

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.



LIFE GROUP MATERIAL

JUNE 16, 2019

There are certain things you didn't do as a male in the Wisley house growing up. One of those things was say, "I Love You." Don't get me wrong, it wasn't for lack of feeling that emotion, or even for lack of knowing we were loved. That was never the issue. The issue was that none of us could say it without being a weepy, sappy mess! I probably could count on one hand the number of times my dad has said those 3 little words to me since I've been an adult. To this day, He'll awkwardly and abruptly end a phone call with me rather than having to choke up and say them (middle of me talking... "Well, alright, I'll talk to you later. Bye." ...click)! So, it was a big deal for me a couple years ago when he turned 70 and I decided to give him a folder filled with my thoughts about my 10 favorite memories with my dad! I sent a card along and asked him never to speak of the memories in person, knowing full well it would result in ugly grown men crying if he did! The only mention we've ever made is a passing acknowledgement of him having received it. My stepmom did report, though, that it was a weepy success in the old farmhouse!

I'll never forget those 10 moments, and countless others, with my dad. I'm hopeful many of you have similar and heart-warming memories with your own father. If you've not been able to share tender moments with your dad, I'm sorry, and I'm incredibly thankful we have a Heavenly Father who is always up to task of loving and caring for His kids so well. When I think about the best memories with my earthly father, I think what makes them stand out as most remarkable and impacting is the fact they so closely mirror the example of God Himself. Scripture is very clear about that. Any time an earthly father "gets it right" as it relates to parenting, you can be sure he is simply a reflection of the Heavenly Father.

This Father's Day spend some time in your life group reflecting on the attributes of a good father. We'll have some scriptures for you below but put it in your own words as well. Maybe spend some time talking about some of your best memories with your earthly dad...and maybe even share some of your best memories with your Heavenly Father.

Scripture:

Matthew 7:7-11, Psalm 103:13, Genesis 18:19, Ephesians 6:4, Proverbs 3:11-12, Proverbs 3:1-4, 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, Colossians 3:21, Deuteronomy 1:29-31, Luke 15:20-24

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Discussion Questions

What is one of your best memories of your earthly father (if this is a painful question, answer regarding someone who has filled this role for you)?

What is one of your best memories of your Heavenly Father

Of the attributes you've discussed of a good father, which do you think is the most important? Why?

Going Further

If time allows, spend a few minutes writing a letter to either your earthly or Heavenly father, detailing some of the reasons you love them or some of your favorite memories with them.

Best Summer Ever Week 2 Memory Verse:

The righteous lead blameless lives; blessed are their children after them. Proverbs 22:6