

Jesus is the “Golden Thread” that runs through the whole Bible from start to finish. He is truly the beginning and the end (Revelation 22:13). We hope you will enjoy the journey that we will take together. Don’t make it a duty; let it be a delight. Don’t be depressed or discouraged if you get behind—there is always tomorrow. You may want to keep a notebook to write down your thoughts and impressions as you read each day. What is the Holy Spirit showing you from your reading—about God, about Jesus, and about yourself? What can you learn from what you read? How can you pray so that what you have learned impacts the way you think and live?

It has been said that one of the best ways to read the Bible is to read it as an unfolding story with Jesus as the main character and the hero of the story. If we look at the Bible this way, we see that the first two chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1 and 2, serve as an introduction or prologue to the story. They present the ideal world that God created to glorify him. The last two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22, serve as the conclusion of the story or the epilogue. In between all those chapters, starting in Genesis 3 and ending in Revelation 20, is the story of Jesus. Let’s explore it together.

Day 1—John 1: 1 – 14

Genesis 1:1-3 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Before we begin at the beginning, we have to understand what happened before the beginning. With minds that are so bound by time, it is hard for us to understand concepts like eternity where there is no beginning and there is no end. Modern science discounts God because there is no explanation for how God came into being. To the modern scientific mind, everything must have an explanation, and everything must have a beginning. Since the God of the Bible has no explanation for his beginning, in their minds he can't possibly exist. The funny thing is they have no explanation for what caused our world to come into being; they have no explanation for where all of the chemicals and elements came from that are the building blocks for the world we live in. Do you see a contradiction in their thinking? Don't let anyone tell you that creation without God at the center of it is a proven fact, because it isn't. It takes more faith to believe in accidental creation (Big Bang and evolution) than it does to believe in an eternal God who created all things (for more information on what is going on in the scientific community today watch the movie Expelled by Ben Stein or check out the website: Answers In Genesis).

One of the reasons that modern scientists reject God is because, in their minds, a God who would be great enough to create all of the galaxies in the universe could never care about humanity in a personal way like the God of the Bible clearly does. A God so great could never be so caring. A reason why they think that way is because their view of God is formed by their view of humanity. The greater humans are, the less they seem to care about others. But is God really like us? If he is like us, what kind of a God does that make him?

Here, in John 1, we see a God who is great enough to create all things.

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

But we also see a God who loves us so much that after we sinned and rebelled against him, he was willing to come and enter our world.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

It is clear from verse 14 that the "Word" that is referred to throughout this passage is Jesus. He was there at the beginning with God when everything was created, and he is God made flesh, who came and made his dwelling with us so that even after our sin and rebellion, which made us children of Satan, we would once again have the right to be called Sons of God.

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Jesus, the Creator of mankind is also Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 1. Who made you? God.	<p>Q. 4. What is God?</p> <p>God is a Spirit,[a] infinite,[b] eternal,[c] and unchangeable[d] in his being,[e] wisdom,[f] power,[g] holiness, [h] justice,[i] goodness,[j] and truth.[k]</p> <p>[a]. Deu 4:15-19; Luk 24:39; John 1:18; John 4:24; Acts 17:29 b]. 1 Ki 8:27; Psa 139:7-10; Psa 145:3; Psa 147:5; Jer 23:24; Rom 11:33-36 [c]. Deu 33:27; Psa 90:2; Psa 102:12; Psa 102:24-27; Rev 1:4; Rev 1:8 [d]. Psa 33:11; Mal 3:6; Heb 1:12; Heb 6:17-18; Heb 13:8; Jas 1:17 [e]. Exo 3:14; Psa 115:2-3; 1 Tim 1:17; 1 Tim 6:15-16 [f]. Psa 104:24; Rom 11:33-34; Heb 4:13; 1 John 3:20 [g]. Gen 17:1; Psa 62:11; Jer 32:17; Mat 19:26; Rev 1:8 [h]. Heb 1:13; 1 Pet 1:15-16; 1 John 3:3; 1 John 3:5; Rev 15:4 [i]. Gen 18:25; Exo 34:6-7; Deu 32:4; Psa 96:13; Rom 3:5; Rom 3:26 [j]. Psa 103:5; Psa 107:8; Mat 19:17; Rom 2:4 [k]. Exo 34:6; Deu 32:4; Psa 86:15 vs Psa 117:2; Heb 6:18</p>

Question 1. Read Psalm 90:2. How is God different from everything and everyone else? What characteristics of God can you name? (eternal, perfect, the creator and king over all creation)

Question 2. Once God created the earth, was He done with His work in creation? He is still present in creation?

Question 3. What does it mean that Jesus is the redeemer of mankind?

Day 2 – Genesis 1: 3 – 27

As you read this very familiar account of the creation of our world by the hand of God, think about these things. Think about the orderliness and care of how God went about creating everything. Think about the intricacies of creation. Take a moment and look at your hand and think about the complexities of the hand. Think of all of the nerves and muscles that have to work together to make your hand open and close. Do you really think that just accidentally happened by chance? Look at the beauty and variety in creation and marvel at what God has done and think how God made it all from nothing.

Hebrews 11:3 “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” God made it all so that we would know that there is a God and we should seek him with all of our hearts.

Psalms 19:1-4 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

You don't ask a God this great to just come and be a consultant for your life or a spiritual advisor—a God this great has to be worshipped and be the center of our entire being and entire existence.

Romans 1:20-22 “[That] since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.”

Do you know God? Is God the center of your existence? There is enough evidence in creation to know there is a God who is worthy of our worship. But God didn't stop with that. God also gave us His Son, so that we might really know him.

Hebrews 1:1-3 “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”

John 14:7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Do you understand what Jesus is saying to us? If we see him, if we know him, we will also know God. Jesus is the revealer of God to us.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 2. What else did God make? God made all things.	Q. 9. What is the work of creation? The work of creation is the making by God of all things from nothing, by his powerful word,[a] in the space of six days, and all very good.[b] [a]. Gen 1:1; Psa 33:6, 9; Heb 11:3 [b]. Gen 1:31

Question 1. What parts of creation show us God's glory? How does creation show us God's greatness and worth to be worshipped?

As Paul writes these words, he makes some bold and wonderful statements about who Jesus is and what Jesus does. The “He” that Paul refers to in these verses is Jesus. Jesus is the image of the invisible God who reveals God to us—he is God made flesh. Be careful as you read the phrase, “firstborn over all creation,” in verse 15. Read this exactly as Paul meant it to be read. Paul is not saying that Jesus is a created being, because in the very next verse, Paul tells us that Jesus is the creator of all things. Paul tells us in:

Philippians 2:6-11 that Jesus, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

This is what Paul means when he talks about Jesus being the firstborn. The phrase firstborn ties directly into Jesus’ resurrection from the grave. He was the first one who was resurrected to eternal life. The phrase firstborn had a very significant meaning in the world Paul lived in. The firstborn son managed all aspects of the family for the father. Everyone, except for the father, had to answer to the firstborn son. Paul uses the phrase firstborn to illustrate Jesus’ place as ruler of all things.

Now consider everything else Paul tells us about Jesus in the rest of Colossians 1: 15 – 17. In verse 16, Paul acknowledges Jesus as being the creator of all things, even the very things that conspired together to have Jesus put to death (the rulers and authorities of this world). How amazing is it that Jesus would create the very powers that would one day put him to death? As you think about this, think about the conversation between Jesus and Pontius Pilate that is recorded in:

John 19:10-11 "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

Think how amazing it is that Jesus gave Pilate the power to put him to death. Jesus willingly orchestrated all of the events that led him to the cross, and he did it all for our sake!

Paul goes on in Colossians 1: 17 to tell us that Jesus is eternal (coming before everything), and Jesus is the one who holds all things together.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 13. Can God do all things? Yes. God can do all his holy will.	Q. 11. What are God’s works of providence? God’s works of providence are his most holy,[a] wise,[b] and powerful[c] preservation[d] and control[e] of all his creatures, and all their actions.[f] [a]. Psa 145:17 [b]. Psa 104:24 [c]. Heb 1:3 [d]. Neh 9:6 [e]. Eph 1:19-22 [f]. Psa 36:6; Pro 16:33; Mat 10:30

Question 1. Jesus not only orchestrated all the events of His life, including going to the cross, but He also orchestrates the events of our lives. He is allowing you to go through whatever it is that you are going through. Are you trusting Him? Will you be thankful, even if you don’t like what He might bring into your life?

Question 2. What do you know about Jesus that makes you trust Him more?

As we read these verses from Genesis 1, we see that God created Adam and Eve in his image and then we read God gave a mandate to Adam and Eve. It is a mandate to take the image of God that is in them and to go and fill the whole earth with that image. Throughout history, kings have built monuments to themselves to remind the people they rule--that the people have a king. In the same way, as Adam and Eve multiply and make new image bearers of God and those image bearers fill the earth, all of creation will be reminded of God's rule and authority over it. In the next few days, we will look at Adam and Eve's sin and how that changed the world we live in, but understand this, the mandate that Adam and Eve were given didn't change even after they sinned. God expelled them from the Garden, but He didn't take back the mandate to go and make image bearers, to fill the earth and rule over it. The mandate was still there; they were just incapable of carrying it out because sin had marred the image of God that they carried.

But Jesus changes everything and allows us to once again be able to carry out that mandate. We have already seen from Colossians 1: 15 that Christ is the image of the invisible God. Now we must couple that thought with this thought from the Apostle Paul:

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory.

As followers of Christ, we are being remade into his likeness, which means we are being remade into the image of God that was marred by Adam and Eve's sin. Jesus tells us in:

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Do you see the connection? As followers of Christ, we are to bear the image of Christ and take it to the whole world. It is the same mandate Adam and Eve had—to fill the earth with the image of God. Just as Adam and Eve had a God-given mission, so do we. Will we let sin stand in our way, or will we move forward boldly in the name of Jesus?

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 22. In what condition did God make Adam and Eve? He made them holy and happy.	Q. 10. How did God create man? God created man, male and female, in his own image,[a] in knowledge,[b] righteousness, and holiness,[c] with rule over the creatures.[d] [a]. Gen 1:27 [b]. Col 3:10 [c]. Eph 4:24 [d]. Gen 1:28; see Psa 8:1-9

Question 1. In what ways is man different from the rest of creation?

Question 2. In what ways is man different from God? How does man reflect God's image?

Question 3. What does the creation of the Garden of Eden teach us about the goodness and greatness of God?

In today's reading, we read the beautiful story of how woman was created, and how marriage was ordained by God. As you read these verses, we see that Eve was created by God to complete Adam—to be a helper to Adam, so that Adam could carry out his God-given responsibilities. In today's world, this whole idea is frowned upon by our modern thinking. In our society, the beauty of a woman being a helper to a man is lost, because to our modern way of thinking this role, which has been given to women by God, seems to be demeaning to them. Nothing could be further from the truth. In marriage—in the roles of husband and wife—we see a beautiful picture of Christ and His church.

Ephesians 5:23-27 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Think about what Paul is writing in these verses. Marriage is a picture of Christ and His church. The husband's role is to be like Jesus. What does that mean? Look how Paul describes the husband's role in these verses. Yes, Paul says the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, but the husband is to be willing to die to himself for the good of his wife, just as Christ died for his church. Now what is the role of the wife? It is the same as the church. What does the church do for Jesus? It serves him by carrying out the work that he has given it to do. The church is the helper to Jesus. One of the things we have to decide as we read the Bible is this: Is it really God's Word? A person can believe it is, and even though he may not like everything he reads in it (at least at first glance), he must wrestle with it and accept its truth because it is God's Word. How beautiful would our marriages look if we could learn to carry out our God-given roles and be a picture of Christ and his church to the world around us?

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<p>Question 18. Of what were our first parents made?</p> <p>God made Adam's body out of the ground and Eve's body out of a rib from Adam.</p>	<p>Q. 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?</p> <p>The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God,[a] and what duty God requires of man.[b]</p> <p>[a]. Gen 1:1; John 5:39; John 20:31; Rom 10:17; 2 Tim 3:15</p> <p>[b]. Deu 10:12-13; Jos 1:8; Psa 119:105; Mic 6:8; 2 Tim 3:16-17</p>

Question 1. What was Adam's role as a husband? What was the woman's role?

Question 2. What is your role in the church? How do you serve Jesus?

Day 6 – Genesis 2: 1-15 (2 – 3)

Rest. It is what we all need, but we just can't seem to get enough of it. It is ultimately what was lost when Adam and Eve sinned. Once sin entered the world there was no more rest, only restlessness. Before Adam and Eve ever sinned, God put Adam in the garden to work and care for it.

Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Work was part of what we were created to do, so work is not part of the curse of sin, nor is it the reason we don't find rest. Our rest is found in our relationship with God, and when we sinned, that relationship and that rest was lost. But Jesus came so that once again we could find rest.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The rest Jesus is talking about in these verses isn't the kind of rest you get when you put your feet up in your recliner; it's real rest that comes as a result of knowing that Jesus has done everything we couldn't do and everything we need to do so that we can be declared righteous in God's sight and, once again, have a full relationship with God. No matter how hard we try, because of sin, we can never live lives that will please God. Everything we do is tainted by the sin that lives in us. That is why we need Jesus in order to find rest for our souls. Jesus fulfilled all of the law perfectly and then died as the perfect sacrifice for our sin. By placing our faith in Christ our sins are forgiven, and we also receive Christ's record of perfect righteousness as our record. We can rest in that record because it is perfect. It is the forgiveness and righteousness that we have in Christ that allows us to once again find rest in a right relationship with God.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 56. How does God justify you? God forgives all my sins and accepts me as righteous through Christ.	Q. 60. How are you righteous before God? A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. ¹ Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments, of never having kept any of them, ² and of still being inclined toward all evil, ³ nevertheless, without any merit of my own, ⁴ out of sheer grace, ⁵ God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, ⁶ as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. ⁷ All I need to do is accept this gift with a believing heart. ⁸ 1 Rom. 3:21-28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil 3:8-11 2 Rom. 3:9-10 3 Rom. 7:23 4 Tit. 3:4-5 5 Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8 6 Rom. 4:3-5 (Gen. 15:6); 2 Cor. 5:17-19; 1 John 2:1-2 7 Rom. 4:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:21 8 John 3:18; Acts 16:30-31

Question 1. Are you resting in the righteousness of Christ alone?

Question 2. What harmony do we see in the Garden of Eden? How does Jesus, and faith in Jesus, begin restoring that harmony?

Question 3. God is the creator and ruler over all things, but what responsibility did God give to man?

Day 7 – Genesis 3: 1 – 13

These verses contain the tragic tale of Adam and Eve’s fall into sin—a fall that also placed us under the curse of sin. Adam and Eve represented all of humanity, so when they became guilty of sin, we also became guilty of sin. We all fell under the curse of sin.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned

Sometimes we like to flatter ourselves, and in our pride, we believe that if we had been Adam, or if we had been Eve, we would not have fallen like they fell. That is a lie. We would have fallen in just the same way. Because of the fall, we are sinful from birth.

Psalm 51:5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

But we are not without hope. Paul tells us in:

Romans 5:6-17 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!... But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!... For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Just as sin entered the world through one man, Adam, righteousness enters the world through one man, Jesus Christ. We have a choice. Do we want to live under the old way, under the curse of sin and have Adam as our representative, or do we want to live under a new way, no longer under the curse of sin, but rather under the blessing of righteousness with Christ as our representative? As Joshua 24:15 says, “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 39. What is the sinful nature that we inherit from Adam called? Original sin.	Q. 16. Did all mankind fall in Adam’s first disobedience? Since the covenant of life was made with Adam[a] for his descendants as well as for himself, all mankind descending from him in the ordinary manner, sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression.[b] [a]. Gen 2:16-17; Jas 2:10 [b]. Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:22

Question 1. Can God stand to be in the presence or look at sin? Why not? Read Habakkuk 1:13a. Why did God have the right to determine the punishment for sin? Discuss God’s justice and mercy.

Question 2. God did not leave His people without hope. What promise do you see in Genesis 3:15? What do you know about the Savior?

Question 3. Will you continue to live under Adam and the curse, or will you, by faith, come and live under the blessing of Christ’s righteousness?

Question 4. Satan still tries to deceive God’s people today. What has God given us to stand against his attacks?

Day 8 – Genesis 3:14 – 15

After Adam and Eve sinned, God showed up in the Garden and dealt with their sin. Because of sin, a curse fell on all of creation. In these verses God starts by dealing with the serpent, Satan, and placing a curse on him. Verse 15 contains the first words of prophecy about Jesus that are found in the Bible. As part of Satan's curse, God tells Satan that there will be hatred between Satan's offspring and the offspring of the woman. Satan's offspring are all those who choose to remain in rebellion against God.

1 John 3:10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are:
Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God

To see how this is true consider these words that Jesus spoke to the Pharisees as they stood in opposition to Jesus and plotted to kill him:

John 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The offspring of the woman that God is referring to here in Genesis 3:15 is Jesus. The whole point of Jesus being born of the virgin Mary but conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit was so that he could become flesh and blood like we are, but without our sinful natures. In Genesis 3: 15, God clearly establishes the fact that there will be continual warfare between the kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of Heaven. The kingdom of Satan will strike the heel of the Kingdom of Heaven. The kingdom of Satan will inflict a wound on the offspring of the woman. That is a picture of Jesus going to the cross. He was wounded for our transgressions (Isaiah 53: 5), and when Jesus went to the cross, Satan believed he had won. But when Jesus rose from the grave, he triumphed over Satan, and the head of Satan was crushed. It's as if the death sentence has been pronounced but has not yet been carried out. Revelation 19 and 20 tells us about that day.

There is no middle ground in this conflict—either we are children of Satan, or we are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 46. How, then, can you be saved? By the Lord Jesus Christ through the covenant of grace.	Q. 20. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the state of sin and misery? God, solely out of his love and mercy, from all eternity elected some to everlasting life,[a] and entered into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the state of sin and misery, and to bring them into a state of salvation by a Redeemer.[b] [a]. Acts 13:48; Eph 1:4-5; 2 Thes 2:13-14 [b]. Gen 3:15; Gen 17:7; Exo 19:5-6; Jer 31:31-34; Mat 20:28; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 9:15

Question 1. Why is a Savior needed?

Question 2. How does one have assurance if he is a child of God?

Yesterday we saw the curse that God pronounced on Satan because he tempted Adam and Eve, and in doing so, declared war on the Kingdom of God. Today we see God curse Eve, Adam, and all of creation because of their sin. Everything about life would become hard. Remember the mandate God originally gave to Adam and Eve? “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, rule it and subdue it.” The curse of sin made fulfilling that mandate so much more difficult for man to carry out. Being fruitful and multiplying would be more difficult. There would be pain in childbearing, and that is not just referring to the physical pain of childbirth, but rather it refers to all the pain and heartache that is associated with trying to raise Godly children. Think about how much harder child rearing became because children would now be born with a sinful nature. Because children are born with a pre-disposition to sin, parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles must through prayer engage in spiritual warfare, and call upon spiritual resources to protect our covenant children from Satan having his way with them. Because of sin, there would be strife in the family between parents and children and husbands and wives (verse 16). But that is just the curse that fell on Eve.

Adam’s curse brought pain and trouble to his work. No longer would the rest of creation cooperate in Adam’s effort to rule and subdue the earth. Before the fall, work was enjoyable for Adam, because everything went right—whatever he planted grew and produced fruit; there were no natural disasters to contend with that would undo the work Adam did. But now after the fall there would be sweat, weeds and thorns, and the chaos of natural disasters. Work would become a toilsome burden because nature would no longer cooperate in the process.

Romans 8:19-22 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Even creation awaits the day when all will be made right again. But that is not even the end of the curse. Rather than living eternally, man will die and return to the dust he was made from. It is no wonder the world we live in is such a mess, is it? But thanks be to God because He has sent Jesus to reverse the curse.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 35. How did Adam and Eve change when they sinned? Instead of being holy and happy, they became sinful and miserable.</p>	<p>Q. 7. Then where does this corrupt human nature come from? A. The fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise.¹ This fall has so poisoned our nature² that we are all conceived and born in a sinful condition.³ 1 Gen. 3 2 Rom. 5:12, 18-19 3 Ps. 51:5</p>

Question 1. Where do you see the consequences of sin in the world? Where do you see the consequences of sin in your own heart?

Question 2. How and in what ways does the blood of Jesus reverse the curse on Adam, Eve, and creation?

After God placed a curse upon the serpent (Satan), Eve, and Adam, He sent them out of the Garden and into the world where they would have to fend for themselves. Before they had sinned, Adam and Eve didn't know what evil was or know what guilt felt like.

Genesis 2:25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Now they knew both of those things all too well.

Genesis 3:6-10 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

The moment Adam and Eve rebelled against God their innocence left, and they were covered with guilt and shame. Now think about how they tried to deal with that guilt and shame. They sewed garments of fig leaves together to cover their nakedness and shame, and they tried to hide from God. What is our first reaction when we sin? Isn't it to try to cover up our sin? Isn't it to try to hide from God? How do we do that? Often, it is by sewing together fig leaves of self-righteousness to try to cover up our sin and inadequacies. Here's the problem—we can't hide from God.

Psalm 139:7-12 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

And what about our attempts to cover up our sin?

Proverbs 15:3 The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.

God can see right through the cover up. The fig leaves of self-righteousness wither under His gaze. It is interesting that Adam and Eve tried to use fig leaves to cover their nakedness and shame. How long would it be before those leaves would dry out, wither, and expose them once again? They needed something better, so in Genesis 3: 21, the Bible tells us that God made coverings from animal skins to clothe them and cover their shame. This is the first record of a sacrifice—of one living creature losing their life for the sake of another. It is a picture of what Christ would do for us on the cross. As he hung there naked and bore the wrath of God, his sacrifice covers our guilt and our shame, but unlike Adam and Eve's fig leaves, his sacrifice for our sins is permanent and covers us completely for all of eternity.

Hebrews 7:26-27 Such a high priest meets our need-- one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<p>Question 12. Does God know all things? Yes. Nothing can be hidden from God.</p>	<p>Q. 21. Who is the Redeemer of God's elect? The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ,[a] who, being the eternal Son of God[b] became man,[c] and so was and continues to be God and man, in two distinct natures and one person for ever.[d] [a]. John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5-6 [b]. Psa 2:7; Mat 3:17; Mat 17:5; John 1:18 [c]. Isa 9:6; Mat 1:23; John 1:14; Gal 4:4 [d]. Acts 1:11; Heb 7:24-25</p>

Question 1. Read Isaiah 64:6. Are you trusting in Christ alone as the only acceptable sacrifice to cover your sin, or do you have your own garment of fig leaves you are trying to cover your guilt and shame with? Are you hoping that somehow your good works will cover your shame? If you are, then what does that show about who you are trusting in instead of Christ's righteousness?

Question 2. How did sin cause a separation in the fellowship between God and man? How does Jesus restore that fellowship?

Adam and Eve are driven from the Garden by God. This was much more than just losing their home and a nice place to live. They also lost access to the thing they needed to be able to live eternally—the Tree of Life (verse 22). But even more importantly, they also lost the thing they needed more than anything else in the world—their intimate relationship with God the Father. The Garden was the place where God came and walked with them and had fellowship with them. Because of sin, this would no longer be the case. The angel with the flaming sword not only kept Adam and Eve from going back home again, he kept them from the Tree of Life, and he also kept Adam and Eve from entering the presence of God again.

All seems to be lost, except remember the promise that God made as he placed the curse on Eve.

Genesis 3:15 From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

We already have seen that when God spoke these words he was looking ahead to Jesus. Jesus is the one who makes the way for us to get back to the Garden. Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross we will once again have a wonderful place to live for all of eternity.

John 14:1-3 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Through faith in Christ, we once again have the hope of eternal life.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Through Christ, in that eternal home that awaits us, we once again will have access to the Tree of Life.

Revelation 22:1-2 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.

Through Christ, we get back to the Garden, and we once again have access to God, both now:

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

And for all of eternity.

Revelation 21:3-5 "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 22:3-6 The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true."

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<p>Question 40. Can anyone go to heaven with this sinful nature?</p> <p>No. Our hearts must be changed before we can believe in Jesus and go to heaven.</p>	<p>Q. 19. What misery did the fall bring upon mankind?</p> <p>The fall brought upon mankind loss of communion with God,[a] and his wrath[b] and curse,[c] so that we are justly liable to all miseries in this life,[d] to death[e] itself, and to punishment in hell for ever.[f]</p> <p>[a]. Gen 3:8, 24; John 8:34, 42, 44; Eph 2:12; Eph 4:18 [b]. John 3:36; Rom 1:18; Eph 2:3; Eph 5:6 [c]. Gal 3:10; Rev 22:3 [d]. Gen 3:16-19; Job 5:7; Ecc 2:22-23; Rom 8:18-23 [e]. Eze 18:4; Rom 5:12; Rom 6:23 [f]. Mat 25:41, 46; 2 Thes 1:9; Rev 14:9-11</p>

Question 1. How does the gospel give you hope in the present? How does it motivate you to live for God's glory now while we await the final completion of redemption?

Question 2. How is the gospel a warning?

Day 12 – Genesis 4: 1 – 10

In this passage we read the account of the first murder as Cain, in a fit of jealous rage, kills his brother Abel. It seems like Cain thought that no one had seen his crime, and no one would know how Abel had died, but look at verse 10. God tells Cain that Abel's blood is crying out from the ground. What did Abel's blood cry out? It cried out for justice, for Cain to be called to account for shedding the innocent lifeblood of his brother, for God to take vengeance on Abel's behalf.

In John's vision, in the Book of Revelation, there is something very similar that takes place.

Revelation 6:9-11 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

The typical cry of shed blood is to cry out for justice and vengeance; but in the Bible we also find an exception to what is typical. Rather than crying out for vengeance, the blood of Christ cries out for our forgiveness.

Luke 23:33-34 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals-- one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus' cry for forgiveness wasn't just for those who were physically nailing him to the cross. It was for us. It was our sin that caused him to go to the cross. His blood cries for forgiveness for each of us.

Hebrews 12:23-24 You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The blood of Abel rightly cries out for justice and vengeance; the blood of Christ cries out for forgiveness. The righteous blood of Abel cries out in condemnation of Cain; the perfectly righteous blood of Jesus cries out for our forgiveness.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 37. What effect did the sin of Adam have on all people? We are all born guilty and sinful.	Q. 8. But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil? A. Yes, ¹ unless we are born again by the Spirit of God. ² 1 Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Job 14:4; Isa. 53:6 2 John 3:3-5

Question 1. What is the only way for us to please God? If we do anything without faith, can it be acceptable to God? What does our faith have to be placed in?

In today's reading, we find the beginning of the very familiar account of Noah and the Ark. Notice how today's reading begins. God was grieved that He had made man because man had gone from being the very image of God to being a creature whose "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all of the time." Because of that evil, creation was doomed to destruction, but salvation for mankind and all of creation would be found in one righteous man. Does that sound familiar? It should, because in a very real way the account of Noah and the Ark gives us a picture of a greater salvation that is to come through a man even more righteous than Noah. Noah's faithfulness in building the Ark preserved the descendants of Adam until a savior could come. Jesus is that savior—the true Ark of salvation. His faithfulness in going to the cross makes it possible for us to not just live to see another day, but for us to live for all of eternity.

In the story of Noah, God's wrath against the sinfulness of humanity was poured out on all of humanity. Just one man and his family were saved. At the cross we see something similar and yet very different. At the cross, we see God's wrath against the sinfulness of humanity poured out on one man so that many can be saved. But, just as in the account of Noah, the only people who will be saved will those who have faith in Christ's atoning death on the cross.

Noah's seeking salvation by building and then taking his family into the ark was an act of saving faith, and if we are to be saved, we must have that same faith. Faith to climb into Jesus—to place our lives in him.

"Being 'in Christ Jesus' is a stupendous reality. It is breathtaking what it means to be in Christ. United to Christ. Bound to Christ. If you are 'in Christ' listen to what it means for you:

- 1) In Christ Jesus, you were given grace before the world was created. 2 Timothy 1:9, "He gave us grace in Christ Jesus before the ages began."
- 2) In Christ Jesus, you were chosen by God before creation. Ephesians 1:4, "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world."
- 3) In Christ Jesus, you are loved by God with an inseparable love. Romans 8:38–39, "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- 4) In Christ Jesus, you were redeemed and forgiven for all your sins. Ephesians 1:7, "In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses."
- 5) In Christ Jesus, you are justified before God and the righteousness of God in Christ is imputed to you. 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."
- 6) In Christ Jesus, you have become a new creation and a son of God. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Galatians 3:26, "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."
- 7) In Christ Jesus, you have been seated in the heavenly places even while he lived on earth. Ephesians 2:6, "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."
- 8) In Christ Jesus, all the promises of God are Yes for you. 2 Corinthians 1:20, "All the promises of God find their Yes in Christ."
- 9) In Christ Jesus, you are being sanctified and made holy. 1 Corinthians 1:2, "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus."
- 10) In Christ Jesus, everything you really need will be supplied. Philippians 4:19, "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."
- 11) In Christ Jesus, the peace of God will guard your heart and mind. Philippians 4:7, "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
- 12) In Christ Jesus, you have eternal life. Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

13) And in Christ Jesus you will be raised from the dead at the coming of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." All those united to Adam in the first humanity die. All those united to Christ in the new humanity rise to live again."

– John Piper, *Desiring God*

Jesus clearly taught that there is yet another judgment that is still to come—a final judgment when all men will be called to account for their sin. This judgment will take place when he comes again. Jesus' message to us is: just as Noah was prepared for the flood by building an ark, we must be prepared for his second coming and the final judgment by trusting in him and obeying his commands.

Matthew 24:37-42 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Peter also tells us that the ark is a symbol of the salvation we have in Christ.

1 Peter 3:20-22 God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also-- not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand-- with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

During the flood, salvation only came to those who took God at his word and found safety inside the ark. In the same way, when Jesus comes again, salvation will only come to those who in faith cling to the cross and find their life and righteousness in Christ alone.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 61. What does it mean to believe in Christ? To trust in Christ alone for my salvation.	Q. 34. What is adoption? Adoption is an act of God's free grace[a] by which we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.[b] [a]. 1 John 3:1 [b]. John 1:12; Rom 8:17

Question 1. How do we see both God's justice and mercy in this passage? How do we see them on the cross? How do we see them at the final judgment?

Question 2. How do we see faith manifesting out through Noah's actions? Do you see fruit of faith in your own life?

As the flood waters subsided, God made a covenant with Noah—a covenant in which God promised to never again destroy the earth by means of a flood. As a sign of this covenant, in chapter 9 verse 13, God says this, “I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” Some translations use the word rainbow rather than bow, and they do this because clearly what we know today as a rainbow is the symbol that God gave to Noah to mark His covenant promise to Noah. But the actual word that some versions translate as rainbow is the word for a warrior’s bow that would shoot arrows. What God was saying to Noah was that God was going to hang his warrior’s bow in the clouds, just as a warrior would hang his bow up after being victorious in battle. The hanging of the warrior’s bow marked the end of hostilities. Even though mankind would continue to persist in our rebellion against God, God was hanging up his bow. In the promise God made to Noah, God promised that there would be stability in creation so that Noah and his descendants could carry out the same work God had given Adam and Eve to do—be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.

This may seem like a minor point, but it is something to think about. God could have hung his bow in the sky so that it was continually aimed at earth, but that is not the way a rainbow hangs in the sky. As a rainbow hangs in the sky, it points toward heaven. Because of sin, God would once again pour out his wrath, but this time He would not shoot his arrow toward the earth and pour out His wrath once again on mankind. No, instead, the bow points toward heaven, the wrath of God against sin would be poured out on God’s own Son—the arrow of God’s judgment and wrath would pierce His own Son—Jesus.

Isaiah 53: 4 – 6 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 54. What is meant by the atonement? Christ satisfied God's justice by his suffering and death as a substitute for sinners.	Q. 37. What do you understand by the word “suffered”? A. That during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race. ¹ This he did in order that, by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice, ² he might deliver us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation, ³ and gain for us God’s grace, righteousness, and eternal life. ⁴ 1 Isa. 53; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18 2 Rom. 3:25; Heb. 10:14; 1 John 2:2; 4:10 3 Rom. 8:1-4; Gal. 3:13 4 John 3:16; Rom. 3:24-26

Question 1. In Noah’s day, what was the one way to salvation? What is our one way to salvation? How did the ark point ahead to Jesus?

Question 2. How do we see from the covenant He made with Noah, that God is a promise-keeping God? Why did God make the covenant with Noah? How does the sign of the covenant (the bow) remind us of God’s grace?

The story of the Tower of Babel is a story of mankind trying to build a perfect society without God—a story of mankind trying to reach the heights of heaven in our own power. It is a story that ends in failure, just as all our attempts to reach God in our power will ultimately end in failure. In the world we live in today, there are many trying to engineer a perfect society without God in the center of it. There are many trying to reach the heights of heaven in their power through their own goodness and righteousness. But none of our schemes to reach heaven on our own, or to create heaven here on earth, can succeed. That's because we really have no idea just how sinful we are.

Isaiah 64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

Because of our sinfulness, there is no way for us to get to heaven in our strength, so the Son of God left heaven and came down to earth.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

It was an act of mercy for God to intervene and stop the construction of this tower so that we would see that we can't depend on our own strength to reach heaven but must depend on Christ alone.

John 14:5-6 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 29. How Can We Be Saved? Only by faith in Jesus Christ and in his substitutionary atoning death on the cross; so even though we are guilty of having disobeyed God and are still inclined to all evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of our own but only by pure grace, imputes to us the perfect righteousness of Christ when we repent and believe in him.	Q. 30. Do those who look for their salvation in saints, in themselves, or elsewhere really believe in the only savior Jesus? A. No. Although they boast of being his, by their actions they deny the only savior, Jesus. ¹ Either Jesus is not a perfect savior, or those who in true faith accept this savior have in him all they need for their salvation. ² 1 1 Cor. 1:12-13; Gal. 5:4 2 Col. 1:19-20; 2:10; 1 John 1:7

Question 1. What were the inhabitants of the earth supposed to be doing? What are some ways people try to reach God on their own terms and in their own ways today?

Question 2. What does the difference look like of making yourself look great versus magnifying God's glory among the nations? How can you magnify Jesus' name today?

Question 3. Read Psalm 86:9. How does the blood of Jesus reunite people from all nations? What will we all one day be doing? See also Revelation 7:9-10.

In Genesis 12, God makes a magnificent promise to Abraham, and then in chapter 17, God reaffirms the promise. It is a four prong promise that involves remarkable blessings for Abraham and his offspring. God promises to give Abraham the land of Canaan as an inheritance for his family, and God also promises that Abraham will be the father of not just one nation, but many nations (12:5), and that kings will come from him (17:6). There is a third prong to the promise that God has made to Abraham: that all nations of the world will be blessed through the offspring of Abraham. And finally, the fourth, and maybe the most important, prong that this would be “an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” (Genesis 17: 7).

Now let's think about how God fulfilled these promises to Abraham. Abraham got to tour the land of Canaan (chapter 12: 4-9), but he never really got to settle there. In fact, it would be 400 years before his descendants would settle there after Moses brought them out of Egypt. But the land that God promised to Abraham would become the home of the Israelites and be known as the Promised Land (because of the promise God had made to Abraham).

The second promise God made to Abraham was that he would become the father of many nations. As you read the history in the Bible, we see that in an effort to fulfill the promise God had made to Abraham, Abraham slept with his wife's handmaiden, Hagar, (Genesis 16), and she bore him a son named Ishmael who became the father of the Arab nations. But God was just waiting for the right time to fulfill his promise to Abraham. When Abraham and his wife Sarah were almost 100 years old, God gave them a son, Isaac, who became the father of the Israelites. But even further down the road, out of the nation of Israel would come Jesus. Jesus would usher in a new Kingdom (nation), the Kingdom of Heaven. Through Jesus, God fulfilled the third promise he made to Abraham. Through Jesus, all nations of the world would be blessed, and it would be through Jesus that we would be able to have an eternal relationship with God.

One of the remarkable things about these promises is that Abraham never really got to see these promises fully fulfilled. He only got little glimpses.

Hebrews 11:8-16 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith Abraham, even though he was past age-- and Sarah herself was barren-- was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Even though Abraham never got to see these promises fulfilled completely, he walked by faith and trusted God, and God counted Abraham righteous because of his faith.

Romans 4:16-25 So that's why faith is the key! God's promise is given to us as a free gift. And we are certain to receive it, whether or not we follow Jewish customs, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, "I have made you the father of many nations." This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who brings into existence what didn't exist before. When God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations, Abraham believed him. God had also said, "Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars," even though such a promise seemed utterly impossible! And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though he knew that he was too old to be a father at the age of one hundred and that Sarah, his wife, had never been able to have children.

Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was absolutely convinced that God was able to do anything he promised. And because of Abraham's faith, God declared him to be righteous. Now this wonderful truth-- that God declared him to be righteous-- wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was for us, too, assuring us that God will also declare us to be righteous if we believe in God, who brought Jesus our Lord back from the dead. He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised from the dead to make us right with God.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 30. What is Faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is acknowledging the truth of everything that God has revealed in his Word, trusting in him, and also receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.</p>	<p>Q. 61. Why do you say that through faith alone you are righteous? A. Not because I please God by the worthiness of my faith. It is because only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me righteous before God,¹ and because I can accept this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than through faith.² 1 1 Cor. 1:30-31 2 Rom. 10:10; 1 John 5:10-12</p>

Question 1. What do we learn about God always remaining faithful to his promises from this reading? What do we learn about what faith is from this reading?

Questions 2. Does righteousness come by faith or by being born into the right family? Read Galatians 3:7. Have you placed your faith in the one true God? Have you asked God to give you a growing faith in Him?

Who is this Melchizedek that we read about today and what does he have to do with Jesus? That's a good question and the answer is everything! At the very least, Melchizedek is a picture of Jesus. Psalm 110 is known as a Messianic Psalm, meaning that the Psalm contains a prophecy about Jesus.

Psalm 110:1-5 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth. The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.

We will look at Psalm 110 later on in our study, but right now we just need to see that this Psalm pictures the Messiah, Jesus, as both a great king and a great priest, which is exactly who Jesus is. Think about what our reading in Genesis told us about Melchizedek—he was both a priest and a king, and he was of such greatness that Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of the plunder he seized in his battle as a tribute. You only pay tribute to one who is greater than you are. As great as Abraham was, Melchizedek was greater.

In addition, Abraham also received a blessing from Melchizedek, and it is always the greater person who blesses a lesser person. Do you begin to see how Melchizedek, as both priest and king, is a picture of Jesus as our priest and king? The writer of Hebrews makes this connection very well for us. In speaking about Jesus as our priest and king, the writer of Hebrews references Melchizedek by quoting from Psalm 110 and saying this:

Hebrews 5:6-10 And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 6:19 - 7:3 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:1 This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

In Old Testament Israel, the office of priest and king were always separate, a man could not serve as both. But before Israel, there was Melchizedek, a man who was both priest and king. Some scholars say that Melchizedek was a theophany—an Old Testament manifestation of Christ. At the very least, he is an Old Testament picture of Christ, one who is great enough to be both priest and king. Jesus is our "king of righteousness" and our "king of peace."

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 74. Why do you need Christ as your priest? Because I am guilty of breaking God's law.	Q. 25. How does Christ fill the office of a priest? Christ fills the office of a priest in his once offering up of himself to God as a sacrifice, to satisfy divine justice[a] and reconcile us to God;[b] and in making constant intercession for us.[c] [a]. Isa 53:1-12; Acts 8:32-35; Heb 9:26-28; Heb 10:12 [b]. Rom 5:10-11; 2 Cor 5:18; Col 1:21-22 [c]. Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; Heb 9:24

Question 1. How does Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross gives us righteousness and peace with God? How is He our priest (how do we have access to the throne room of heaven?) What does it mean that He is an anchor for our souls?

Verse 6 is such an important verse for us to remember, “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Everything Abraham did was based on faith in God to keep the promises God had made to Abraham. Even though Abraham had doubts, he kept moving forward trusting God. As you read this passage, you can’t help but see that Abraham is starting to have doubts about the promises God has made to him. As he and Sarah grow older, they are beginning to wonder how God can keep his word. So, God reaffirms the promise that he had made to Abraham. God blessed Abraham because Abraham believed God; but more importantly, God has blessed us though Abraham.

Galatians 3:5-9 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

All of the blessings we have in Christ come by way of faith—faith that God will save us from our sin if we believe and trust in the promises God has made. Those promises are sealed with the blood of Christ. It is through Christ’s blood that the promises God made to Abraham would ultimately be fulfilled, because it is through Christ’s blood that we become heirs to the promises God has made.

Galatians 3:13-14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 61. What does it mean to believe in Christ? To trust in Christ alone for my salvation.	Q. 86. What is faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace[a] by which we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is freely offered to us in the gospel.[b] [a]. Eph 2:8-9; cf. Rom 4:16 [b]. John 20:30-31; Gal 2:15-16; Php 3:3-11

Question 1. What is the importance of faith? Read Hebrews 11: 6.

Question 2. How are you and I like the stars in the sky? What does that teach us about God keeping his promise?

As we observed yesterday, you can't help but see that Abraham is starting to have doubts about the promises God has made to him. As he and Sarah grow older, they are beginning to wonder how God can keep his word. So, God reaffirms the promise that he had made to Abraham. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, there was nothing greater for God to swear an oath by, so he swore an oath by himself.

Hebrews 6:13-14 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants."

That is what God was doing in the ceremony that takes place in this passage. He was swearing an oath by his name. To understand this, we have to understand the world that Abraham lived in. What God did in this passage was a very common way for men to swear an oath in Abraham's day. They would cut animals in half and then walk between the pieces of the animals. By doing this they were saying, "May I be torn in two, just as these animals are, if I do not keep my word to you."

In verses 13 – 16, after Abraham arranges the pieces of the animals on the ground, God reaffirms the promises he has made to Abraham—promises to give him a land of his own and a family to live in that land. In fact, God not only re-affirms the promise, but he also tells Abraham how future events will unfold. Abraham's descendants will be strangers in a land that is not their own, and then they will become enslaved in that land for 400 years; but then they will come out of that land with great possessions. As we look back at history, we can clearly see the events that God was talking about. God was speaking about the time between Joseph and Moses when Abraham's descendants (Israel) would go to Egypt first as honored guests but then as slaves. After 400 hundred years of slavery in Egypt, Moses would bring them out in the Exodus, and they would come and settle in the land that God had promised to Abraham.

Now notice what it is that walks between the pieces of the animals. Was it Abraham? No, it was something (someone) else. Verse 17 tells us that it was a smoking pot and a blazing torch that walked between the pieces. Do you remember how God accompanied the Israelites on their exit out of Egypt? It was a pillar of fire by night, and a cloud of smoke by day. The smoking pot and the blazing torch that walked between the pieces of animals that Abraham had laid out on the ground were representing God walking through cut up animals, and God saying, "If I don't keep my promise to you Abraham, then may I be torn in two just as these animals are cut in two."

<u>First Catechism</u>
Question 24. What is a covenant? A relationship that God establishes with us and guarantees by his word.

Question 1. In order for God to keep His promise for Abraham to truly become a great nation and for all peoples of the earth to be blessed through Abraham's offspring, what would have to happen? Who would be torn in two so that we could be made right with God?

Imagine waiting your whole life, ninety-nine years, for a son—the son through which all of the promises God had made to you would be fulfilled. Then imagine that same God who made the promises telling you to go and take your one and only son and offer him as a sacrifice. That is exactly what God told Abraham to do. Two days ago, we looked at Abraham’s faith and trust in God, and now that faith is being put to the ultimate test. Abraham’s faith was built on the rationale that no matter what happened, God would somehow, some way, keep his promises.

Hebrews 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

In a very real way, what happens in this story of Abraham and Isaac is a picture of what would one day happen with God and His only Son, Jesus. The similarities are remarkable:

- The place where Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed was a place called Mount Moriah. Almost 1000 years later, the Temple, where sacrifices would be offered for sin, was constructed on this same mount, and then 1000 years after that Jesus, God’s only son, would be crucified on Mount Calvary, which is a hill that is part of this same Mount Moriah.
- Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice on his back. Jesus carried a wooden cross for his sacrifice on his back.
- Just as Isaac trusted his father and didn’t try to run away, Jesus trusted his Father, and didn’t try to run away, but instead: “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51)
- Just as Isaac was to take the place of the lamb for this sacrifice, so Jesus became “the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world” (John 1: 29).
- After Abraham proved his willingness to sacrifice his own son, God provided a substitutionary ram for the sacrifice, so Abraham called the place where Isaac was to be sacrificed, “The Lord will provide.” 4000 years later, God did just that – he provided a once and for all sacrifice for our sin, by giving his own son to take our place. With the ram we have a picture of an innocent victim dying as a substitute for another. Its blood was spilt so that others could go free. This is what Jesus did for us. “God presented him [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:25).

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Heidelberg Catechism</u>
Question 67. What did these sacrifices represent? Christ, the Lamb of God, who would come to die for sinners.	Q. 18. Then who is this mediator— true God and at the same time a true and righteous human? A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹ who was given to us to completely deliver us and make us right with God. ² 1 Matt. 1:21-23; Luke 2:11; 1 Tim. 2:5 2 1 Cor. 1:30

Question 1. Continue the discussion on the theme of faith that we have been exploring. Is knowledge the same as faith? How do knowledge and faith in God’s promise of a savior work together?

The New Testament writer of the Book of Hebrews does a wonderful job of looking back on Abraham's faith, and what that faith was really all about. Remember, Abraham never really saw all the promises God had made to him fulfilled in his lifetime. When Abraham died, all he had were God's promises and one son, Isaac, whom God had promised to fulfill those promises through. In a very real sense, Abraham was still a wandering nomad. But Abraham died believing God. Abraham died as a wandering nomad, but he looked forward to a city with foundations. He died with just one child, but he looked forward in faith to the time when his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. He didn't receive all the things God had promised during his own lifetime, but he saw them in the distance. He didn't know as much as we now know. He didn't exactly know how God would fulfill the promises he made. He didn't fully understand that all the promises would be fulfilled in Jesus.

2 Corinthians 1:20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.

Even though Abraham didn't fully understand everything, he lived by faith trusting God. We understand so much more. We have seen Jesus crucified on the cross for our sins. We now live under the promise, just as Abraham did—the promise of a heavenly city with foundations.

Revelation 21:2 - 27 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

This is the city that Abraham was ultimately looking forward to in faith. It is the same city that we look forward to in faith, because of what Christ has done for us on the cross.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 52. What Hope Does Everlasting Life Hold for Us?</p> <p>It reminds us that this present fallen world is not all there is; soon we will live with and enjoy God forever in the new city, in the new heaven and the new earth, where we will be fully and forever freed from all sin and will inhabit renewed, resurrection bodies in a renewed, restored creation.</p>	<p>Q. 21. What is true faith?</p> <p>A. True faith is not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in Scripture;¹ it is also a wholehearted trust,² which the Holy Spirit creates in me³ by the gospel,⁴ that God has freely granted, not only to others but to me also,⁵ forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and salvation.⁶ These are gifts of sheer grace, granted solely by Christ's merit.⁷</p> <p>1 John 17:3, 17; Heb. 11:1-3; James 2:19 2 Rom. 4:18-21; 5:1; 10:10; Heb. 4:14-16 3 Matt. 16:15-17; John 3:5; Acts 16:14 4 Rom. 1:16; 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21 5 Gal. 2:20 6 Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:10 7 Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-10</p>

Question 1. What does living a life of faith in God's promise look like? How does focusing our mind on eternity with Jesus change how we view our present circumstances?

In this passage, we find the beautiful account of how Isaac and Rebekah became married. While this is very different from the way a man finds and marries a wife in our culture, this was the way it was commonly done in Abraham and Isaac's day. The servant, acting as an agent for Abraham, goes back to Abraham's homeland to find a wife for Isaac. Believe it or not, without looking too hard, we can see a picture of Jesus in this story and the picture involves us. In several different places in the New Testament the Church (that's us) is pictured as the bride of Christ.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Revelation 21:2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband...

Now stop and think about the servant's role in this process of finding a wife for Isaac. He was sent out by Abraham to find a bride, prepare the bride for the wedding, and bring the bride safely home, so that she could become Isaac's wife. Isn't this exactly how the Holy Spirit works? The Holy Spirit is the one sent by the Father and the Son to come and find us and prepare us to be the bride of Christ. Rebekah didn't find Isaac; the servant found Rebekah and was brought to Isaac to be Isaac's forever. In the same way, the Bible teaches us that we aren't really looking for Jesus, but the Holy Spirit comes and takes us to be his bride forever.

Ephesians 2: 1 – 7 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

<u>New City Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 37. How Does the Holy Spirit Help Us? The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, comforts us, guides us, gives us spiritual gifts and the desire to obey God; and he enables us to pray and to understand God's Word.	Q. 30. How does the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ? The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ by producing faith in us,[a] and by this uniting us to Christ in our effective calling.[b] [a]. Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 2:12-16; Eph 2:8; Php 1:29 [b]. John 15:5; 1 Cor 1:9; Eph 3:17

Question 1. Where do you see God's rule and sovereignty in this passage? What do we learn about our responsibility to still act? How should that truth motivate us to serve our God?

Question 2. From this passage, what do we learn about prayer and being submissive to God's will for our lives?

Question 3. Abraham, the servant, and Isaac all weighed and considered their actions based upon God's previous promise and had the goal of furthering the kingdom. Do we do the same when we make decisions?

It is interesting that just as Abraham and Sarah had difficulty in conceiving a child, so too did Abraham's son, Isaac, and his wife, Rebekah. They didn't have to wait quite so long, but they were in their 60's before Rebekah became pregnant with twin boys, Esau and Jacob. As we read in the account, even though they were twins, Esau was the firstborn of the two. In that culture, by rights, Esau should have been the one to take the leadership of the family after Isaac died. That was the way things normally worked in their world. By rights, Esau would receive the birthright, meaning that all that belonged to Isaac would become Esau's to manage, and Jacob would live under Esau's rule and authority. By rights, Esau would receive the blessing, which would mean that the promise God had made to Abraham (that all nations of the world would be blessed through his offspring) should have passed through Isaac to Esau. But God had other plans. God was about to turn things upside down. Look again at Genesis 25: 23. God tells Rebekah that the normal order will be reversed—the older will serve the younger. As you read the rest of the account, you can see how this happens. First, Jacob takes Esau's birthright by bribing him with some stew, and then in chapter 27, Jacob takes Esau's blessing by tricking his aging father, Isaac. Why did God allow this? If God wanted Jacob to have the birthright and the blessing, then why didn't God just arrange for Jacob to be the firstborn? We really can't answer questions like that, just like we can't answer questions like why God allows some to hear the Gospel and respond to it, but not allow others. Paul uses Jacob and Esau to illustrate this very important point.

Romans 9:8-16 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Stop and think about this. Isn't it a wonderful thing that all of this relies on God's mercy and not our effort?

As you continue reading the account of Jacob's life, it is easy to see that there was nothing about him that should have made God choose him over Esau. Jacob, at one time in his life, was a cheat, a swindler, and totally self-absorbed. Yet, for his own reasons, God chose Jacob to be the one who should inherit all the promises God had made to Abraham, and, ultimately, Jesus would come by way of Jacob's family line rather than Esau's. God has mercy and compassion on whom he wants to, rather than questioning why we have been shown grace, we should just be amazed by it!

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 55. What does God the Father guarantee in the covenant of grace? To justify and sanctify all those for whom Christ died.	Q. 32. What benefits in this life are shared by those who are effectively called? In this life those who are effectively called share in justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the further benefits in this life which accompany or flow from them.[a] [a]. Rom 8:30; 1 Cor 1:30; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 1:5

Question 1. What consequences of sin do you see from this passage? How was God's purpose still carried out even in the midst of man's sinful actions?

Question 2. What do we learn about the doctrine of grace from this passage? Can we do anything to earn God's grace?

Question 3. Are you amazed by grace? How do we increase our awareness and amazement of grace?

Jacob was a mama's boy. His brother, Esau, loved the outdoors and would go hunting and probably would have thought nothing of sleeping out under the stars. Jacob liked to hang around the kitchen and be with his mother. He wasn't too fond of the great outdoors, or being away from his mother for that matter, but when he stole his brother's blessing, he had no choice but to venture out into the wild because Esau wanted to kill him. So, Jacob goes on the run. You know life isn't going well when you must use a stone as a pillow!

Jacob was probably feeling pretty hopeless at that point in time. He had no clue what was going to happen next or how he was ever going to get his life on track. But as Jacob slept that night, with a stone for a pillow, God came to him in a dream and brought him to his knees. In the midst of Jacob's hopelessness, God gave Jacob a vision of heaven, or maybe more precisely a vision of a stairway leading to heaven. The intersection of Jacob's hopelessness with heaven's hope and heaven's glory brought Jacob to his knees and it brought him to the very gate of heaven. It brought him to the place where God could begin to get his life moving in the right direction. This vision made Jacob stop looking down and focused his attention on the one place where help could truly come from.

Psalm 121:1-2 I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

But let's stop and think about this vision that Jacob had for just a minute. How does this vision relate to Jesus, "The Golden Thread?" In John chapter 1, Jesus introduces himself to one of his future disciples, Nathaniel, and this is part of the conversation Jesus has with Nathaniel:

John 1:49-51 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Look at what Jesus says about himself in a description that very much parallels the vision that Jacob had the night in the wilderness. Instead of a staircase, what does Jesus say the angels are ascending and descending on? It's the Son of Man. What Jesus is saying is that he is the staircase between heaven and earth.

When Adam and Eve sinned, it created a gulf between man and God, a gulf between heaven and earth. Jesus is the stairway that bridges the gulf. Jesus is the mediator who bridges the gap between God and us.

Hebrews 9:14-15 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Jesus is the connection between heaven and earth. Jesus makes it possible for the help of heaven to come to us in our times of deepest need. When we come to the intersection of hopelessness and heaven, Jesus is there. In the midst of our hopelessness there stands one able to give us hope. In the midst of our hopelessness, rather than looking down at the ground, we need to lift our eyes to the heavens to Jesus.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 20. Who is the Redeemer? The only Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, in whom God became man and bore the penalty for sin himself.	Q. 29. Why is the Son of God called "Jesus," meaning "savior"? A. Because he saves us from our sins, ¹ and because salvation should not be sought and cannot be found in anyone else. ² 1 Matt. 1:21; Heb. 7:25 2 Isa. 43:11; John 15:5; Acts 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 2:5

Question 1. Can anyone gain access to the Father without Jesus? Why is Jesus the only mediator?

As Jacob awakes from his sleep, he is stunned by the vision (dream) that God had given to him. Jacob knows that he not only enjoys a special place with God, but that he is in a special place as well. Look at the words Jacob uses to describe this place in verse 17. He calls it the house of God (that is what Bethel means) and the gate to heaven. Just as the stairway to heaven that Jacob saw in this vision gave us a very powerful picture of Jesus, so also do these two expressions that Jacob uses to describe the place where he has slept.

Jacob called this place the gate to heaven and in John 10: 7 Jesus said something very similar about himself.

John 10:7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep."

During the time when Jesus lived the gate to the sheepfold was nothing more than an opening in the wall. At night the shepherd would become the gate by laying down in the opening. This was how the shepherd protected his sheep. Nothing could get into the fold without the shepherd allowing it to get in, and no sheep could leave the fold without the shepherd allowing it to leave. Jesus is the gate to heaven. No one can enter heaven without Jesus.

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is the only gate by which we can enter into God's presence, but as the gate Jesus also keeps us there. Jesus stands between us and those who seek to remove us from the presence of God. He is not just our savior, he is also our powerful defender and king, defeating our enemies (Satan, sin, and death) and keeping us safe and secure forever.

John 10:27-30 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 75. Why do you need Christ as your king? Because I am weak and helpless.	Q. 31. Why is he called "Christ," meaning "anointed"? A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit ¹ to be our chief prophet and teacher ² who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance; ³ our only high priest ⁴ who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body, ⁵ and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; ⁶ and our eternal king ⁷ who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us. ⁸ 1 Luke 3:21-22; 4:14-19 (Isa. 61:1); Heb. 1:9 (Ps. 45:7) 2 Acts 3:22 (Deut. 18:15) 3 John 1:18; 15:15 4 Heb. 7:17 (Ps. 110:4) 5 Heb. 9:12; 10:11-14 6 Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24 7 Matt. 21:5 (Zech. 9:9) 8 Matt. 28:18-20; John 10:28; Rev. 12:10-11

Question 1. Can a person lose their salvation? What is the reason why our salvation is secure?

In yesterday's reading, from Genesis 28: 16 – 22, we saw that when Jacob awoke from his dream, he proclaimed the place where he was standing the "Gate to Heaven," and the "House of God." He used these terms to describe this spot, because this was a place where he had experienced the presence of God in a very real and powerful way. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, we have wanted to get back to the Garden, back to the place where God dwelt with men. Whether we realize it or not, each of us has a deep desire to experience the presence of God in our lives.

This passage that we read today, comes at the very end of the Bible, at the end of the story. It is speaking about a time when Satan has been defeated, and the power of sin and death have been destroyed. It is a time that we look forward to in great anticipation. A time when there will be no more sorrow, no more tears, no more sickness, no more death. It is a time when the house of God literally fills everything. Look at verse 3 again. "The dwelling of God will be with men, and he will live with them." That will be a special time and we look forward to that day, but because of Jesus we can also experience the presence of God each day in our lives here on earth, just as Jacob did that night while he slept.

Jesus came and brought the very presence of God right into our world. Jesus said in John 14:9 that, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." When Jesus came to earth, God, through his Son, was literally making his dwelling with men.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And even though Jesus has now ascended into heaven, where he is seated at the right hand of God, we still can experience the presence of God everyday of our lives because of Jesus' work on the cross.

Hebrews 10:19-23 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

<u>New City Catechism</u>	<u>Heidelberg Catechism</u>
Question 49. Where is Christ Now? Christ rose bodily from the grave on the third day after his death and is seated at the right hand of the Father, ruling his kingdom and interceding for us, until he returns to judge and renew the whole world.	Q. 47. But isn't Christ with us until the end of the world as he promised us? ¹ A. Christ is true human and true God. In his human nature Christ is not now on earth; ² but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit he is never absent from us. ³ 1 Matt. 28:20 2 Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21 3 Matt. 28:18-20; John 14:16-19

Question 1. What is the "hope that we profess" that we should "unswervingly hold" to? In whose power do we hold to this hope?

Rebekah sent Jacob to his Uncle Laban, so that he would be safe from Esau, and also so that Jacob could find a wife from among his own people, rather than from the wicked Canaanites. When Jacob arrived at Laban's, he saw Rachel and immediately fell in love with her. She was so beautiful that Jacob was willing to give up seven years of his life to make her his wife. But as you read the account, you see that Laban tricked Jacob, and he ended up being married to Leah. But Jacob's love for Rachel was so great that he was willing to work another seven years, so he could marry her as well. Can you imagine loving someone so much that you would be willing to give up fourteen years of your life just have her for your wife? Jacob's willingness to give up his life, so he could make Rachel his wife, is in a small way a vivid picture of the love that Jesus has for us.

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

These words from John's Gospel serve as the introduction to the story of Jesus becoming like a servant and stooping down low to wash the feet of his disciples. But that was just the beginning of showing us the full extent of his love. Jesus' love for us was so great that he didn't just give up fourteen years of his life for us, he gave up everything so that we could belong to him.

Philippians 2:5-8 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 52. What kind of life did Christ live on earth?</p> <p>A life of obedience, service and suffering.</p>	<p>Q. 37. What do you understand by the word "suffered"?</p> <p>A. That during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race.¹ This he did in order that, by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice,² he might deliver us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation,³ and gain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.⁴</p> <p>1 Isa. 53; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18 2 Rom. 3:25; Heb. 10:14; 1 John 2:2; 4:10 3 Rom. 8:1-4; Gal. 3:13 4 John 3:16; Rom. 3:24-26</p>

Question 1. How do we have the same attitude of Jesus, serving one another in love? Why should we serve others with humility? What should be the motivating factor for us to serve one another?

Question 2. How would all of our relationships look different if we consistently and constantly served one another in love?

We were introduced to Leah in yesterday's reading, and it would be easy to think that she is not a very important player in the story of Jacob, or the story of the Bible for that matter. But as we will see, nothing could be further from the truth. As you stop and think about Leah's life, you can't help but see that she was despised and rejected by seemingly everyone. Her father Laban didn't want her, and Jacob certainly didn't want her. But as you read the Bible you can't help but notice that God is constantly at work turning things upside down. God humbles the proud and raises up the downtrodden.

Proverbs 3:34 He (God) mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.

Taking those who are seemingly weak and making them strong.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

Taking the foolish and shaming the wise.

1 Corinthians 1:27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

Isn't that exactly what God did with Jesus? Like Leah, Jesus was rejected and despised by men. Writing 800 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote this about Jesus:

Isaiah 53:2-4 He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

But that is not the end of Jesus' story, is it? Jesus was despised by men, he was crushed for our sins, but after three days in the tomb Jesus rose again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

The Gospel is all about God turning things upside down and going against the way of the world.

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Even though Leah was dumped on Jacob, just to get her married off, and even though Leah didn't seem to have much going for her, and even though Jacob certainly did not love her, God had big plans for her. She is very much a part of the Gospel story. As you see in this passage Leah would become the mother of Judah, the tribe of Israel from which King David would come, and the tribe from which Jesus, the Lion of Judah, would come.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 141. Did Christ remain in the grave after his crucifixion? No. He rose bodily from the grave on the third day after his death.	Q. 11. What are God's works of providence? God's works of providence are his most holy,[a] wise,[b] and powerful[c] preservation[d] and control[e] of all his creatures, and all their actions.[f] [a]. Psalms 145:17 [b]. Psalm 104:24 [c]. Hebrews 1:3 [d]. Nehemiah 9:6 [e]. Ephesians 1:19-22 [f]. Psalm 36:6; Proverbs 16:33; Matthew 10:30

Question 1. Who is always at work to carry out His plan, even if it doesn't seem like it?

As we read this account of Jacob, understand that, in this case, Jacob is not a picture of Jesus. In fact, Jacob is much more a picture of us than he is of Jesus. Who is it that Jacob is wrestling with? It is not just another man; it is God, or maybe better stated a theophany (an Old Testament appearance of God). Many argue that this theophany is Jesus making an earthly appearance before his birth. What we know for sure is that this was not just an ordinary man that Jacob wrestled with. This “man” had the power to touch Jacob’s hip and throw it out of socket. He had the power to bless Jacob and change Jacob’s name to Israel. But the clearest evidence of all that this is a theophany is that when the wrestling match ended, Jacob himself exclaimed that, “I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

Jacob and the “man” he wrestled were obviously very different, nonetheless, we can draw some interesting comparisons between Jesus and Jacob.

In order to secure the blessing that had been promised to them, both Jacob and Jesus would have to go to a place that had become very hostile to them. Jacob had to return to his homeland (The Promised Land) to face Esau. Jesus had to go to Jerusalem and face not just the Jews, but also Satan and the very power of hell.

Luke 9: 51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Jacob was alone at night, facing his fears of what tomorrow would bring. The night before Jesus was crucified, he too was alone in the Garden of Gethsemane facing his fears of what tomorrow would bring.

Luke 22:41-44 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Just as Jacob was wounded in his struggle with God, Jesus was wounded as God’s wrath poured out on him.

1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

But even as both wrestled with their fears, and were wounded in their struggles, neither would give in to fear. Both persevered until they received the blessing that they longed for. Even in great pain, Jacob would not give in or even let go until the promise of the blessing had been secured. In the same way, Jesus’ whole life was a life of persevering through suffering to gain the blessing that he longed for, to do the will of his Father, so he could have us as his forever.

Hebrews 5: 7- 9 During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

After the struggle, God changed Jacob’s name to Israel. The name Israel meant that Jacob had struggled with God and with man and had overcome. In a very real way, Jesus on the cross struggled with God and with man, because he took our sins, and as a result, God’s wrath was poured out on him. Jesus also won, and because he won, Satan, sin, and death are forever defeated.

There is also one last connection between the two stories. As a result of Jacob’s struggle his name was changed to Israel and he became the father of the Israelite people in fulfillment of the promise God had made to his forefather Abraham. Because of Jesus’ triumph on the cross, Paul tells us that he also has been given a new name—King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Philippians 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And in a sense, Jesus has also become the father of a new people. He is not called father in the Bible because God is our Father, but Jesus is referred to as our elder brother, and in Jesus' day, the elder brother had responsibility over the whole family just as a father would.

Hebrews 2:10-13 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me."

<u>New City Catechism</u>	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 24. Why Was it Necessary for Christ, the Redeemer, to Die?</p> <p>Since death is the punishment for sin, Christ died willingly in our place to deliver us from the power and penalty of sin and bring us back to God. By his substitutionary atoning death, he alone redeems us from hell and gains for us forgiveness of sin, righteousness, and everlasting life.</p>	<p>Q. 33. Why is he called God's "only begotten Son" when we also are God's children?</p> <p>A. Because Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son of God.¹ We, however, are adopted children of God—adopted by grace through Christ.²</p> <p>1 John 1:1-3, 14, 18; Heb. 1 2 John 1:12; Rom. 8:14-17; Eph. 1:5-6</p>

Question 1. How does Jacob's limp after struggling with God demonstrate the need of humble dependence on God's grace? How could it remind him of not gaining advancement through self-effort but by dependence on grace?

Jacob (Israel) had twelve sons who would become the twelve tribes of Israel. His favorite son was Joseph. Joseph was not the firstborn son to Jacob, but he was the firstborn son of Jacob's most loved wife, Rachel, and because of that he had a special place in Jacob's heart. From an early age, Joseph was destined for greatness. As you can see in today's reading, this realization went to his head, but that is another lesson for another day. God had given Joseph a dream, a dream that pointed to a time in the future when his own brothers would bow down to him and recognize his power over them. Needless to say, this did not sit well with his brothers, especially the ones who were older. In Joseph's day, there was very much a pecking order. The older brothers had more power and authority over the younger brothers, but in the dream that God gave to Joseph things get turned upside down and Joseph is put in a place of power over his brothers. In Joseph's dream, he becomes their ruler.

You know Joseph's story well. His brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt and Joseph suffers terribly there, but through another dream and through the hand of God, Joseph rises to a place of power in Egypt and becomes second only to Pharaoh himself. There is a famine in the land and Jacob and Joseph's brothers are starving. They have to go to Egypt for food, and unbeknownst to them, the ruler they bow down to as they beg for food is their brother Joseph. It is a most unlikely turn of events.

Again, as we ponder this, we see a little picture of Jesus. Born to a peasant girl in humble circumstances but born to be a king.

Matthew 2:1-3 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Just as Joseph's brothers did not like the dream Joseph had, Herod doesn't like the prophecy that points to a new king being born—a king that he sees as a threat to his kingdom. As Jesus grew into a man, the Pharisees didn't like it either. Jesus was a threat to their power, so like Joseph's brothers, the Pharisees decided to get rid of Jesus.

John 11:49-53 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

Just as they did for Joseph, things seem to go from bad to worse for Jesus. But just like in the story of Joseph, God turns things upside down.

Colossians 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death

Westminster Shorter Catechism
Q. 27. In what did Christ's humiliation consist? Christ's humiliation consisted in being born, and that in a poor circumstance;[a] in being subject to God's law;[b] in undergoing the miseries of this life,[c] the wrath of God[d] and the curse of death on the cross;[e] in being buried; and in continuing under the power of death for a time.[f] [a]. Luk 2:7; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 4:4 [b]. Gal 4:4 [c]. Isa 53:3; Luk 9:58; John 4:6; John 11:35; Heb 2:18 [d]. Psa 22:1 (Mat 27:46); Isa 53:10; 1 John 2:2 [e]. Gal 3:13; Php 2:8 [f]. Mat 12:40; 1 Cor 15:3-4

Question 1. Just as Joseph's brothers would have to bow to him one day, who will have to bow to Jesus, as the risen Lord and King?

Joseph's life follows a very interesting pattern. He starts off in a high and exalted position. He is his father's favorite son, but then through a series of events he is brought low. Today we are only reading about one of those events, when his brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. You would think that would be about as low as you can go, but as you remember Joseph's story, he hasn't hit bottom when his own brothers sell him into slavery. Through no fault of his own, Joseph goes from being a slave to a prisoner as a result of a false accusation brought against him by his master's wife and becomes a forgotten prisoner when Pharaoh's cupbearer forgets to tell Pharaoh about Joseph. Because we are trying to follow the Golden Thread of Jesus in this study, we won't directly be reading about these other events that brought Joseph low, but if you want to, you can read more about these events in chapters 39 and 40 of Genesis. The point is that Joseph was a young man who had everything and then his life took a sudden downturn to a point where all seemed to be absolutely hopeless. But throughout all of Joseph's troubles, God was at work carrying out his plan to give not just Joseph but also Joseph's people a hope and a future. Just when you think that God has abandoned Joseph, God suddenly turns everything upside down. Joseph goes from being an abandoned prisoner in Pharaoh's dungeon to the second in command of all of Egypt (Genesis 41), providing life sustaining food and a place for his family who had turned their back on him.

Do you see any similarities to Jesus, in Joseph's story? Jesus, the only begotten son of God the Father, left his throne in heaven and came to earth. He was born in a stable to a poor peasant woman and spent most of his adult life homeless.

Matthew 8:20 "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Like Joseph, it would seem as if things could not get any worse for Jesus, but then he is betrayed by one of his disciples and crucified on the cross. To top it all off, as he is dying on the cross, his own Father (God) abandons Jesus and turns his back on Jesus, because Jesus has been defiled by our sin that he carried to the cross with him.

Mark 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-- which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When Jesus was abandoned to the grave it seemed like all hope was lost, but then God raised him from the dead, and exalted him to the highest place in heaven.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Joseph's suffering and subsequent rise provided hope and a future for his family. Jesus' suffering and subsequent resurrection provide hope and a future for those who belong to his family through faith in him.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 50. How could Christ suffer? Christ, the Son of God, became a man so that he could obey and suffer in our place.	Q. 28. In what does Christ's exaltation consist? Christ's exaltation consists in his rising again from the dead on the third day;[a] in ascending into heaven; [b] in sitting at the right hand[c] of God the Father; and in coming to judge the world at the last day.[d] [a]. 1 Cor 15:4 [b]. Psa 68:18; Acts 1:11; Eph 4:8 [c]. Psa 110:1; Acts 2:33-34; Heb 1:3 [d]. Mat 16:27; Acts 17:31

Question 1. Does trusting God to carry out his purpose mean you will never suffer? How does suffering actually produce character?