



**COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH**



Part II

Aug 2 - Sept 5

CHBC Daily Scripture Readings

Since I will be gone this Sunday, my friend, Blake Carpenter, will be preaching. I've asked him to write the devotions for this week as you prepare to hear him deliver the sermon on Sunday.

Monday, August 2 - Luke 15:11-24 - "COMING HOME"

"You want to do what?" I can still hear my father's reaction when I proposed spending my junior year living and studying in France. My college had a well-established year abroad program, and several students took advantage of it each year. Initially, my dad wasn't too crazy about the idea, but after much coaxing and cajoling on my part, he finally buckled, gave in, and I got to go.

I arrived in Europe on September 2, 1983, and began 10 months of study, travel, and new experiences. It didn't take me long to discover that a year abroad meant much more than seeing the Eiffel Tower or visiting Paris. France was like a completely different world with a different language, a different way of doing things, and different people who knew nothing about me.

Eventually, the novelty of being several hours from Paris, Rome, Munich, Geneva, Monte Carlo, and other famous places wore off. Although I was able to adjust to the lifestyle and master the language, I had a growing desire to return home and see my family. As June 1984 approached, I found myself becoming more and more excited about returning home.

Finally, the day arrived. After a flight that lasted an eternity, I met my mom and dad at the airport. My dad was the first person I saw, and we hugged each other. I will never forget that day. The trip home went by very quickly while we caught up on the past ten months. My dad did not take the most direct route to our home. I didn't think anything about it, but when we crested the hill above our home, I saw a huge line of cars on both sides of the street. My mom said they decided to throw me a "little" homecoming party.

I don't know how many people were there, but it was a wonderful surprise and a great way to come home. All my friends and family members were there, as well as food!! I had forgotten how wonderful home cooking was, especially the taste of mom's sweet tea! What a way to come home!

Jesus told a similar story of a young man who also had a wonderful coming home party thrown in his honor. He, too, had traveled abroad to live in a "far country." However, he didn't go there to study or to improve himself in any way. Instead, he went as an act of rebellion, to prove to himself, his father, and to others that he could live his life as he pleased. He failed!

The attraction of the far land lost its allure for him. He squandered his money and had to find a way to earn a living. He took a job, feeding hogs, just to make ends meet. Finally, he realized that he could go home and work for his father, so he packed his bags and left.

As he turned onto the road leading to his house, his father spied him. His dad, it seems, had been looking forward to this day for a long time. Let's look at this father's reaction to his son who returned home in shame and disgrace. Luke 15:20b says, "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

Surprised? Instead of scolding this young man, instead of telling him, "I told you so," instead of giving him a lecture, this father runs to him, kisses him, and welcomes him. And that's not all, he throws a giant coming home party to celebrate his son's return. It didn't matter that the boy had rebelled or that he had gone far away and lost all he had. All that mattered was his return.

Do you know of a better picture of God than this? Before accepting Jesus Christ, we all live in the distant country of sin. One day, sin loses its allure, we wake up to discover we are hungry with no means of feeding ourselves, and we decide to return home. We find it impossible to believe God will forgive us and that's when we get a big surprise. He has been looking for us all along, just waiting for our return. He runs to us, hugs us, kisses us, and throws a giant party because we have come back to him. It

is said that we can't go home again. Fortunately, this phrase is not in God's vocabulary! How long has it been since you've been home?

Tuesday, August 3 - Psalm 139:13-16 - "Until the Finger Work is Done"

One of my fondest memories from childhood centers around the back hall of our home on Main Street. Much like a magnet, everyone in the house was drawn to the back hall, usually at the same time, creating a traffic jam which made New York City look tame.

Our back hall contained the washer and dryer - always in use, the pantry - the most popular spot in the house, the utility closet, daddy's closet, the dog's box, the back door, and mom's sewing machine. There was always a constant stream of traffic in the back hall and, although congested, it was a place I thoroughly loved to be.

Several times during the year, mom sat in the back hall at her sewing machine doing what she loved best: making us clothes. She loved the challenge, and I could always tell when she was working on a project because it was the only time she tolerated any kind of clutter in the back hall. Since it is impossible to sew without making a mess, mom tolerated piles of cloth, balls of unused thread on the floor, scraps of pattern paper, and the presence of the ironing board which effectively blocked traffic flow in the back hall, forcing us to detour through the rest of the house.

Every year, as Easter rapidly approached, I remember seeing her in front of her sewing machine, making clothes for all of us. Every Easter I remember the clothes mom made for me, for my brother and sister, and for herself. Daddy always had suits, but mom wanted to make clothes for us, and make them she did. Beautiful clothes, ones that made me feel very good about myself, and one's that made me very proud of her. I still have several shirts mom made for me in my closet. Even though I can no longer wear them, I will not part with them!

The most important part of mom's sewing was the finger work; it was also the most tedious. This involved hemming pants and skirts, sewing on clasps and snaps,

working buttonholes, and placing buttons. Mom finished all her projects up to the finger work. Usually, she worked well into the night sewing buttons and placing decorative stitching for that added touch. While the rest of us slept, she sat in the back hall, listening to the radio, singing as she worked, her hands expertly working the needle and the thread until the job was done.

I have learned many things from my mother but this example of her diligence in the details speaks volumes to me about the love of my Heavenly Father and His care for me. God is very interested in the finger work of my life and of your life. He pays close attention to every detail leaving nothing undone or unfinished. God does not rest until the finger work of our lives is done.

In Psalm 139:13-16, David reminds us just how important God's finger work is: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

Notice the words David uses to describe how God works. God created, He knitted, He made, He wove, He saw, He ordained, and He wrote! Every one of these activities requires thought and planning. Every one of these actions speaks about God's will and desire to create and to make us down to the last detail. It is impossible to knit without touching the yarn. It is impossible to weave without first conceiving a pattern. It is impossible to ordain without giving a purpose. Yes, God's finger work is most evident in us because He loves us and cares for us! Of all the things God created, only man was given the opportunity to have a relationship with God. Only man has the opportunity to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ; the redemption of man from his sins is the reason Jesus came to die on Calvary's cross.

Wherever you are today in your walk with God, know this. As His child, He loves you, He has plans for you, and He is constantly working on you to bring you into

conformity with His son, Jesus Christ. God will keep working in your life until He has accomplished His purpose for and through you. No detail will be neglected because God will not finish until the finger work is done! You have His word on it today!!

Wednesday, August 4 - Exodus 34:1-9

****Because we had Snow Cones last week, we will discuss Exodus 32-34 tonight.****

Because we have an extra week in our devotions to study Exodus 32-34, we get to see the full expression of God's love towards Israel. There was disobedience with the Golden Calf. There was punishment and consequences of sin. But then there is renewal, steadfastness, and God never leaving nor forsaking his people. There is recommit to the Covenant.

The fullest description of who God is is on display in verses 6 and 7. It is the most quoted part of the Bible found elsewhere in Scripture. At least nine times it is quoted elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments. God deserves our praise and adoration for being merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for eons, and giving forgiveness for sin. Let's talk about the entire Golden Calf episode starting Exodus 32 and concluding with Covenant Renewal in Exodus 34. See you tonight!

Thursday, August 5 - Exodus 32:24 - "I don't know how that happened!"

Beside the backdoor of my parents' home hangs a set of house rules. A quick perusal of the list indicates the type of behavior that is expected from those living there. No one reading this list has any doubt of what he can and cannot do. There are no suggestions on the list, only specific dos and don'ts.

As a growing boy, I decided that mom and dad's rules should be tested. After all, that's what rules are for, right? We lived only three houses down from my dad's funeral home. My dad had some very precise rules about playing around the funeral home,

especially when a funeral service was being conducted in the chapel. Under no circumstances was I to go near the place!

Now, one of my favorite things to do was to climb behind the wheel of the hearse and pretend to be driving. When they weren't busy, my dad used to let me climb in and hold the wheel. However, I had been told never to get into the vehicle unattended and under no circumstances was I to play with the siren! Yes, the hearse had a siren. Before the advent of the local rescue squads, funeral homes ran ambulance service for their communities.

Now, you know what happened one day, don't you? I was about three or four years old. I went up to the funeral home and climbed into one of the hearses. It felt really neat to be behind the wheel, pretending to be an ambulance driver. All of a sudden, I spied the siren button.

I knew I shouldn't, but I just had to do it. I pushed the button and the siren sounded. There just happened to be a funeral service in progress. The back door of the funeral home opened and my dad came out. I crouched down in the seat, thinking he'd have no idea where the sound came from! I heard him approaching, and when he opened the door, I just looked at him and said, "I don't know what happened. I was just sitting here and it went off!" Then my dad went off, and I got a much-deserved spanking.

Exodus 32:24 records Aaron's explanation to Moses for his creation of the golden calf in the wilderness of Sinai. Look at Aaron's words, "And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."

Can't you just see Moses' face? What a ridiculous explanation and inept excuse for these actions. In essence, Aaron said, "The people just brought me their gold, I threw it into the fire, and presto, a golden calf emerged. I have no earthly idea how that happened!" Moses didn't buy it and God didn't either!

In blatant defiance of God's laws, they constructed for themselves a graven image and worshiped it. The decision to make a calf of gold was not a sudden one,

however. It involved several smaller decisions along the way. At every turn the people questioned God and tried his patience. He performed miracles, yet they doubted. He fed them, but they complained. He protected them, and they rejected him.

The same scenario still happens in the lives of Christians today. We take our eyes off of God's plan for us, we become less and less content to live in his provision, and we begin to make decisions that take us out of his chosen path for us. The decisions appear innocent at first and seem to have very few consequences. However, the culmination of these small decisions leads to results that can be devastating to our relationship with God.

My dad punished me not only for blowing the siren that day, but for breaking several rules leading up to that decision. I knew right from wrong, but with each small decision, the next one became easier to make until I was in well over my head. Once caught, I, like Aaron, gave the lamest excuse possible, "I don't know how that happened!" But I did know, and my dad knew as well. It happened because I disobeyed.

God has set rules in place for us because he loves us. They are for our good, to keep us close to him, and to nurture and grow us up to spiritual maturity. Pay close attention to the decisions you are making today. What may seem small and innocent by itself may lead to an unpleasant trip to the woodshed!!

Friday, August 6 - Psalm 23 - "Restored!"

The table belonged to my grandmother. As we made plans to complete the restoration of our house, grandmother was making plans for that old table. Her father built it for his family, and she had kept it all these years.

Although it had been in the family for three generations, the table was in very good shape. It was well-built, solid, and had no major blemishes or damage. However, the table was in need of restoration. The old varnish needed to be removed, and a new finish put in its place. This was a job that grandmother wanted to participate in and supervise herself.

The first step in this long process involved removing years of old varnish in order to restore the wood to a lighter color suited to our dining room. This first step took a long time and involved the most elbow grease. Grandmother, along with my dad, used steel wool and harsh chemicals to dissolve and remove the old stain. Every nook and cranny of the table received the same treatment until all the old covering had been removed.

Now the process of restoration could begin. The wood was sanded, neutralized, and prepared to receive a new look. Hours of wiping, rubbing, sanding, and buffing transformed that table into a beautiful piece of furniture. Along the way, there were stories about the table, jokes were told, and wonderful plans were made for its future. Throughout the entire process, that table remained the center of attention until all the work was completed. When finished, it became the centerpiece of our home.

God is in the restoration business. He carefully, methodically, and constantly works with us, removing years of wear and tear in our lives. He knows that underneath, down deep, we have infinite value. God is also aware that we grow tired and frustrated; we get banged up and scratched. Instead of assigning us to the trash dump, however, God lovingly undertakes the long process of restoring us so he can use us.

He strips away anything and everything that has discolored our lives. This process may take a long time as God rubs, sands, buffs, and strips away layers of self-doubt, deceit, low self-esteem, fear, anxiety, and mistrust. Lovingly, he stays at his task until the last remnants of these blemishes are completely wiped out of our lives.

Then he undertakes our restoration. He applies ample layers of his love, grace, and mercy. He stains us to conform to the exact image of his son, Jesus, so that we can be used in his service. Along the way, there are stories of love, there is laughter, and great plans are made for our future. God does all the work; we just have to be still.

The final and most important step was sealing the table's surface. After all that work, a coat of sealant protected the table from spills, nicks, and scratches. God seals us as well with the Holy Spirit, so that we will always look and be our best for him. The

sealant insures that all the work done before remains unchanged, perfect, and evident for all time.

Psalm 23:3a is a short statement but one of great importance. It simply reads, “he restores my soul.” This is one of the great things about our God. His house is filled with restored furniture. He alone sees the value when others don’t. He knows that we need to be restored in order to serve his purposes. God wants to restore us, to make our lives into centerpieces that reflect and testify to his glory.

Are you being restored? Just hang on because the finished product will be a wonder to behold!

Saturday, August 7 - Isaiah 44:1-8 - “Ice in the Fountain”

My hometown is a tightly knit community with a population of around 5000 people. Some families, like my own, have lived there for generations, carefully watching and monitoring all the changes over the years. As a young boy, Cherryville proved a wonderful place in which to grow up. We didn’t worry about kidnappings; we didn’t worry about being out late at night playing; we didn’t even worry about locking our doors. It was true small-town America and I loved it.

My favorite time of year was summer. School was out, we went barefoot, we got up early, played hard, and came in late. I could visit my friends’ houses on weeknights, and we could get into all kinds of mischief without getting into too much trouble. We rode our bikes for miles on end, going from one end of town to the other, exploring neighborhoods, and seeing who could ride the farthest distance in the least amount of time. All in all, we were just typical kids doing typical summertime things.

All this activity meant that we worked up a considerable thirst and when we wanted something cool to drink, there was only one place to go. On East First Street, just one block from the town square, there stood an ice plant built completely of wood. People would come from miles around just to buy bags of freshly crushed ice. I remember on several occasions my dad would send me to get ice when we made ice cream or when we cut a watermelon. I enjoyed watching the iceman take a huge

chunk of ice from the freezer, put it into the crusher, and fill a brown paper bag with ice. I can still see it to this day.

However, the best part about the ice plant was its water fountain. The fountain sat outside on the porch and had the coldest water in town. The water was cold because the employees at the ice plant would place a large chunk of ice inside the fountain, next to the water line. As the water passed through the fountain, it was instantly chilled. Nothing tasted better on a hot summer day than that water and we kids would ride, sometimes from across town, just to drink at that fountain. The fountain was always available, day or night, rain or shine, to anyone wanting a drink. The water was always cold, wet, and refreshing.

The prophet Isaiah understood the importance of cool, fresh water. Geographically, Israel has a lot of deserts. It is hot, dry, arid, and very little water falls in several of its regions. Water is a welcomed sight, and its value is beyond measure. It is no wonder then, that our Scripture today addresses God's blessings in terms of water. In Isaiah 44:3, the prophet writes, "For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground."

What a wonderful promise this is. Even after the children of Israel rejected God, even after they worshiped other idols, and even after they refused to live up to the covenant they made with God, He still promised to bless them. No longer would they wander in a hot, deserted land. No longer would the burning thirst for God's presence go unquenched. No longer would they search for living water. Instead, God would bless them, pouring out His spirit and His blessing upon all who thirsted.

In John's gospel, Jesus speaks of this same water. In his discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well, he promises that those believing in him will have a well of living water springing up from within. Jesus offers the water that quenches our thirst once and for all. Once we drink from this water, our souls are at rest, they are content, and they are satisfied. Water from any other source will satisfy our thirst for a short while but we will thirst again. The world offers many fountains from which to drink, however, only one fountain will ever totally quench our thirst.

There were several water fountains in Cherryville where you could get a cool drink; but there was only one fountain offering water cooled with fresh ice. While the other fountains offered water, only the ice plant gave consistently cold water on a continual basis. As Christians, we need to be like the water fountain at the old ice plant. All around us people are thirsty. They are searching for a way to quench their thirst once and for all. Most of them are drinking from several different fountains in a vain attempt to find peace of mind and soul. Let us share Jesus with them today. God's promise is that He will pour water on all those who are thirsty. Jesus himself said that all those who thirst for righteousness will be filled. Won't you share a cold drink of water with someone today?

Sunday, August 8 - Psalm 102:12-24

While I (Pastor Josh) won't be with you today, I pray you enjoy the preaching of my friend, Blake Carpenter. I hope you have seen his heart throughout this week of devotions and look forward to hearing the voice of God speak through him today.

WEEK 5: David and Jonathan

Monday, August 9 - 1 Samuel 18:1-4

Other than LeeAnn, I have had two best friends in my life. The first was in childhood. When living in Arizona, I had a close friendship with Matthew. We did everything together: swimming, building forts, playing baseball and basketball, playing video games, etc. When I was in fifth grade, my family moved to Texas and it was painful to leave my best friend behind. We've remained friends throughout almost the quarter of a century since then, checking in with each other a couple times of year.

The other of my best friends was my roommate in my freshman year of college. We shared a love of baseball which has propelled us to share life together and help one another with growing from immature college students to respectable husbands and fathers. Living closer to him allows us to partner easier. I see him about once a month, but we text daily.

The greatest friendship in the Bible is David and Jonathan. I cannot even think of a close second. First Samuel 18:3 tells us everything we need to know: “he loved him as his own soul” (NRSV). What platonic relationship do you have like David and Jonathan? There was a time a few years ago when my college roommate was going through a really difficult time. I was in pain because he was in pain. But then he recovered, and I got to rejoice as he rejoiced. This is what best friends do for one another. Who is your best friend who is not your spouse? Thank God for that person being in your life. And then call that friend and set up a time for lunch or coffee. Enjoy this Dynamic Duo which God has given you!

Tuesday, August 10 - 1 Samuel 19:1-7

The Dynamic Duo of David and Jonathan gets difficult because of King Saul. A friendship is not all fun and games but sometimes it takes hard work and hard choices. In yesterday’s reading, it seems David is forced to stay with the king’s family which leads to the opportunity for David and Jonathan’s covenant. Today, Jonathan has to intercede for David in front of his father, King Saul. These first few stories in David and Jonathan’s relationship set the direction for the entire narrative. Jonathan is going to have to choose between his family and his friend.

We are often told that blood is thicker than water, indicating that our family allegiance takes precedence over anything else. But what if our family is in the wrong? This dilemma is a classic storyline in movies. Typically, you have two rival groups of people, sometimes countries, gangs, neighborhoods, ethnicities, etc. Then the story shows a girl and boy from rival sides falling in love, and then they must convince their groups that the other side is not like they think. In most storylines, there is a happy ending when the couple gets married and the two sides put an end to their generations long squabble.

Would you be willing to stand up to your family on behalf of your friend? When your family has stereotyped a person, are you willing to tell them that their stereotype is wrong? When your family has the wrong information about what happened, are you

willing to tell them that? Jonathan advocates for his friend; Jonathan puts his life on the line for David. Are you willing to do that? That's what true friendship requires. Pray for God to give you the strength to stand for what is right and correct anyone who is in the wrong, no matter if they are family.

Wednesday, August 11 - Exodus 35:1-36:7

I want to remind you of my favorite story about College Heights Baptist Church. In 1978, Rev. Bowman was your pastor, and you needed to renovate the church to accommodate the growth which was happening. The church needed to raise \$75,000 and many were uneasy about the need to raise this amount of money. But you went as God led. In the news clipping I have in my office, Rev. Bowman states "we started it on a Sunday afternoon, and we could have shut it off on Wednesday night and been safe." When God is in an event, God will make sure it happens.

This is what we see in our Exodus passage for tonight. God gave instructions to build the Tabernacle and the people responded accordingly. They kept responding and giving daily to the point Moses was able to "restrain [the people] from bringing; for what they had already brought was more than enough to do all the work." How amazing it is when God's people listen to God and God does amazing work. Let's talk more about the Israelites tonight and how we may be able to emulate them in our lives as well.

Thursday, August 12 - 1 Samuel 20:41-42

True friendship means tears when parting. We have all experienced this when saying goodbye to a friend whether it was for a short time or forever. These two verses today are the last time David and Jonathan see each other. David is now a fugitive from King Saul and will be on the run until Saul and Jonathan are killed in battle.

When we talk about Dynamic Duos, it is not just about two people working to the bone for the Kingdom of God. God does not see us only as workers, but He sees us as people to enjoy creation as God designed. Having deep meaningful friendships are instrumental to having a happy life. When we share life together in this way, parting

hurts. With their souls intertwined as Monday's reading told us, there is a ripping apart of what God has put together. This is how sin can ruin God's plan.

This is the end of David and Jonathan being in company with one another, but it is not the end of their friendship. Friendships only end when friends make that decision. Circumstances cannot force you to end a friendship. Over the next few readings, we will see exactly how David continued to think about Jonathan.

I remember leaving my best friend Matthew. Being that he was my best friend from second to fifth grade, he was my first real best friend. It hurt to learn we had to move. I still have it ingrained in my memory playing basketball with him at his house for a final time as my parents finished packing up the moving truck. I still have a picture of that day in a frame. But that was not the end of our friendship. Just because we changed zip codes, did not mean I left our friendship behind. Dynamic Duos stay together even when they are far apart.

Friday, August 13 - 2 Samuel 9:1-13

David remained friends with Jonathan even after death. Remember the last words Jonathan said to David from yesterday's reading? "The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever." David held on to his word and brought Mephibosheth to the King's table. David took care of Mephibosheth as he would a son and restored to Mephibosheth all of the land of Saul's family.

Maybe David was treating Mephibosheth this way for political reasons. He could keep an eye on him in case there would be a coup coming from Saul's family. Maybe he honored Mephibosheth this way because he knew Mephibosheth couldn't lead an army given his bad feet. It's possible, but I think the main reason David honored Mephibosheth in this way is his relationship with Jonathan. It is clear in the pages of First and Second Samuel that David and Jonathan's friendship was greater than a political alliance. In a culture of honor and shame, David would not dishonor Jonathan by using their friendship for political posturing.

Friendships are gifts from God which are not to be used for individual pursuit. True friends remain friends forever. This includes being friends with future generations of a family after the friend has passed away. True friends do not end friendships when there is no more mutual benefit. Friends give sacrificially because that is what Jesus did for his friends: “there is no greater love than this; to lay down one’s life for his friends.”

Who is a friend who has passed away? Reach out to that family today to see how they are doing. Offer friendship to them in the same way you had friendship with the departed. Pray for that family as well. Take care of that family as David cared for Mephibosheth.

Saturday, August 14 - 2 Samuel 1:17-27

It is hard to define the emotions which David must have been feeling at this moment. David has been on the run from Saul for a considerable amount of time. Saul, who has been trying to kill David, is dead, but so is Jonathan. David can return home, but he is in mourning for his friend.

On top of that, David is now recognized by most in Israel as the rightful king. Israel is in mourning for their past leader, and, as the new leader, David must be chief mourner for the man who is responsible for David’s misery. With all of this in mind, David gives a eulogy for David and Jonathan. He reminds the people to mourn for Saul because Israel remains prosperous under his leadership.

It is in verse 26 that we see the great love David had for Jonathan. His love for Jonathan surpassed any love he had for women. Jonathan was David’s best friend, “soul-mates,” we might say, even though they weren’t a married couple.

Praise God for the opportunity to have this type of relationship in your life. Praise God for a partner, a second-half of your dynamic duo who is looking out for you. Praise God for love that will not break no matter what life throws at you. Praise God for friends.

Sunday, August 15 - Psalm 103:1-5

One of my favorite Psalms. Bless the Lord, O my soul! And all that is within me!

WEEK 6: Deborah and Barak

Monday, August 16 - Judges 4:1-10

LeeAnn and I are the opposite when it comes to keepsakes. I would keep everything if I had my way, and she would throw out pretty much everything. Sometimes she is right (we don't need to keep every piece of artwork the kids draw); other times I am right (we should keep those ticket stubs to put in the photo album). This is what Dynamic Duos can do for one another. A duo should be stronger than one person on their own or even the sum of the two people's work.

The story of Deborah and Barak (and Jael) is such that each member of a Dynamic Duo uses their strengths for the betterment of the team and one person covers for the weaknesses of the other. Deborah is a prophetess, one of only three women to hold this title in the Old Testament (the other two being Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20)). Her strength is hearing from the Lord and directing God's people to do God's work. Barak is a warrior. He can lead an army and deliver Israel victory in battle. Together, as co-judges, they will give Israel freedom once again from the Canaanites.

These first ten verses lay the groundwork for what will occur in the rest of the narrative of Deborah and Barak's story in Judges 4. Barak needed Deborah to go to war, and Deborah needed Barak to lead the army. God used both of them to bring God glory. In your life and in your duo, do what you can do so that others can do what they can.

Tuesday, August 17 - Judges 4:11-16

We continue Deborah and Barak's story today with its conclusion on Thursday. In yesterday's section, Deborah looked to clearly be the leader. She is the first person mentioned and is the one giving orders. She is the one Barak will not fight without.

In these six verses, we start to see more equality between Deborah and Barak. Deborah is still telling Barak where to go (v. 14), but we see the reason Barak is necessary to the plan. Barak and his army start to pursue Sisera and his army. The army is captured and killed; Sisera is still on the run, but not for long.

It is in these six verses, however, where we start to see the true leader, the true main character of this story. It is not Barak, and it is not Deborah; it is God. As Barak is descending on Sisera's army, it is the Lord who throws Sisera and his chariots into a panic. God has performed this act before. This panic is the same panic that the Egyptians are thrown into in Exodus 14.

In your Dynamic Duos and in the duo of Deborah and Barak, it is a waste of time clamoring for position and wanting to be the "ranking member" of the duo. A biblical dynamic duo has only one leader and that is God. In all of your relationships, remember this fact today. If God is not the leader of your marriage, friendships, work relationships, and all other relationships, then it is a duo which is destined for trouble. Deborah and Barak allow God to lead them; we would be wise to remember to do the same.

Wednesday, August 18 - Exodus 39:32 - 40:38

We conclude our study of Exodus tonight. The question we explore tonight is "What is God waiting for you to finish in order to lead you further?" Israel completed the Tabernacle which led to further blessing from God. What does that mean for our lives today? How does this apply to you and me? We will discuss tonight.

As you read this, would you take the time to pray for teachers and students in Cleburne ISD? Today is the first day of school, and for some, like my children, it is their first day in a classroom in almost 18 months. Pray for nerves to be calm and a great first day of school! Pray for safety and health. Pray for patience and understanding in the minds and hearts of teachers and students alike. Pray for the parents to be ok. And above all, pray for Christian teachers and students to be the light of Jesus in their classes.

Thursday, August 19 - Judges 4:17-24

I don't want to be grotesque, but a tent peg through the skull is not how I want to die. We finish the narrative of Deborah and Barak's Dynamic Duo by introducing Jael as an accomplice. Maybe we should call them a Triumphant Trio! There is an interesting part of this story in verse 9 which we skipped on Monday. When Deborah says that she will go with Barak, she also prophesies that because of his need for Deborah, Sisera will be captured or killed by a woman. The assumption in verse 9 is that the woman would be Deborah. We should learn to never assume when it comes to the will of God.

Verse 11 is an odd insertion at first thought. Why do we care what Heber the Kenite is doing? Verse 17 reveals the importance of that information. At first, Sisera believes himself to be safe because Heber is at peace with King Jabin. Because of that, he lets his guard down, falls asleep... and never wakes up. Sisera indeed falls in the hands of a woman, but it is a foreign woman who God uses, not Deborah the prophetess.

Once again, we see in verse 23 who the main character is, the main deliverer and judge of this story. It is not one of the Triumphant Trio, but it is God. God heard the cries of Israel and he has delivered them. He has used certain people to carry out a certain part of the mission, but it is God who is the Savior.

Let us remember who the Savior of the world is. Not just in spiritual salvation but also in daily life. Psalm 103 tells us that God is one "who forgives all your iniquity, heals all your diseases, and redeems your life from the Pit." Luke 4:18-19 quotes Jesus as saying "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." God is not just concerned with eternal salvation, but he wants you to be free today as well. This is how he helped Israel and this is how he can help you too. What is holding you back? Ask God to free you from those chains, deliver you from bondage, so that

you can be a free person. Just like God subdued King Jabin, he will subdue your oppressor as well.

Friday, August 20 - Judges 5:1-31

What we have in Judges 5 is the song/poem version of Deborah and Barak's story. Songs can express emotion better than a narrative story can. The emotion of Judges 5 is the biggest difference from Judges 4. Being a poem, the words are more expressive and paint a picture while Judges 4 is more "just the facts." A poem after a narrative of the same event is uncommon in the Bible. Exodus 14-15 with the story of the crossing of the Red Sea then Moses' song about that event is the only other instance of this occurring in Scripture. This has led some to suggest that the author of Judges is attempting to show that Deborah is "the female Moses." That the delivery from King Jabin was just as important in Israel as delivery from Egypt.

This song in Judges 5 is a song of celebration mostly (there is a section which reprimands some of the tribes for not participating in battle). The concluding verse of the song (verse 31) summarizes the spirit of the entire song well: "So perish all your enemies, O Lord! But may your friends be like the sun as it rises in its might." This statement reminds me of what Romans 8:31 says: "if God is for us, who can be against us?"

God is victorious. That's the message of Judges 4, the message of Judges 5, and the message of the entire Bible. The enemies of the Lord will perish; the friends of God will be victorious. Let us be thankful to be called friends of God!

Saturday, August 21 - Hebrews 11:32-34

It is curious that Barak is named among the heroes of Israel, but Deborah is not. Why is that? It is curious that Jephthah, of all people, is named here, but Deborah is not. Why is that? Is it because Deborah is a woman? That can't be right because Rahab is mentioned just one verse earlier. Is it because this is only a list of warriors

who fought for Israel's freedom? That's not right because Samuel and the prophets did not fight. So why Barak and not Deborah?

The official answer is "no one knows." But this happens twice. In addition to Hebrews, there is a list of judges in 1 Samuel 12:11 which also names Jerubbaal (Gideon), Barak, Jephthah, and Samson. This is where I start to see an answer to the question. The Hebrews list of judges is verbatim the list from 1 Samuel. The author of Hebrews copies the list from 1 Samuel. In 1 Samuel, it says "the Lord sent..." Deborah was a spokesperson of God as a prophetess. In Judges, she is never called by God, but is the one who does the calling on behalf of God. This makes Deborah different from the other judges, which could be a reason why she is left off of these lists... I think.

Whenever I read Barak's name in Hebrews, I think of Deborah too. They were a team using their strengths to help where the other was weak. This is how duos and teams should operate. When you are strong, lead. When you are weak, follow. And always, always, always, trust in the Lord's leadership.

Sunday, August 22 - Psalm 104:31-35

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live! Let's sing together in worship today!

Week 7: Mary and Martha

Monday, August 23 - Luke 10:38-42

We twist ourselves in knots trying to explain what Jesus tells Martha in these verses. We twist ourselves in knots because Martha plays the role of the servant, a role we are repeatedly told in scripture to fulfill. After all, it was Jesus who washed the feet of the disciples. And it was Jesus who said that "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom of many (Mark 10:45). Martha is the example of the dutiful woman who takes care of the company who are being welcomed in her home. Why, then, does Jesus tell Martha that she is worried and distracted?

Jesus tells Martha she is worried and distracted because she is, indeed, worried and distracted. When I preach about this Dynamic Duo on Sunday, I will take Jesus' words at face value. Jesus goes on to say, "there is need of only one thing." Martha is worried and distracted because Martha is busy. Busy is a bad word. I have learned lately that being busy is being arrogant. Being busy means you think you are in charge and have to do everything. Being busy means you do not trust that God knows what He is doing. There is need of only one thing; that thing is sitting at the feet of Jesus.

We twist ourselves in knots trying to interpret this passage because we are Martha, busy about many things and ignore the one thing that matters. We want to explain ourselves in some form or fashion. We want to say "yes, but..." to what Jesus says. As followers of Jesus, we must put first things first and the only thing which should be first should be sitting at the feet of Jesus. Let us not be distracted and worried by many things. And if lunch is late, so be it.

Tuesday, August 24 - John 12:1-8

The same Mary and Martha from Luke yesterday, are seen in John today. Many times we highlight the differences between John and the other gospels, but Mary and Martha exhibit the same characteristics as in the story yesterday. Martha is serving dinner; Mary is at the feet of Jesus; Jesus defends Mary's actions.

In fact, the "moral of the story," if you want to put it that way, is the same: don't worry about other things, focus on Jesus. In both stories, Jesus emphasizes a point which we might think is contrary to the message of Jesus. Don't show hospitality (Luke)? Don't consider the poor (John)? Is this the same Jesus who told the rich man to give all of his possessions away?

Of course it is the same Jesus. What Jesus is correcting Martha and Judas about is why they are doing what they do. Our service and our giving should flow from our worship of the Lord. We cannot separate what we do from the reason that we do it. Martha was not serving because it was a spiritual act. Judas was not questioning Jesus from a compassionate heart.

We do what we do for others because of who we are in Christ. We cannot leave that second part out. Take time today to consider that last statement: we do what we do for others because of who we are in Christ. What does that mean to you? How do you live that out? Who are you in Christ?

Wednesday, August 25 - 1 Timothy 1

We begin a study of the books of the New Testament known as the Pastoral Letters. First and Second Timothy and Titus are grouped together because they are attributed to Paul who is writing to a younger generation of pastors, Timothy and Titus. Paul mentored these two in ministry much like we have been discussing the importance of mentoring in our Dynamic Duos.

In 1 Timothy 1, we arrive at the purpose of the letter in verses 18-20. This letter is to encourage Timothy to not falter in the faith but to “fight the good fight.” Already in the First Century, there are false teachers floating around leading people astray with heresy. Paul encourages Timothy to not buy into what these false teachers are selling but to remain in the faith that was taught to him.

First Timothy is written as Paul has left Ephesus and left the church in the care of Timothy. This letter is to help with that transition of leadership. Theological advice, ethical advice, and practical advice can all be found in this letter and the next. Let us learn from this letter starting tonight!

Thursday, August 26 - Matthew 21:12-22

“He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.”

Bethany was a suburb of Jerusalem, only about two miles outside the eastern side of the city. This is where Jesus was staying the week of Passover, and I think it is appropriate to make the assumption that Jesus was staying at the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

What made these siblings Jesus' "home away from home" when he was near Jerusalem? Was it Martha's cooking? Or Mary's attention? Did Lazarus tell good stories? I wonder why Jesus chose to stay with them?

Then, I realized this: Jesus chooses all of us if we invite him in! Revelation 3:20 says "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me."

That's the answer. The reason Jesus stayed with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus is that they invited him. We all have the opportunity to dine with Jesus, for Jesus to stay at our house, if we invite him in. When Jesus says the words of Revelation 3:20 he is speaking to the church at Laodicea who thinks they do not need God; they are self-made men. What they don't realize is that they are actually poor without Jesus' guidance. They are poor without putting God first as Mary had done in the stories earlier this week.

We need to invite God into our hearts and homes. Invite him to make decisions for our lives. He wants to come in and eat with you. Will you open the door? Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were blessed because they opened the door to Jesus; what blessings will you receive because you do the same?

Friday, August 27 - John 11:20-32

LeeAnn and Hannah are the same person. From day one, Hannah has looked like LeeAnn and it hasn't stopped yet. Their sameness does not stop with looks. Attitudes, mannerisms, interests, etc. are all the same. It is amazing and frightening. Dynamic Duos have this type of connection a lot of times. Mary and Martha are no exception. When you read our passage from today, they both say the same thing when they encounter Jesus for the first time: my brother would be alive today if you were here.

It is beautiful when a Dynamic Duo believes this way concerning Christ. When a duo has utmost faith in God, God can do amazing work through them. We see that work in the lives of Martha and Mary. Jesus knows he can work through the lives of

Martha and Mary. Raising Lazarus has been in the plans since Jesus knew Lazarus was ill. He knows that Martha and Mary can be used in this way so that the glory of God can be shown to all who hear of what Jesus is doing. Praise be to God for people who God knows he can use.

Are you one of those people? Can God use you even when life is difficult? Don't forget that Martha and Mary just lost their brother and yet they trust in who Jesus is and what he can do. Are you willing to be used by God no matter the circumstances? Pray that God can use you today, no matter if it's a good day or bad.

Saturday, August 28 - Micah 6:6-8

I want you to remember back to what Jesus told Martha about Mary in Luke 10:42: "Mary has chosen the better part." We've spoken this week a considerable amount of seeking God first and letting our actions be influenced solely by our worship and devotion to God. This is what it means that Mary has chosen the better part.

Our verses today should be very familiar to you as they have been a focus of this church ever since I became your pastor. The prophet is asking rhetorically "how should we worship God? Does God require this offering or that?" And then he responds with Micah 6:8.

Walking humbly with God is what Mary does when she chooses to sit at the feet of Jesus' teaching. Walking humbly with God is what Mary does when she chooses to pour perfume on his feet. Walking humbly with God is what Martha and Mary do when they trust in Jesus even after he has not rushed to Bethany to heal Lazarus before death. Walking humbly with God is what all three siblings do when they invite Jesus into their home. Walking humbly with God is putting God first; it is choosing the better part. Walking with God means slowing down; it does not say we are to run humbly with God!

Are you walking humbly with God? Or are you too busy? Are you walking humbly with God? Or do you think you know what to do? Part of what the Lord requires of you is to walk humbly with him. Are you walking with him or pulling against him?

Sunday, August 29 - Psalm 105:1-6

Week 8: Moses and Aaron

Monday, August 30 - Exodus 4:27-31

Our last dynamic duo is a duo which should have been a solo, but we will get to that later this week. Moses and Aaron together went to Egypt to free Israel from enslavement. Of course, they did this under the leadership of God. The leadership of God is not something we have discussed enough in this series. Let us not lose sight of God's work even when we are talking about the actions of humans.

Every dynamic duo will fail without the leadership of God. In this passage, God tells Aaron where to go; Moses relays all of the words of God to Aaron; Aaron then speaks God's words to the people. God is in charge every step of the way.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 says "and though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken." We are stronger together than we are apart, but we are unstoppable when God is with us as well. Romans 8:31 reminds us "if God is for us, who is against us?"

The story of Moses and Aaron (and Israel) is the story of Christians today. When we let God lead, we have success, but when we take over, it leads to ruin. Are you walking where God wants you to walk, talking when God wants you to talk, and living as God wants you to live? Dynamic duos can only be successful if each member is following God.

Tuesday, August 31 - Exodus 15:20-21

Much like Deborah and Barak a couple of weeks ago, there is a third to the Dynamic Duo of Moses and Aaron. Moses' sister Miriam is also part of this leadership trio. Mentioned in a few sections of Exodus, Miriam is given the name prophet in this passage just like Deborah in Judges 4. While Deborah actually was a spokesperson for God, it seems that Miriam is a prophet in name alone. She is given this honorary title because of her leadership during the Exodus.

Miriam's help to Moses is not just when they were adults; remember Moses' birth? Miriam was the one watching from the reeds to see what happened to her baby brother. She has been a protector, guide, and helper to Moses all of his life. Moses benefits from having his brother Aaron and sister Miriam as his companions on this journey.

Give thanks to God for your siblings today. Thank God for how they have helped you and given you companionship in your toughest moments. Thank God that they can be a dynamic duo (or trio, quad, etc.) with you. Take some time to journal your happiest moments with your siblings. Praise God for those good times.

Wednesday, September 1 - 1 Timothy 2:1-7

These seven verses are a beautiful expression of why we pray and why we evangelize: God desires salvation for all people. God wants all people to come to the knowledge that He alone is God and the only way to him is through the mediator Jesus, who gave up his throne in heaven for a cross on earth.

Paul tells Timothy it is this message for which he was appointed an apostle. Apostle in this context could just as easily be translated missionary. Paul was to leave the comforts of Jewish culture and proclaim the message of Jesus to the Gentiles. Who can you proclaim the truth to? Who can you invite to church? Take time today to pray for those who need to hear the message of salvation. God wants them to hear the message; will you be an apostle who goes?

Thursday, September 2 - Leviticus 9:22-24

If you studied Exodus with us on Wednesday nights or have studied Exodus before, you know the problems Moses ended up having with Aaron. That will be the text tomorrow. However, it wasn't all bad for the dynamic duo. Maybe Moses should have led Israel out of Egypt alone, but the job of leading the people was more than one person could handle.

In our passage today, we read of Aaron becoming the high priest. In the distribution of leadership, Moses starts to take more of a political role while Aaron takes a religious role. The dividing of the role of leader of Israel here is a continuation of what Jethro told Moses to do in Exodus 18. The work of leading the people is too much for one person; Moses and Aaron, when following God, are able to work together to lead Israel effectively. A few centuries later, David and Nathan would lead Israel as King and Prophet in a similar way.

The Apostles and the deacons modeled the same behavior in Acts. When the Apostles discerned that the church was getting too large for them to lead alone, they gave the deacons the tasks of waiting on the widows while they devoted themselves to “the word of God” (cf. Acts 6:1-7). The church flourished under this division of work.

That brings us to today. The dynamic duos that work best in the church is when the leaders can divide up the work which allows more to be accomplished. Leaders are not just those who are paid, but those who are gifted in certain work. A secret to success in the church or in any group is to let those who are strong in an area, lead, and those who are weak, follow. Then, in a different setting or situation, the strong and weak will be different so let those who are strong, lead. We saw this with Deborah and Barak as well. Leaders do not have to lead in every facet. A good leader knows when to follow. And good followers know when they need to lead. Moses and Aaron had this dynamic where they knew how to help one another. A church is strongest when it can do the same.

Friday, September 3 - Exodus 32:1-6

There is lots of blame to go around for the Golden Calf episode. Let’s keep the focus on Aaron for today. Here’s how the story should go:

Israelites: “Aaron, we don’t know what happened to Moses.

Make us some gods which can go before us.”

Aaron: “No. God already said to not make any idols.”

The end.

Leaders make decisions based on what the people *need*, not what the people *want*. Aaron's job is not to appease the people, but to lead the people. Aaron, as Moses' second in command, needs to show true leadership in Moses' absence. The allowance he makes here is absolutely unacceptable. People die because of Aaron's lack of leadership. If you think I'm being too harsh, Exodus 32:35 puts the blame on Aaron. Aaron deserves the blame.

Remember, at the beginning of the week, I told you that this dynamic duo should have been a solo act? When Moses is being called in Exodus 3-4, God finally makes a concession to have Aaron be with Moses. It was God's intention for Moses to lead the people out of Egypt alone as leader. Because of free will and Moses' refusal to go alone, God must accommodate Moses by sending Aaron as well. Perhaps God knew Aaron would be predisposed to lead as he did here in Exodus 32? That he was too much of a people-pleaser to be a good number 2 to Moses.

Moses got Aaron. He got what he wished for. Sometimes what we want is not in our best interests, yet sometimes God allows us to have what we think we need. Aaron has a colossal failure of leadership. He deserves the blame. Yet, if Moses' does as God wanted, Aaron is never in that position in the first place.

Decisions we make have consequences. Those consequences are not simple cause and effect and the event is over, but there can be repercussions for generations. After all, isn't that what Exodus 34:6-7 says?

What can we do about this? Think about the decisions we make. How will this affect my life today? How will this affect my family? Community? World? A decision Moses made years earlier puts Aaron in the position to fail. How can we better foresee what's on the horizon to prevent this from happening to us?

Saturday, September 4 - Numbers 12:1-16

I never told anyone this story. I don't think my parents even know this. When I was in seventh grade, I got called into the principal's office. The one and only time I was ever called to the principal's office to be reprimanded. A rivalry between me and

another boy went a little too far. We would be playing each other in little league baseball that night, and I was sitting behind him in math class. He had his baseball shirt on and I wrote on it. I said that “[my team] ruled, and [his team] drooled.” Real original... Anyway, class ended, no one saw it, and I thought I had gotten away with it. Then, while in my next class, the assistant principal called for me over the intercom to come to the office. I was horrified. It took every fiber of strength in my 12 year old body to not burst into tears at getting in trouble. I never got in trouble at school again.

This passage reminds me of getting called into the Principal’s Office except 1000 times worse. God calls Moses, Miriam, and Aaron to the tent of meeting because there is a rivalry brewing. Can you imagine God calling you out like this? Miriam and Aaron think that Moses thinks he is more important than they are. Miriam and Aaron want to make sure the people know they are leaders too. God is having none of it. He calls them to a meeting and basically tells them as a father tells his children “Stop it! Stop it right now!” Miriam is punished for her initiation of this trouble and then the people move on their way after 7 days. This spat between the siblings delays the progress of all Israelites.

There is no room for rivalry in our Dynamic Duos. A good dynamic duo will follow the leadership of God, no matter what he asks. A good member of a team will accept the role they have been given. I can’t imagine the terror of being called out by God in this way. I pray that I accept the role He has given, so that I’m not called into the “principal’s office” ever again.

Sunday, September 5 - Psalm 106:1-3