

ENTER

STUDY #1

LONG READING: GENESIS 6- 9:17

SHORTENED READING: GENESIS 6:9-7:10

THINK ABOUT IT

God called Noah to build an ark, but not the ark you may remember coloring in Sunday School. This is not a cute little houseboat! Instead, imagine a floating box that is three stories high, with each story having 15-foot ceilings—twice as tall as your average living room! It is six times longer than it is wide. The total deck area is about the same as twenty college basketball courts! This was no small project for Noah to complete. Once finished, it must have been an incredibly intimidating site to see! It was a sight that surely noticed, and probably laughed at by those around them.

God instructed Noah to build with these specific dimensions so that the ark could survive the most turbulent of waters. Remember, it was not built for a pleasure trip. There are no playful elephant trunks waving from a window in this picture! God was about to cover everything under the heavens. Imagine Noah and his family entering the ark, knowing they were leaving everything behind. Imagine entering the ark to the jeers and laughter to the world around you, trusting that you are following God despite the world thinking you're insane for building and living in this giant box. Imagine entering the ark knowing that you were the one chosen to enter into the safe protection of God. Yes, walking into the ark must have been intimidating and a step or two might have faltered with a little bit of doubt. But Noah and his family entered. Imagine entering that ark with obedience. Imagine entering by grace.

DISCUSS

- 1- What thoughts do you think ran through Noah's mind during years of building the ark? What do you think he felt as he finally entered the ark and left everyone outside?
- 2- Have you ever experienced a time where you felt like you were *entering* into a particular space God was calling you to?
- 3- Is there something in your life that God is asking you to do that requires trust? Are you resisting?

PRAY

TRY THIS: Write a list of spaces (conversations, physical places, relationships, etc.) you enjoy entering into God's presence. Then write a list of spaces that you feel called to enter but find it challenging. Take time to pray for each one. Ask God to draw you into those spaces and give you guidance for how and when and what you ought to do in them.

ENTER

STUDY #2

LONG READING: JOSHUA 3:1-4:24

SHORTENED READING: JOSHUA 3:14- 4:9

THINK ABOUT IT

Imagine the fear, confusion, and excitement that must have settled among the Israelites. They had been wandering in the desert for forty years without a true home. They had no place to go, aimlessly and continually wandering around the desert because their sin had kept them from entering Canaan so many generations ago. Yet here they are, being given another chance, waiting at the edge of a roaring river that separated them from the Promised Land. Imagine a rushing river at flood time. The water is powerful, destructive, and deadly. Then God chooses to show up in a miraculous way! God doesn't just gradually lessen the flow, God stops the water, piling it up a great distance away. Think about that: God *stopped* the river! Through this, God not only opens up the way, but displays how the Holy Presence that commands the elements not only *enables* them, but enters *with* them into promises. What an amazing sign to bless Israel as they finally enter safely into Canaan, stepping foot into the land God had promised them for a home. They then obediently set up a pillar of stones to remember that moment when they entered Canaan with God. They could finally enter into rest after so much wandering.

DISCUSS

- 1- How would you have felt while standing by the surging river, being instructed by God to cross it? Close your eyes and imagine the roar of the water filling your ears. Hear the crashing torrents. Then imagine silence an instant later. God stopping the water and clearing a safe path for *you*.
- 2- Do you ever think about the promises God has made to you, in scripture, in your baptism? What do you think it means for God to walk alongside us in those promises?
- 2- When have you "wandered in the wilderness?" Maybe experienced a restlessness in your spirit? Have you had an "entering Canaan" experience after your wanderings? How would you describe entering into rest?

PRAY

TRY THIS: Trace your foot on a piece of paper and color it (for children and the young at heart.) Pray for people who are in need of a home; consider how their feet have nowhere to rest. Pray that they may enter homes and lands that will keep them safe, give them rest. Write a list within the footprint naming people who are struggling with displacement. Look up some of your local agencies and think about the global refugee crisis. Pray not only for their needs, but for your own heart to empathize with them as they wander, seeking peace.

ENTER

STUDY #3

LONG READING: 2 CHRONICLES 5- 7:10

SHORTENED READING: 2 CHRONICLES 5:2-14; 7:1-3)

THINK ABOUT IT

Many of us have seen the massive celebration on New Year's Eve in New York City as the ball drops, ushering in the New Year. People are chanting together, celebrating, dancing in the streets! Now think about the entire nation of Israel celebrating the completion of the building of the temple. This was an enormous celebration! There are Levites dressed in their best, playing instruments and singing. The entire crowd is chanting. The city is ringing, not with "10..9...8...7....", but with "He is good; His love endures forever!" Try chanting that now with your family. Then just imagine proclaiming these powerful words in celebration with an entire nation!

Now comes the truly amazing part--God enters the temple. Fire from heaven comes down and consumes the sacrifice and the glory of the Lord fills the temple! This is such a magnificent event, bringing the entire nation of Israel to its knees before the Lord. This is a marvelous picture of God "entering." Take a moment to simply think about this. Recognize that we are now the temple of God. When you accept God's gift of salvation in Jesus, the Holy Spirit enters into *you*. This awe-inspiring truth requires a celebration! Consider how magnificent it is that God joins us, enters into us. How can we not shout: "God is good; God's love endures forever!"

DISCUSS

- 1- Reflect on some of your favorite, most exuberant celebrations. Connect it to how this might have reflected the Israelite's experience as God entered into the temple.
- 2- Take some time to talk about God entering your life. Even if you've shared your faith story with your family before? Take some time to share it again.
- 3- Consider ways that God is appearing in your life right now. Maybe it's not evidenced by fire from heaven, but how might God be showing up, entering into your life lately?

PRAY

TRY THIS: Light a candle, or a fire in your fireplace. Watch the flame and think about the power that must have been displayed at the temple that day when fire from heaven burned the offering. Ask God to "show up" in your life this week, and to open your eyes and heart so you are sure you see it.

ENTER

STUDY #4

Reading: Luke 1: 26-56

THINK ABOUT IT

You may know the popular Christmas song, “Mary, Did You Know?” It ponders how much Mary knew about the child she was carrying, if she knew he was the Son of God. But take some time to dwell on the announcement in vv. 26-38. She did know! She knew that her baby was going to be a king, a ruler, a holy one, the Son of God. She might not have known or understood all the details of God’s plan but as she grew large with child, she knew that the child she was carrying was destined for great things. God entered into human form through Mary. She was with God. She felt GOD grow within her. She felt GOD move within her. Remember that in grace, God now enters us: the awesome Holy One, the Son of God in *you*. You are with God. Do you feel GOD grow within you? Do you feel GOD move within and through you? God is mighty and great and powerful. That’s why we considered last week the thought of coming to God in worship. This week we marvel at the fact that God loves us so much that Christ chose to enter into our world. The precious miracle of Christmas is not only that a virgin conceived, but the larger truth that our amazing and great God chose to enter into our world...into us.

DISCUSS

- 1- Look again at Mary’s Song (vs. 46-56.) Talk about which of those words really resonate with you. What parts of Mary’s song do you relate to as you reflect on how God has entered into your world?
- 2- If you’ve carried a child, try to explain to your group, your family some of the experience of having a child grow inside of you. Discuss what it might have been like for Mary.
- 3- Just like Mary felt Jesus within her, there are times when we feel God moving within us. There are times of great joy when the Spirit moves within us, there are times of sorrow when the Spirit wrenches within, and so many instances between. Talk about when you’ve experienced God moving within you.

PRAY

TRY THIS: Write your own song/poem, like Mary, to celebrate the particular ways you have experienced God coming into our world. Read it together aloud and celebrate how God has lovingly entered into your life