



MORNING SCHEDULE

10am Breakfast & Connect

10:30am BiOY Devotional

Open with prayer, invite people to take turns reading sections, discuss "take aways," close this segment in prayer

11am - 12pm "What's Your Story?"

Facilitate using the 5 Conversation questions (pg. 6) / Wrap Up / Prayer

DEVOTIONAL INSTRUCTIONS

As you read (and/or listen to the audio of) the devotional and scriptures below, do so through the lens of our "What's Your Story?" theme, pay attention to any key verses, phrases, or thoughts that jump out to you, so that you can share them during the brief "take aways" discussion at the end.

**THE
BIBLE**
WITH NICKY AND PIPPA GUMBEL

Day 165

A Spacious Place

<https://bible.alpha.org>

Express Version

Scripture Readings

Wisdom	Psalm 73:23–28
New Testament	Acts 9:1–31
Old Testament	2 Samuel 22:2–20

Introduction

John Newton (1725–1801) was a militant atheist, bully and blasphemer. He was a wild and angry young man. He was press-ganged into the Navy at the age of eighteen where he broke the rules so recklessly that he was publicly flogged for desertion. He was hated and feared by his crewmates and himself became a slave trader.

At the age of twenty-three, Newton's ship encountered a severe storm off the coast of Donegal and almost sank. He called out to God as the ship filled with water and on that day, 10 March 1748, God rescued him. He began a new life. He started to pray and read the Bible. Eventually he joined William Wilberforce in the campaign to abolish the slave trade and became a leading light in that campaign.

Newton is best known as the author of the hymn 'Amazing Grace': *Amazing grace!
How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now I'm found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

To be rescued is to be saved, set free, delivered from danger, attack or harm. Jesus is the one who rescues you and brings you into 'a spacious place' (2 Samuel 22:20).

Wisdom

Psalm 73:23–28

23 Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards you will take me into glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 Those who are far from you will perish... 28 But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

Commentary A spacious place for you

Have you ever experienced the slippery slope of sin? You find yourself slipping further and further down a path that you do not really want to be on. The psalmist found himself on the slippery slope: 'As for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked' (vv.2–3).

Your whole perspective changes when you enter 'the sanctuary of God' (v.17a): 'Then, I understood their final destiny' (v.17b). It is the arrogant and wicked who are on 'slippery ground' (v.18). Although they may seem outwardly successful and prosperous, they are on a road that leads to destruction (vv.19–20). It is 'senseless and ignorant' (v.22) to be envious of the 'ungodly'. When you get a proper perspective, you realize how almost unbelievably blessed you are (vv.23–26).

There is nothing that compares to walking in a relationship with God, knowing his presence, his guidance and his strength, and his promise that he will take you into glory. You are far better off than the 'ungodly', both in this life and in the future. God brings you into his 'spacious place'. When you see what you have been rescued from, you realize how good it is to be near God (v.28), and you want to pass the good news on to others: 'But I'm in the very presence of God – oh, how refreshing it is! I've made LORD God my home. God, I'm telling the world what you do! (v.28, MSG).

Prayer

Lord, thank you that you have rescued me from the slippery slope and brought me into a spacious place.

New Testament

Acts 9:1–31

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

5 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked.

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 6 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'

7 The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised...

20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

Commentary A spacious place for the church

Do you know anyone who is very antagonistic towards Christians and the Christian faith? Saul was like that. John Newton was like that. I was like that. When we read the account of Saul's conversion it gives us hope that God can change the most unexpected people.

In this passage we see a double rescue. The church is rescued from the darkness brought about by Saul's attacks, and Saul is rescued from his own inner darkness (13:9). God's transforming power changed Saul from a persecutor of the church into the great church leader, evangelist and apostle Paul.

Saul had a privileged background. He was a Roman citizen from Tarsus. He was a highly educated intellectual. He was a qualified lawyer. He was a deeply 'religious' man with a strong belief in God. Yet, Saul was living in darkness on a road that led to destruction. He was 'out for the kill' (9:1, MSG). He was trying to arrest Christians and put them in prison (v.2). He had a terrible reputation among the Christians because of 'all the harm he [had] done to [them]' (v.13) and the fact that he wreaked 'havoc' among followers of Jesus (v.21).

On the road to Damascus, Saul 'was suddenly dazed by a blinding flash of light' (v.3, MSG). Jesus appeared to him and said, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' (v.4). As Saul had never met him before, how could he be persecuting Jesus? In that moment, he must have realised that the church is Jesus. It is his body. In persecuting Christians, he was in fact persecuting Jesus. Later, he was to develop this understanding that the church is the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12–14).

Saul's physical blindness symbolized the spiritual darkness in his life at that point. When Ananias laid hands on him, his sight was restored and he was filled with the Spirit (Acts 9:17): 'Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again' (v.18). He was rescued from physical and spiritual darkness.

Not only did Jesus rescue Saul from darkness, but he also appointed him as his 'chosen instrument'. He said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel' (v.15).

However, God did not promise him an easy life. With great privilege would come suffering, 'for I will make it clear to him how much he will be afflicted and must endure and suffer for my name's sake' (v.16). At once, Saul began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God (v.20). He grew 'more and more powerful... proving that Jesus is the Christ' (v.22). Like a lawyer, he produced the evidence to show that something had in fact happened in history. Jesus had been crucified, raised from the dead and is the Christ.

Through the rescue of Saul, the church was also rescued: 'Things calmed down after that and the church had smooth sailing for a while. All over the country – Judea, Samaria, Galilee – the church grew. They were permeated with a deep sense of reverence for God. The Holy Spirit was with them, strengthening them. They prospered wonderfully' (v.31, MSG). God had brought the church into a spacious place and they enjoyed a time of peace and blessing.

Prayer

Lord, I pray that you will bring the church in our nation into a spacious place, that strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it will enjoy a time of peace and grow in numbers.

Old Testament

2 Samuel 22:2–20

2 'The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; 3 my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. 7 'In my distress I called to the LORD; I called out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears. 17 'He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. 18 He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. 19 They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. 20 He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.

Commentary A spacious place forever

As David comes to the end of his life, he praises God for rescuing him again and again from his enemies and from death and destruction (chapter 22 – the song is also found in Psalm 18). God is his 'rescuing knight' (2 Samuel 22:2, MSG).

'A hostile world! I called to God, to my God I cried out. From his palace he heard me call; my cry brought me right into his presence – a private audience!' (v.7, MSG). Many times, he called out to the Lord and the Lord heard his voice. 'He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters' (v.17). 'He rescued me from my powerful enemy...' (v.18). 'He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me' (v.20, see also v.49).

When God rescues you, he does not want you to stay as you are: ‘When I cleaned up my act, he gave me a fresh start... God rewrote the text of my life’ (vv.21,25, MSG). He wants you to lead a blameless life and to keep yourself from sin (v.24). He wants you to be ‘faithful’ (v.26), pure (v.27) and humble (v.28).

With God’s help, you can ‘advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall’ (v.30). God arms you with strength (v.33) and enables you to stand on the heights (v.34). He broadens the path beneath you so that your ankles do not turn over (v.37).

Whatever you are facing – a difficult boss, a complicated marriage, raising a problematic child – God gives you strength to stick with it.

David, in the evening of his life, summed up his experience of God and of life (chapter 23). God had rescued him and anointed him (23:1): ‘The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue’ (v.2).

God had already saved him. Yet, there was more to come: ‘Will he not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire?’ (v.5). God’s rescue plan of salvation will one day be brought to fruition. On that day, the rescue will be complete and you will enjoy a spacious place for ever.

Prayer

Lord, thank you that you have rescued us through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Thank you that one day the rescue will be complete, when Jesus returns and we will be in a ‘spacious place’ with him forever.

Pippa adds (Pippa is Nicky’s wife)

In 2 Samuel 22 it says: ‘It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect’ (v.33). This is rather encouraging when I feel so unprepared for so many situations, most of the time.

Thought for the Day

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now I’m found, Was blind, but now I see. – John Newton

Take Aways

What’s a verse, phrase, or thought that jumped out at you from today’s devotional reading?



Summer House Church Gatherings

What's Your Story?

PRE-HOUSE CHURCH ASSIGNMENT

Take a few minutes sometime before House Church Sunday to read, reflect, and write down your answers to the “What’s Your Story?” questions below. Thinking through these questions beforehand will greatly enhance our time together. *NOTE: Our goal is to get to know each other a little better, but we also want everyone to feel comfortable. So, feel free to share your answers at your level of comfort or not at all.*

Introductions

Have everyone share their name, family, and where they live.

What's Your Story?

INSTRUCTIONS: If there’s not enough time for everyone to share, here are some ideas.

1) You can have half the people can answer all 5 questions below today, and the others can share the next time (July 19). 2) Everyone can answer the first 3 questions below today, and then the last 2 questions on July 19. *NOTE: It will help the conversation if, when sharing, everyone can try to be brief (see the share times suggested with each question).*

1. **BIRTHPLACE:** Where were you born? Where did you grow up? What brought you to Atlanta? (Sharing time: 1 minute)
2. **WORK / FUN:** What do you do for work? What do you do for fun? (Sharing time: 1 minute)
3. **GOOD NEWS CHURCH:** How did you find Good News Church GA? What do you like about it? (Sharing time: 1-2 minutes)
4. **UPBRINGING:** Did you grow up in church? Did your religious upbringing draw you to faith or repel you from it? (Sharing time: 2-3 minute)
5. **FAITH EXPERIENCE:** Where there any significant events, life experiences, or turning point moments that were instrumental in drawing you to faith and/or bringing you closer to Jesus (and into church)? (Sharing time: 3-5 minute)