

ALLEY Rundown – July 1-3, 2023

Today's Bible Story: Salvation is Here (Salvation Is God's Gift) • *Ephesians 2:8-9*

Today's Key Question: How do you feel when you get a gift?

Today's Bottom Line: Jesus is a gift for everyone.

Monthly Memory Verse: *God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift.* Ephesians 2:8 (NIRV)

SLIDE: Theme

Welcome, everyone! I am so pumped for another month here in the Alley. I hope you're ready and set, because we're keeping things moving, just like last month.

I know it's July and we're celebrating the fourth of July holiday this week, but right now I'm thinking back to Christmas—and even to past birthdays—and I have a question. Has anyone ever gotten a really horrible gift? A gift that, when you opened it, you tried really hard to be excited about, but it was something you really didn't like too much? Turn to someone near you and tell them about it.

Give kids a few minutes to talk about this—and add your own well-meaning but off-putting gift story.

What about the *best* gift you've ever gotten? Or even better, what's the best gift you've ever *given* to someone? Find a friend near you and tell them all about that!

Give kids a few minutes to talk about this and then take a few answers from the group.

Gifts are an amazing way to make someone else feel special—and sometimes you get the *perfect* gift for someone, and you can't *wait* to give it to them. It's really exciting, the anticipation, waiting for them to open your gift. And you can't wait to see their reaction! Anyone know what I'm talking about?

So what happens if that person opened your really amazing gift, maybe something you spent a ton of time and thought on, and they weren't really appreciative of it? What if they were like, '*Oh, great, I've already got three of these,*' and then tossed it aside?

How do you deal with that? Good questions, right? And the answers aren't so black and white. When faced with these kinds of questions, a great place to look for answers is (*hold up Bible*) right here. People were inspired to write down what God said and did thousands of years ago—and we can take these stories and accounts and letters and still learn from them today, thousands of years later.

To help us answer some of these questions, we're heading to the New Testament of our Bible, but first let's do a quick recap.

If you've been here in the Alley lately, you know we've been going through God's Big Story in the Bible (*hold up Bible*)—all the way from the very beginning.

We saw how God created EVERYTHING. People turned away from God . . . but God had a plan to make everything right. God's plan was to send Jesus to be our Savior!

While Jesus was on earth, He taught amazing things about God, and He showed what love is all about. The religious leaders at the time didn't believe that Jesus was and is the Son of God, so they sent Jesus to die on the cross. But then Jesus came back to life!

Jesus stayed on earth for 40 more days and then returned to heaven. After Jesus left, the early church grew quickly, and lots of people decided to put their faith in Jesus. People like Peter and Paul traveled all over the place to tell others about Jesus.

Paul especially started many new churches all over the Roman territories. He started one church in a city called Ephesus. That's where we start today with a letter called Ephesians. We call it a letter because many of the early church leaders wrote letters to groups of Christians around the known world to encourage them, to teach them, and sometimes to challenge or correct them if necessary.

The apostle Paul wrote quite a few letters that we have in the New Testament of our Bible. One of those letters was written to a group of Christians living in a city called Ephesus. If you live in Ephesus, you are an Ephesian. Hence, the letter to the Ephesians. Let's check it out...

VIDEO: The So and So Show

It's difficult to think about getting something for nothing. It's not in our nature, really, just to believe that you could be given something without being asked for something in return. We're a very 'what do I get out of it' sort of people.

But God's not a person. God doesn't only pass out love or grace to those who most deserve it, hand picking some and not others. It's because we're messed up and broken that God offers grace freely. Some of you might think, 'I'll never be good enough for God to love me.' But the truth is exactly the opposite. You're never bad enough for God not to.

This can really help us as we think about the people in our lives who maybe sometimes frustrate us or get on our nerves. Sometimes we might want to withhold our love or kindness from them in order to show them that they haven't earned it. But remember, if God treated us like this, we'd all be sunk. Instead, we can be more like God by loving people even when they don't deserve it.

It might be easy to think that because the apostle Paul—the guy who wrote this letter in the first place—said we can't earn anything, we should just simply stop trying. I mean, it's free, right? That means I'm off the hook!

Not exactly. We're saved by God's grace through our faith in Jesus, but the best way to show your faith in Jesus is to treat people like He treated people.

We aren't saved by good works—that is a gift. But once we have put our faith in Jesus and accept that gift, we now get to do good works as our gift back to God! Not because we need to earn anything from God. We do good and love others because God loved us first and prepared us to do good and love others well!

Let's learn our memory verse for this month, Ephesians 2:8. This is the same part of Paul's letter to the Ephesians that we just heard about. Say it with me.

SLIDE: Memory Verse

"God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift." (Ephesians 2:8, NIV)

Today as we finish our large group, think about this:

SLIDE: Key Question

"How do you feel when you get a gift? How does this change the way you think about God as the gift-giver? Or you as the gift-receiver? Before we move on, let's pray and ask for help to understand God's grace more and more today. Let's pray."

Communicator leads group in a prayer related to what they just heard.

OFFERING:

Where has our offering money been going this summer? Yep, to families in Kenya! They are experiencing a lack of food resources because of an on-going drought. We are collecting money for food baskets for the families who live in Turkana. If you have any offering, you can bring it up now while we watch this video of Turkana families receiving baskets.

Turkana video #2

****AT YOUR COORDINATOR'S DIRECTION, YOU WILL EITHER DIVIDE INTO SMALL GROUPS OR DO ACTIVITIES TOGETHER.**