



Staff Devotions

Devotion 1

Stand for God!

by Stacia McKeever

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." Hebrews 11:7

This week at *Ocean Commotion*, we'll be teaching our kids to stand for God, obey God, trust God, thank God, and fear God, just as Noah did 4,300 years ago. All characteristics that we want to instill in our children, right? But if we're not careful as we teach good character qualities, we can easily fall into the trap of moralism. Moralism is the idea that we can achieve righteousness or right living apart from the gospel.

We teach moralism when we say, "Noah took a stand for God, and you should, too!" While it's true that Noah stood for God in the face of unrelenting wickedness, he did not do it in his own power. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). He walked with God (Genesis 6:9). He knew that God was the one who was saving him from the coming judgment and, by faith in God, he willingly responded to God's call on his life (Hebrews 11:7). Noah's stand for God was grounded in his faith in God.

Think about it this way: So what if we teach kids to stand for God? If we teach them to stand for God apart from the gospel, they are as much in danger of the fires of hell as the child who mocks God. If we teach kids to obey God's commands (be kind, tell the truth, obey your parents, stay sexually pure until marriage) apart from the gospel, they are as much in danger of eternal separation from God's goodness as the homosexuals who

outright defy God's commands. If we teach them to thank God but don't hold out the ultimate reason we give thanks—that we've been rescued from the eternal wrath of God on our sins—we bring them no closer to the kingdom of heaven than the ingrates who refuse to acknowledge God even exists.

We don't want to encourage kids to change themselves—to take a stand in their own power just because some guy did it thousands of years ago. Being good, standing for God—moralism—doesn't save anybody. After all, it wasn't for the righteous that Jesus came; He came for sinners (Luke 5:32). Instead, we need to encourage our children to realize their desperate need for a Savior who will help them stand for Him through the indwelling power of His Holy Spirit.

As we go through this week, let's look for opportunities to share Noah's life with our kids—how he stood for God, obeyed God, trusted God, thanked God, and feared God—through the lens of his faith in God. Let's point them to the only One who can save us and sanctify us—the only truly moral One who gives us His morality when we can't manufacture any on our own (2 Corinthians 5:21). Let's reject the idea that morality is our end goal. And let's encourage them to trust whole-heartedly in Jesus and to rely on Him to work out these attributes in us—the only true basis for morality that exists.



Devotion 2

Obey God!

by Dan Lietha

"If you love Me, keep My commandments." John 14:15

Images of Noah's Ark—mostly directed at children—are everywhere: on fine art prints, children's books, wallpaper, toys, tapestries, greeting cards, T-shirts, magazine and TV ads, posters, wall decorations, and even business logos. And these images are not just aimed at the "religious" market; they are also hot items among the secular crowd.

Have you ever stopped to think how the Ark—such a powerful reminder of God's judgment—became so popular, considering so many reject the true account of Noah's Flood?

It can't be because of what the Ark really stands for. The Bible says that people are willingly ignorant that "the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water" (2 Peter 3:5–6).

A clue to the Ark's popularity can be found in the Ark images themselves. Most Ark images bear little resemblance to the one described in Genesis. Artists generally ignore the information in Scripture in favor of a wide variety of imaginative shapes, sizes, and themes. The most common version is a toy-like boat, stuffed full of cuddly animals that crowd around Noah. Why is that?

Some artists treat the Ark like an amusing myth or children's fairy tale. They do not believe that the story is an account of actual events, and therefore they have no problem in doing anything they want with it. Even artists and companies who believe the Bible's account of Noah's Flood sometimes choose to create a caricature of the Ark for artistic and sales reasons. For instance, small arks take less time to draw, are cute, sell well, and make it easy to show the entire Ark and animals in one scene. And small arks aren't controversial, either, because they don't look real.

In addition to a lack of accuracy, the modern arks have a more serious drawback. One of the most-asked questions about Noah's Ark is how Noah fit all the animals into it. The size of the Ark is critical to the believability of the biblical account, and so is a realistic shape that could survive the Flood. Yet the Ark images that come to most people's minds fall far short.

In our modern, media-saturated culture, it is true that seeing is believing, especially for young children. Images make a strong impression and often overshadow the biblical account, even for those who have a moderate familiarity with whatever event is being described. So while airplanes and other well-known objects may be fine to caricature, promoting poor caricatures of the Ark can be harmful.

Sadly, with the best of intentions, the church has promoted cutesy caricatures of the Ark in Sunday school materials and other literature, leaving the world largely unaware of the real message of the Ark that God instructed Noah to build.

The Bible explains why the modern world is willingly ignorant. It's because they don't want to face the reality that judgment is coming again: "But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7).

Today, as we talk about the Ark that Noah built, let's be sure that we're portraying a historically accurate one that held thousands of animals, their food, and Noah's family, so that we're encouraging a robust faith in our kids and not encouraging them to harbor doubts about the biblical account.



Devotion 3

Trust God!

by Gary Vaterlaus

"But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.'" Psalm 31:14

In His instructions for building the Ark, God told Noah to "set the door of the Ark in its side" (Genesis 6:16). The Ark had only one door to pass through to escape God's terrible judgment. By faith, Noah and his family entered the Ark. Once they were all inside, the Lord shut them in (Genesis 7:16).

What is significant about God shutting the door of the Ark? It provides a wonderful demonstration of the twin truths of man's responsibility and God's sovereignty that we see throughout Scripture.

After God shut the door, the time of judgment arrived. Only those who had gone through the doorway would be saved; no one else could enter. Noah and his family had to obey God's command to build and then enter the Ark for salvation—but it was God who had commanded the Ark to be built as the means of Noah's family being saved in this time of judgment.

The Ark pictures salvation in Jesus Christ, our "Ark" of salvation. Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved" (John 10:9).

The Bible makes it clear that we are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Nothing we can do can save us from our sin and its consequence of eternal separation from God. But the Bible also tells us that "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). It is "by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). Nothing we can do will save us from our sin—salvation is all of God. Yet our responsibility is to go through the doorway (Jesus), and God will save us.

How do we put all this together? Can we, as finite humans, ever understand the ways of an infinite God? Only God can bring man's responsibility and His sovereignty perfectly together.

Today, as we present this glorious gospel, in a simplified form for our kids, let's remember that God sovereignly saves but that we have the responsibility of calling these precious image bearers to repentance and faith in Jesus. And let's pray that God would be pleased to bring that repentance and faith to those in our care who haven't yet embraced His gospel.



Devotion 4

Thank God!

by Steve Ham

"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Man made his choice to be a rebel. These are pretty solemn words to start our devotional today, but they are true words, and words we must accept as part of our worldview. In Genesis 6–8 we read of the catastrophic global Flood that God used to judge mankind because of our great wickedness. We see the devastating effects of this Flood in most of the rock layers visible around the world today. When we see the record of destruction and death within these rock layers, it gives us a sense of awe of God's power in judgment, and it is entirely reasonable that it should also give us a sense of fear. God is a just God, and we are sinners deserving of judgment.

Here lies the first great example of the consistency of the biblical message. God promised a "Seed" from Eve to save the world (Genesis 3:15), and that Seed came despite the devastation of a global judgment. While evidence of the Flood shows us the awesome power of God in judgment, the fact that any of us can even view this evidence is also testament of God's consistent saving grace. In an unfathomable act of His grace, God protected a line of descendants throughout human history, from Adam to the Savior. In today's verse we find a simple and yet very powerful example of that consistent grace.

It is important that we understand the significance of the term *grace* when we look at the consistency of the message of Scripture. Grace is not just an act of goodwill on behalf of God. Grace also implies our great unworthiness. Grace is not something that can be deserved. On the contrary, it is something of which we are totally undeserving. Grace is afforded to the blameworthy. Since our sin in the Garden, God's grace in the promised Seed has always been an ultimate display of His mercy and love to sinful humanity.

Although he was a sinner, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." It is because of this grace that God gave Noah the exact dimensions for a life-saving vessel. He also brought a pair of every kind of land-dwelling animal (and seven of some) to Noah to replenish the earth after the Flood. He saved Noah's entire family to repopulate humanity and preserve the line of the Seed.

The rainbow provides us with a constant reminder of God's faithfulness to both judge sin and graciously save (Genesis 9:13). Noah thanked God for His gracious salvation from the watery judgment; we ought also to thank God for His gracious salvation from His eternal judgment on our sin. And today, we can encourage our children to truly give thanks for God's grace in everything.



Devotion 5

Fear God!

by Steve Ham

"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" Psalm 139:7

Have you ever heard Christians make statements like "God turned up"? What about when people pray and invite God into their meeting? Can these statements be consistent with the Bible's teaching on the presence of God?

The verse above tells us that we cannot go anywhere from God's presence. In fact, if you read further in that passage, it tells us that we are not able to escape God's presence anywhere on earth, in heaven, and so on. God sees all and is everywhere, and the great example we all know, Jonah, would testify to this.

The Bible gives us insight into a history of this world that is consistent with the physical evidence we have today; however, God's Word can only be fully comprehended with an understanding that the Bible is given to us by an ever-present God.

Take, for example, the Flood of Noah's day. The Genesis account tells us that all the fountains of the deep broke forth and that all the high mountains of the earth were covered. How could we know this but for an ever-present God? Yet, this is one

example of many in the Bible that are truly consistent with an understanding of God's eternal and limitless presence. Since the Bible is God's Word, we would also expect it to state God's limitless presence, which is what we find.

To make statements such as "God turned up" or to "invite" God to a meeting in which He is already present is more or less a misunderstanding of His omnipresence. God always "turns up" because He is always present and always working His purpose. This should give us a sense of awe. We spend every waking and sleeping moment in the presence of an awesome Creator. And every moment of our VBS day is spent in the presence of the same God who judged the world of Noah's day with a Flood and saved Noah on the Ark. If that doesn't inspire us to fear God—to take Him seriously—what will?

Today, as we teach our children to fear God, let's remember that we are in the very presence of the One we're teaching about.