

Forward: Claiming the Life God Gave You
Joshua 13:8-21:45 – Part 5
Cities of Refuge
Joshua 20:1-9

Intro

Fantastic video summary → <https://youtu.be/ZbcVrLb0w-4?si=PdVQkiBPae1y4zfE>

I've got 4 kids ranging from ages 9-4: my girls, Elisabeth, Lydia, and Julia, and then my little man, Titus. We love going to parks, playing outside, enjoying the sunshine, and running around till we're all exhausted. When we go to playgrounds, one of their favorite games to play is "monster." It's essentially a pairing of the classic games of tag and hide-and-seek. The person who's "it" is the monster and chases everyone around and try to catch and tag the others.

Since the kids don't really like to be "it," that means that I'm normally the monster. Now, I'm still young and agile enough for this to be fun for me. It gives me the opportunity to remind them of a central truth of fathering: that no matter how old daddy is, daddy is always going to be bigger, stronger, and faster than they ever will be. So, I get to be big, bad dad and chase them all over the playground while they run and scream in terror.

Now these playgrounds are designed for little kids under 4 feet tall so I can't really get up to top speed and I have to duck under all the bars, so I don't clean my own clock by running headfirst into them. Unfortunately, I've had to learn that the hard way! But every now and then I've got to flex on 'em and remind them that daddy's still got it and I go hunt them down one-by-one. But even after the monster has caught all the little children and conquered the playground kingdom, I still have to be the monster and do it all over again.

I've often thought about why my kids like to be chased around by the big, bad monster instead of being the monster themselves. And while there is probably a plethora of psychological reasons, there's one reason that really sticks out to me. There's an adrenaline rush when you're running for your life from the monster trying to eat you and you to beat that monster back to "base."

Now again, my kids are ages 9-4, so the actual "base" will change all throughout the game in order to benefit them. It might start as the red platform over there. But then it'll turn into the yellow slide over there. And then they'll be closer to the blue swings and those will turn into base. But no matter how many times they change where the base is, what remains the same is the fundamental truth that **safety can only be found at base**. Every other place on the playground isn't safe from the monster, he can get to them in every nook and cranny. There's nowhere to hide. Except for base. The monster can be right on your heels, he could be stretching out his hand to snatch you from safety, and you be just within his reach. But as long as even just a piece of you gets to base, you're safe! What an amazing feeling it is to be hunted down with your life on the line, only to find that you have found safety from the one hunting you! You beat him! You won!

Now, you might not have grown up playing "monster" like my kids are, but I am certain that every single one of us understands the concept of "base," of safety, of security, of refuge, of what the Psalms and Proverbs call

our “strong tower.”¹ This concept is what our text in Joshua is all about today. We are in Joshua chapter 20 and we’re going to read about the implementation of the law of the Cities of Refuge that God initially commanded to Moses and now Joshua is putting into place.

While you might not be familiar with the term, “the Cities of Refuge,” this is going to be a simple concept to understand. Austin blessed me with a “softball text,” a text tossed underhand nice and slow for me to hit over the left field fence. But while this text might be easy to comprehend, there are HUGE applications for us once we understand this concept.

Old Testament background & additional commentary

Numbers 35:1-34

The Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying, “Command the people of Israel to give to the Levites some of the inheritance of their possession as cities for them to dwell in. And you shall give to the Levites pasturelands around the cities. The cities shall be theirs to dwell in, and their pasturelands shall be for their cattle and for their livestock and for all their beasts. The pasturelands of the cities, which you shall give to the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around. And you shall measure, outside the city, on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits, the city being in the middle. This shall belong to them as pastureland for their cities.

“The cities that you give to the Levites shall be the six cities of refuge, where you shall permit the manslayer to flee, and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities. All the cities that you give to the Levites shall be forty-eight, with their pasturelands. And as for the cities that you shall give from the possession of the people of Israel, from the larger tribes you shall take many, and from the smaller tribes you shall take few; each, in proportion to the inheritance that it inherits, shall give of its cities to the Levites.”

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall select cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person without intent may flee there. The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation for judgment. And the cities that you give shall be your six cities of refuge. You shall give three cities beyond the Jordan, and three cities in the land of Canaan, to be cities of refuge. These six cities shall be for refuge for the people of Israel, and for the stranger and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills any person without intent may flee there.

“But if he struck him down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. And if he struck him down with a stone tool that could cause death, and he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. Or if he struck him down with a wooden tool that could cause death, and he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. The avenger of blood shall himself put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. And if he pushed him out of hatred or hurled something at him, lying in wait, so that he died, or in enmity struck him down with his hand, so that he died, then he who struck the blow shall be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

¹ Psalm 61:3, Proverbs 18:10

“But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or hurled anything on him without lying in wait or used a stone that could cause death, and without seeing him dropped it on him, so that he died, though he was not his enemy and did not seek his harm, then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood, in accordance with these rules. And the congregation shall rescue the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he had fled, and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil. But if the manslayer shall at any time go beyond the boundaries of his city of refuge to which he fled, and the avenger of blood finds him outside the boundaries of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood. For he must remain in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest, but after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession. And these things shall be for a statute and rule for you throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.

“If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses. But no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness. Moreover, you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death. And you shall accept no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the high priest. You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I the Lord dwell in the midst of the people of Israel.”

35:6 “And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites,... The number of which is not yet expressed, but is afterwards: there shall be six cities for refuge; a sort of asylums, of which there were many among the Heathens, perhaps in imitation of these, for persons to have recourse to for safety, when in danger of life: the Septuagint render the words, "cities of flight" (b); or to flee unto, which certainly was the use of them: to this the apostle alludes when he speaks of some that fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before them, Heb 6:18, the word (c) used for refuge signifies "gathering or receiving", for here persons in distress gathered or betook themselves; and here they were received, retained, protected, and sheltered: what and where these six cities were to be, and were, is after shown: which ye shall appoint for the manslayer; not for any and everyone, not for one that killed a man presumptuously and purposely, through enmity and malice, but for one that did it ignorantly, unawares, and without design: that he may flee thither; with all haste, after the commission of the fact; and, to facilitate his flight, and that he might have no interruption in it, the sanhedrim were obliged to prepare the ways to the cities of refuge, and to make them fit and large; and they removed everything that might cause him to stumble; and they did not leave in the way neither an hillock, nor a dale, nor a river but they made a bridge over it, that nothing might retard him that fled thither, as it is said: thou shalt prepare thee a way; Deu 19:3 and the breadth of the way to the cities of refuge was not less than thirty two cubits; and at the parting of ways (on posts erected) were written, "refuge, refuge", so that the slayer might know (the way) and turn there (as this directed him): and on the fifteenth of Adar or February, they met every year, to take care of this business (d); and they also appointed two disciples of the wise men, or two studious and understanding persons, to accompany him, not so much for the direction of the way, as lest the avenger of blood should meet with him, and slay him in the way; and who were to talk to him, and persuade him not to do it, suggesting to him that it was not done designedly, but unawares, and that it would be a bad thing to kill a man for what he did not intend to do, and

which was done without any malice or enmity to the person killed, and with such like words to cool and appease the avenger (e): and to them ye shall add forty two cities; according to the Jewish writers these also were cities of refuge; for so they say (f), "all the cities of the Levites receive or are refuges, every one of them is a city of refuge, as it is said, "and to them ye shall add", &c. the Scripture makes them all alike for refuge: what difference is there between cities of refuge, which are separated for refuge, and the rest of the cities of the Levites? the gates of the cities of refuge receive, whether according to knowledge or not, (which Mr. Selden (g) interprets, whether the inhabitants will or not; but the sense of Maimonides elsewhere (h), and of other writers, is plainly this, whether according to the knowledge and intention of the manslayer or not, whether he knows it to be a city of refuge or :not, and whether he purposely came thither for safety or not,) and he that enters into them is safe; but the rest of the cities of the Levites do not receive, but according to knowledge (when the manslayer knowingly and designedly came thither for shelter); and a manslayer that dwells in a city of refuge gives no more for his house, but he that dwells in the other cities of the Levites gives more (or pays for it) to the owner of the house;"but though this is their unanimous opinion, it rather seems, according to the letter of the Scripture, that only six were cities of refuge, and the rest were for the Levites to dwell in by themselves. (b) , Sept. (c) "receptus", Junius & Tremellius; "collectionis", Piscator; R. Sol. Ohel Moed, fol. 82. 1. "proprie significat collectionem vel retentionem", Munster. (d) Maimon. Hilchot Rotzeach, c. 8. sect. 5. (e) Misn. Maccot, c. 2. sect. 5. & Maimon. & Bartenora in ib. (f) Maimon. ut supra, (d)) sect. 11. (g) De Jure Natarae & Gentium, l. 4. c. 2. p. 489. (h) Maimon. & Bartenora in Misn. Maccot, l. 2. sect. 4."²

35:14 "Ye shall give three cites on this side Jordan,.... Which were Bezer in the wilderness, out of the tribe of Reuben; and Ramoth in Gilead, out of the tribe of Gad; and Golan in Bashan, out of the tribe of Manasseh, Jos 20:8, and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan: which were Kadesh in Galilee, in Mount Naphtali; Shechem in Mount Ephraim; and Kirjatharba, or Hebron, in the mountain of Judah, Jos 20:7. which shall be cities of refuge; the three on the other side Jordan, the Jews say, were separated by Moses, and the three in the land of Canaan by Joshua, but not one of them was a refuge until they were all separated (m): it may seem strange that there should be as many in the two tribes and a half on the other side Jordan, as in the nine tribes and a half in the land of Canaan; let it be observed, what the Jewish writers, say (n), Moses separated three cities beyond Jordan, and opposite them Joshua separated three in the land of Canaan; and they were like two rows in a vineyard, Hebron in Judea was opposite Bezer in the wilderness; Shechem in Mount Ephraim was opposite Ramoth in Gilead; Kadesh in Mount Naphtali was opposite Golan in Bashan; and the three were so disposed, that there was as much space from the south (of the land of Israel) to Hebron as from Hebron to Shechem; and as much from Hebron to Shechem as from Shechem to Kadesh; and as much from Shechem to Kadesh as from Kadesh to the north beyond Jordan; and it should be known that the land of the tribes beyond Jordan extended in length as far as the land of Canaan, and was equal to it, running along it; so that those in the land of Canaan could soon and easily get over Jordan to the cities of refuge there, if there was occasion; besides, there is a direction given, that if their coast should be enlarged, they were to add three cities more in the land of Canaan, Deu 19:8, hence the Jews have a notion, that in the days of the Messiah those three cities will be added (o); but the Messiah is come already, and is the antitype of them all. (m) Misn. Maccot, c. 2.

² Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 42643-42673). . Kindle Edition.

sect. 4. Maimon. Hilchot Rotzeach, c. 8. sect. 2. 3. & in Pirke, c. 4. sect. 2. & Jarchi in loc. (n) T. Bab. Maccot, fol. 9. 2. (o) Maimon. Rotzeach, c. 8. sect. 4.”³

35:15 “These six cities shall be a refuge both for the children of Israel and for the stranger,.... For an Israelite, and a proselyte of righteousness, one that embraced the Jewish religion, and in all things conformed to it, and to whom there was but one law in things civil and religious: and for the sojourner among you; the proselyte of the gate, who renounced idolatry, and observed the commands of the sons of Noah, but in other things did not comply with the Jewish ceremonies, yet had the benefit of the cities of refuge equally with the other; though the Jews say (p), such a proselyte or sojourner had only this privilege, who slew a proselyte, but not if he slew an Israelite; but for this distinction there is no foundation in the text: that everyone that killeth any person unawares may flee thither; whether an Israelite, or a proselyte of righteousness or of the gate. (p) Misn. Maccot, c. 2. sect. 3.”⁴

35:25 “And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the avenger of blood,.... Put him under the care of proper persons, to conduct him to one of the cities of refuge, or put him in the way to it; and restrain the avenger of blood from pursuing him, until such time that it may be judged he is safe arrived there: and the congregation shall restore him to the city of refuge, whither he was fled; so that it seems by this, when one had been guilty of manslaughter, and fled to one of the cities of refuge, he might be taken from thence and had before a court of justice, and there take his trial; and if it appeared that the fact was committed by him, ignorantly, unawares, and without design, then he was returned to his city of refuge; but, if otherwise, he was put to death, notwithstanding he had fled thither; and so it is said in the Misnah (t), that"at first, or formerly, one that killed another ignorantly or presumptuously, they sent him before to one of the cities of refuge, and the sanhedrim sent and fetched him from thence: he who was condemned to death by the court, they slew him; he that was not condemned was dismissed; he that was condemned to banishment they returned him to his place, according to Num 35:25." and he shall abide in it, unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil: and then he was to be set at liberty, and return to his house and family and have his former possessions and honours, if he had any, restored unto him, the commission or warrant for his detainer there ceasing, being made void by the death of the high priest; who was the prince of the priests and Levites, to whom those cities belonged, and so under his jurisdiction: or so it was ordered, because such was the general mourning for such a public loss as an high priest, that all private revenges would subside, and the cause of them be buried, in grief and forgetfulness; though, no doubt, this had a respect to something which will be hereafter taken notice of: the Jews say (u), that the mothers of the priests used to supply with a sufficient quantity of food and raiment such who fled to the cities of refuge, that they might not pray for the death of their sons; and according to them, a man's case was very bad when there was no high priest; for so they write (w)"he whose cause is finished (or his case determined in a court of judicature), and there is no high priest; and he that slays an high priest, or an high priest slays another, he never goes out, no not so much as to bear testimony in any cause, and even in what the congregation has need of him, but there are his dwelling, his

³ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 42712-42727). . Kindle Edition.

⁴ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 42728-42735). . Kindle Edition.

death, and his burial." (t) Misn. Maccot. c. 2. sect. 6. (u) Misn. Maccot. c. 2. sect. 3. (w) Misn. Maccot, c. 2. sect. 7."⁵

35:29 "So these things shall be for a statute of judgment unto you,.... A judicial law, according to which they were to proceed in all the above cases: throughout your generations in all your dwellings; throughout all ages, as long as they dwelt in the land of Canaan, even unto the times of the Messiah, in whom the things figured hereby had their accomplishment: the cities of refuge were types of Christ: hence a divine person, even the Messiah, is often spoken of as the refuge of his people, Psa 9:9 with which compare Heb 6:18 these were places to flee to, as the word is rendered by the Greek version; to Christ sensible sinners flee for shelter and safety, which supposes danger in themselves from the law and justice of God; a sense of that danger which makes them flee from wrath to come; a view of Christ, as a place of refuge, and that no other but he will serve their purpose, and therefore make all the haste and speed they can unto him. The word properly signifies cities of gathering, or of reception. There was a gathering of the elect of God to Christ at his death; and there is another at effectual calling, which is an act of God's grace, and a distinguishing one, when souls gather to Christ as their Saviour for righteousness, peace, pardon, rest, and everlasting life; and when Christ receives them, though sinners, into his arms, and into his heart, and into open fellowship with him, so as to dwell in him, where they dwell pleasantly and safely; he receives them into his house here, and into heaven hereafter; and by, and in Christ, those that flee to him, and are received by him, are retained and preserved from Satan, law, hell and death. The cities of refuge were of God's appointing; so Christ, as a Saviour, and rock of refuge to his people, is appointed and foreordained of God; they were well known for refuges, as the Lord is in the places of Zion; they were open for all, at all times, as Christ is for all sinners, even the chief of sinners, Jews or Gentiles; they are all one in Christ, the Israelite, and the stranger and sojourner; all impediments were removed out of the way of them, and plain directions to them given, as are in the Gospel, and by the ministers of it; and there is always room in Christ for such that flee to him, as there was in those cities; and being in him, they are safe from the curse and condemnation of the law, from wrath to come, and from the second death; and their redemption and atonement, peace and reconciliation, liberty, life and salvation, are owing to the death of Christ, their high priest. Abendana (a) observes, that the death of the high priest atoned for the offence (of manslaughter), which was the reason the manslayer continued in the city of refuge till his death, and then was released: however, certain it is, that the death of Christ, our high priest, atones for every sin of those that flee to him, and by which they are reconciled to God. In some things there is a difference between these cities of refuge and Christ; they were six, he but one; they were for such only who shed blood ignorantly, he for such that were enemies to him, and lived in malice towards others, and guilty of the most enormous crimes: to be in these cities of refuge was a kind of exile and imprisonment, but they that are in Christ are freemen; it was possible that such might die that were in them, and at most were only delivered from temporal death, but they that flee to Christ for refuge are saved with an everlasting salvation. (a) Not. in Miclol Yophi in ver. 25."⁶

⁵ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 42780-42799). . Kindle Edition.

⁶ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 42821-42845). . Kindle Edition.

35:33 “So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are,.... The land of Canaan, as it had been by the old inhabitants of it, by idolatry, adultery, and murder: for blood it defileth the land: the shedding of innocent blood defiles a nation, and the inhabitants of it, brings guilt thereon, and subjects to punishment: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it; or "there can be no expiation" (b), or "atonement made" for it in any other way; the blood of the murderer is required at his hands, and nothing short of it will satisfy law and justice, see Gen 9:6. (b) "non posset expiatio", Junius & Tremellius, Piscator; to the same sense Pagninus, Montanus, Tigurine version.”⁷

35:34 “Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inherit,.... By the commission of such atrocious crimes, or suffering them to go unpunished, or by taking a compensation for the life of the guilty person: wherein I dwell; which is added to strengthen the exhortation, and as giving a reason why care should be taken not to pollute it, because the Holy God dwells there; as he did in the tabernacle erected for him, and in such a peculiar manner as he did not in other lands: for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel; he now dwelt among them as their God, and their King; his tent or tabernacle being pitched in the midst of the camps of Israel; and so he would continue to dwell among them when they were come to the land of Canaan, so long as they observed his laws, statutes, and ordinances; and therefore it behoved them to be careful that they did not pollute themselves and their land, and cause him to depart from them.”⁸

Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 42872-42879). . Kindle Edition.

Deuteronomy 4:41-43 – “Then Moses set apart three cities in the east beyond the Jordan, that the manslayer might flee there, anyone who kills his neighbor unintentionally, without being at enmity with him in time past; he may flee to one of these cities and save his life: Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland for the Reubenites, Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites.”

Deuteronomy 19:1-13

“When the Lord your God cuts off the nations whose land the Lord your God is giving you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses, you shall set apart three cities for yourselves in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess. You shall measure the distances and divide into three parts the area of the land that the Lord your God gives you as a possession, so that any manslayer can flee to them.

“This is the provision for the manslayer, who by fleeing there may save his life. If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in the past— as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies—he may flee to one of these cities and live, lest the avenger of blood in hot anger pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and strike him fatally, though the man did not deserve to die, since he had not hated his neighbor in the

⁷ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 42866-42871). . Kindle Edition.

⁸ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 42872-42879). . Kindle Edition.

past. Therefore I command you, You shall set apart three cities. And if the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as he has sworn to your fathers, and gives you all the land that he promised to give to your fathers— provided you are careful to keep all this commandment, which I command you today, by loving the Lord your God and by walking ever in his ways—then you shall add three other cities to these three, lest innocent blood be shed in your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, and so the guilt of bloodshed be upon you.

“But if anyone hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and attacks him and strikes him fatally so that he dies, and he flees into one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there, and hand him over to the avenger of blood, so that he may die. Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, so that it may be well with you.

19:3 “Thou shalt prepare thee a way,.... A road, an highway to those cities: on the first of Adar, or February, the magistrates used to meet, and proclaimed, or ordered to be proclaimed, that the ways be repaired (r), particularly those leading to the cities of refuge; which was done by making them smooth and plain, so that there was not an hill or dale to be seen; and by building bridges over rivers and brooks, that he might escape who had killed anyone through mistake, and not be hindered, lest the avenger of blood should overtake him and kill him (s); and therefore every obstruction was removed out of the way, that there might be a clear course for him; and at the parting of ways, or where two or more ways met, that he might not be at a loss one moment which way to take, "refuge" was written, as Jarchi and other writers observe, upon posts or pillars erected for that purpose: See Gill on Num 35:6, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee to inherit, in three parts; in each of which was to be a city of refuge, and those at an equal distance: so Jarchi observes, that this was done that there might be from the beginning of the border (of the land) unto the first city of the cities of refuge, according to the measure of a journey, that there is from that to the second, and so from the second to the third, and so from the third to the other border of the land of Israel: of the situation of these cities, so as to answer to those on the other side Jordan; see Gill on Num 35:14, that every slayer may flee thither; to that which is nearest and most convenient for him, that is, who had slain a man unawares, as follows. (r) Misn. Shekalim, c. 1. sect. 1. (s) Maimon. & Bartenora in ib.”⁹

Proposition: There are 2 focal points in Joshua’s implementation of the Cities of Refuge in Joshua 20:1-9.

The 1st focal point in Joshua’s implementation of the Cities of Refuge is:

1) **The Law to Establish Justice (1-6)**

Time to take notes

- A. Before we can talk about how justice is established, we need to define justice. **Justice is the authoritative and impartial establishment and declaration of truth, the righting of wrong, and the punishment of guilt.**^{10 11}

⁹ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 46677-46689). . Kindle Edition.

¹⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/justice>

¹¹ https://www.oed.com/dictionary/justice_n?tl=true

- B. Justice is carried out by those in power, those with authority. Those in power establish a law, and then those in power enforce that law. In America, this is our Justice System made up of “various agencies, establishments, and institutions tasked with administering or enforcing the law.”¹²
- C. Real justice is impartial. There is no favoritism. Justice isn’t justice if it’s only justice for people like me. The scales are meant to be balanced. Now before you start telling me that I worship a donkey or an elephant, listen to what I said again. Justice is impartial. That means that your skin color, gender, nationality, or economic status should have no bearing on your ability to receive justice.
- D. Justice is true establishment and declaration of innocence and guilt. An innocent person being declared guilty isn’t justice. A guilty person being declared innocent isn’t justice.
- E. Justice is restitution, the righting of wrong. If I stole \$20 from your pocket this morning, justice is making me pay that back.
- F. Lastly, justice is the punishment of guilt. For those found to be truly guilty of something that cannot be made right, justice enacts punishment. This is particularly relevant for the cities of refuge that we’re going to talk about today.
- G. Now that we’ve got a good working definition for justice, let’s get into our text.
- H. **[1] Then the LORD said to Joshua,**
- I. This little line gives the the setting for our text today. This lone word places us back to where we were in the text a few weeks ago. Chapters 14-19 are all about dividing up the Promised Land into its tribal territories. Austin did a great job walking us through these chapters! Here, after Joshua divided up all the land, God is speaking to him again.
- J. The last time the Lord spoke to Joshua was in chapter 13 and he said, “Allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you. Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh” (**Joshua 13:6-7**). However, God is speaking to Joshua again because he’s left off a very important piece of the command to divide the land. So important in fact, that this was the last time we have it recorded that God spoke to Joshua! God says:
- K. **[2] "Say to the people of Israel, 'Appoint the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, [3] that the manslayer who strikes any person without intent or unknowingly may flee there. They shall be for you a refuge from the avenger of blood.**
- L. These are the 2 main characters for our text today. The manslayer and the avenger of blood. For thousands of years, the common practice of the land would’ve been to avenge the life of someone killed. Essentially, something like Hammurabi’s Code where justice was acted out eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, and life for a life. This concept dates all the way back to Noah and the Flood.

¹²https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/justice_system#:~:text=A%20phrase%20that%20collectively%20describes,either%20civil%20or%20criminal%20law.

- M.** **Genesis 9:1-7** – “And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. **Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.** And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.”
- N.** The cities of refuge stand out as significantly different from common practice and displays to the watching world that Israel was a nation ruled by the one true God who rightfully and truthfully established a different system of justice. The Law given to Moses by God differentiated between someone guilty of manslaughter and someone guilty of murder. We have several Biblical examples of what manslaughter could be.
- O.** **Exodus 21:12-14** – “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee. But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die.”
- P.** **Numbers 35:22-23** – “But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or hurled anything on him without lying in wait or used a stone that could cause death, and without seeing him dropped it on him, so that he died, though he was not his enemy and did not seek his harm.”
- Q.** All I can picture is that episode from “Home Improvement” with Tim Allen swinging that big 2x4 and knocking people all over the place.
- R.** **Deuteronomy 19:4-5** – “This is the provision for the manslayer, who by fleeing there may save his life. If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in the past—as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies.”
- S.** The key components are intent and negligence. Someone who intentionally kills another is a murderer and is to be immediately taken outside the camp and punished by death. Someone who accidentally killed another is a manslayer and must immediately flee to a city of refuge to save his life.
- T.** Though the manslayer may not have had any intention of killing someone else, there is still guilt that needs to be punished. As Genesis put it, “a reckoning for the life of man.” This is because **negligence doesn’t alleviate guilt.** Ignoring God’s Law doesn’t remove the guilt of breaking the Law.
- U.** Despite this death being accidental, there are still consequences. God has established and declared the supreme value of life. The loss of life is a wrong that can’t be made right. We instinctively know this to be true. This is why teenage drivers’ car insurance is so expensive. These kids don’t pay attention to nothing.

- V. But on a more serious note, if I'm texting and driving, or if I'm changing my Spotify playlist, or if I fall asleep, and I cross the center line and plow into another car, killing the mom driving that minivan, I'm going to jail. Though it was never my intention to hurt anyone, that's a wrong that I can't right. There is nothing I can do nor any amount I could pay that will bring those kids' mom back. I am guilty and justice would need to be served by punishing me for that guilt. **Negligence doesn't alleviate guilt.** Ignoring the law and pretending like it doesn't exist will not remove the guilt of breaking the law.
- W. **B.K. Waltke** – "Innocent blood, like the curse, must find satisfaction. The Lord inquires into and vindicates innocent blood which cries out for vengeance. Homicidal blood pollutes the land, defiles the hands and calls forth judgment both by the Lord and by the family protector, who is obliged to seek justice, not revenge, for his family. Innocent blood is expiated [atoned for, made amends for] either by the death of the murderer or by atonement. Otherwise it brings upon the land the Lord's wrath and disaster."¹³
- X. It is just, it is right, that the avenger of blood is established to bring about atonement for the blood that was spilled by the hands of another.
- Y. "'Avenger' is the Hebrew word *gō'ēl* which actually refers to a kinsman-redeemer. The *gō'ēl* is one who delivers his relatives from danger and difficult situations. One of the duties of a *gō'ēl* is blood vengeance; if someone killed his relative then the *gō'ēl* was to reply in kind."¹⁴
- Z. For those of you who were here when we studied through the book of Ruth, this should be particularly significant to you. Remember Boaz, he was the model kinsman-redeemer, the model *gō'ēl*. Just like Boaz, the avenger of blood would have been a family leader with provisions and resources. You don't appoint your deadbeat uncle who ain't got a job and sits on the porch all day as the one to redeem your family's name. No, you appoint someone like Boaz. Someone strong, courageous, and wise. Someone who, as soon as he heard that one of his relatives was killed, would undoubtedly seek justice swiftly.
- AA. This type of avenger is actually a lot like God. God was the first avenger of blood. When Cain killed Able and committed the first murder, it was God who hunted Cain down. However, for those who truly seek it, God has also always been about making refuge very, very easy to find.
- BB. Some of us are still old enough, and skilled enough, to know how to use a map. For you youngbloods in the room, there actually was a time when you couldn't just ask your phone how to get somewhere and it give you step-by-step GPS directions. Yet even with our far superior technology, road signs and road conditions are still incredibly important. How much more so do you think that would've been for the manslayer fleeing for his life in in a new land traveling along Middle Eastern dirt paths and mountain trails?! Therefore, it wasn't enough to simply appoint these cities and be done with it.

¹³ Waltke, B. K. (1994). [Joshua](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 255–256). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

¹⁴ Currid, J. D. (2011). [Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained](#) (pp. 208–210). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

- CC.** “According to Jewish tradition the roads leading to these cities were kept in excellent condition and the crossroads were well marked with signposts reading, “Refuge! Refuge!” Runners were also stationed along the way to guide the fugitives.”¹⁵
- DD.** The leaders of Israel literally prepared the way for the refuge in God to be found as easy as possible. So should the Church go to great lengths to enable the refuge of Christ to be found as easy as possible—the barriers should be eliminated. Unfortunately, there are plenty of churches that have lost their drive to prepare the way for refuge. The hypocrisy that has taken hold of pastors, elders, deacons, ministry leaders, and anyone else in the church that you can imagine has pushed refuge-seekers away from God for far too long.
- EE.** If you have experienced that hypocrisy, if that’s a reason why you have strayed from the church and its people, I want you to know that here at Venture, we aim to be different. We understand that we are sinners, that our poop stinks just like everyone else’s. We ain’t scared by your mess, your sin, your failure. And we ain’t scared to reach out a hand to help anyone in need of refuge. We don’t take it lightly that you’re here today or listening online. We want you to know that this is a safe place for you to look into the things of God without being judged, without feeling like we’re trying to put an end to your life. I will highlight this point a little later in the sermon so please keep listening.
- FF.** **[4] He shall flee to one of these cities and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and explain his case to the elders of that city. Then they shall take him into the city and give him a place, and he shall remain with them. [5] And if the avenger of blood pursues him, they shall not give up the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor unknowingly, and did not hate him in the past. [6] And he shall remain in that city until he has stood before the congregation for judgment, until the death of him who is high priest at the time. Then the manslayer may return to his own town and his own home, to the town from which he fled.”**
- GG.** “The gate of a city in biblical times consisted of a towered entrance and a large open area where people gathered. City gates functioned similarly to a civic or community center; citizens often conducted business there.”¹⁶
- HH.** “When [the manslayer] arrives there, he is to stand in front of the city gate. The elders, who often assembled at the gate of a city in Old Testament times, will listen to the killer as he makes his case to be allowed entrance to the city. The elders are, in a sense, the gatekeepers of the cities of asylum. Apparently the manslayer must convince the elders that his killing was without intent and accidental. If he succeeds, then the elders will allow him into the city and give him a place of residence. If the avenger of blood tracks the killer to a city of asylum, then the elders will not deliver up the manslayer to him. The killer will be protected until the time of his trial.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 363). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁶ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Jos 20:4). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹⁷ Currid, J. D. (2011). [Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained](#) (pp. 208–210). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

- II. After his trial, if he was acquitted of premeditated murder, he was returned to the city of refuge where he lived till the high priest died. Only after the death of the high priest was the manslayer free to return to his home. That could be many years later. Involuntary manslaughter was therefore something to be carefully avoided.¹⁸
- JJ. **J.D. Currid** – “It is not until the death of the high priest that all is set right again: the manslayer may return home and the avenger of blood is released from his obligation of vengeance. Although not all interpreters agree, it does seem that the death of the high priest is a type of ransom in which his death atones for ‘the blood shed and satisfies the claims of justice’. If this interpretation is correct, then it provides a wonderful picture of the work of our High Priest, Christ Jesus!”¹⁹
1. This concept of the death of the high priest is a direct correlation and pointer to how the death of the Great High Priest brings about ultimate, final atonement for all our sins.
 2. Jesus Christ is the ultimate high priest.
- KK. “Cities of refuge were sanctuaries for those who had committed manslaughter”²⁰ and Jesus is the sanctuary for those guilty of any offense.
- LL. **For Notes** – “One of the first ordinances after the announcement of the Ten Commandments provided for the future establishment of cities of refuge (Ex. 21:12–13). These cities, providing havens for unintentional manslaughter, are discussed in detail in Numbers 35:6–34 and Deuteronomy 19:1–14. The present chapter discusses their appointment after the Conquest (see their locations on the map “Canaan in the Conquest” near Josh. 3). The fact that these cities are discussed in four books of the Old Testament marks them as being of great importance. It is apparent that God wished to impress on Israel the sanctity of human life. To put an end to a person’s life, even if done unintentionally, is a serious thing, and the cities of refuge underscored this emphatically. In the ancient world blood revenge was widely practiced. The moment a person was killed, his nearest relative took responsibility for vengeance. This ancient rite of vendetta was often handed down from one generation to another so that increasingly larger numbers of innocent people died violently. The need in ancient Israel for the refuge that these special cities provided is evident.”²¹
- MM. **For Notes** – “*The Lord also spake unto Joshua, &c.* In the fact of its not having occurred to their own minds, to designate the cities of refuge, till they were again reminded of it, their sluggishness appears to be indirectly censured. The divine command to that effect had been given beyond the Jordan. When the reason for it remained always equally valid, why do they wait? Why do they not give full effect to that which they had rightly begun? We may add, how important it was that there should be places of refuge for the innocent, in order that the land might not be polluted with blood. For if that remedy had not been provided, the kindred of those who had been killed would have doubled the evil, by proceeding without discrimination to avenge their death. It certainly did

¹⁸ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 363). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁹ Currid, J. D. (2011). [Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained](#) (pp. 211–212). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

²⁰ Smith, J. E. (1995). [The Books of History](#) (p. 106). Joplin, MO: College Press.

²¹ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 362–363). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

not become the people to be idle in guarding the land from stain and taint. Hence we perceive how tardy men are, not only to perform their duty, but to provide for their own safety, unless the Lord frequently urge them, and prick them forward by the stimulus of exhortation. But that they sinned only from thoughtlessness, is apparent from this, that they are forthwith ready to obey, neither procrastinating nor creating obstacles or delays to a necessary matter, by disputing the propriety of it. The nature of the asylum afforded by the cities of refuge has been already explained. It gave no impunity to voluntary murder, but if any one, by mistake, had slain a man, with whom he was not at enmity, he found a safe refuge by fleeing to one of these cities destined for that purpose. Thus God assisted the unfortunate, and prevented their suffering the punishment of an atrocious deed, when they had not been guilty of it. Meanwhile respect was so far paid to the feelings of the brethren and kindred of the deceased, that their sorrow was not increased by the constant presence of the persons who had caused their bereavement. Lastly, the people were accustomed to detest murder, since homicide, even when not culpable, was followed by exile from country and home, till the death of the high priest. For that temporary exile clearly shewed how precious human blood is in the sight of God. Thus the law was just, equitable, and useful, as well in a public as in a private point of view. But it is to be briefly observed, that everything is not here mentioned in order. For one who had accidentally killed a man might have remained in safety, by sitting himself before the court to plead his cause, and obtaining an acquittal, after due and thorough investigation, as we explained more fully in the books of Moses, when treating of this matter.”²²

NN. For Notes – “The granting of the tribal inheritances is not the end of the allotment of land to the Israelites. There are still two more allocations that Joshua needs to make: first, the appointment of cities of refuge (chapter 20), and, secondly, the assignment of cities and pasturage to the Levites (chapter 21). The six asylum cities appointed in chapter 20 are also named as Levitical cities in chapter 21. The text, however, deals with the appointments separately, and therefore we shall do the same. Asylum cities (20:1–3). God now commands Joshua to tell the Israelites to appoint cities of refuge, or asylum. At Mount Sinai the Lord had said that such places would be appointed when Israel entered the land of promise (Exod. 21:12–14). That injunction is given in greater detail in Numbers 35:6–34. In the present chapter we see the fulfilment of those two passages as the Israelites designate the specific cities to serve as cities of asylum. The purpose of an asylum city is to provide a place of refuge for someone who kills another person ‘without intent or unknowingly’. He is to receive protection from ‘the avenger of blood’.”²³

OO. For Notes – “As a practical measure to assure justice, God instructed Moses to have Israel locate six cities, three on each side of the Jordan, where anyone who killed a person *accidentally and unintentionally*, could flee and find asylum from the *avenger of blood* (Heb. *gō’ēl*, more precisely, ‘the family protector’). After the conquest of the land east of the Jordan Moses promptly specified the three cities there (*cf.* Dt. 4:41–43; 19:1–13). Innocent blood, like the curse, must find satisfaction. The Lord inquires into and vindicates innocent blood which cries out for vengeance (*cf.* Gn. 4:10; 9:5–6; 2 Sa. 16:7, 8). Homicidal blood pollutes the land (Nu. 35:33), defiles the hands (Is. 59:3) and calls forth judgment both by the Lord (1 Ki. 2:31, 33) and by the family protector, who is obliged to seek justice, not revenge, for his family. Innocent blood is expiated either by the death of the murderer (Nu. 35:33; Dt. 19:13) or by atonement (Dt. 21:7–9). Otherwise it brings upon the

²² Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. (2010). [Commentary on the Book of Joshua](#) (pp. 239–240). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

²³ Currid, J. D. (2011). [Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained](#) (pp. 208–210). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

land the Lord's wrath and disaster (2 Sa. 21; 1 Ki. 2:31–33; 2 Ki. 24:4). In that light—the place of mercy in the OT has not been examined here but see Ps. 51, in particular v 14—one sees the importance of establishing in fair courts whether the killing was deliberate or accidental. If the act was a deliberate one *i.e.* murder, then justice demanded the death sentence; if it was accidental or unintentional, then the criminal was allowed to live a normal life in the city of refuge. When the alleged man-slayer arrived at a city of refuge, the elders, all Levites who were responsible for teaching the law, gave him a preliminary trial at the city gate, where court was held in ancient Israel. If he was found innocent, they gave him asylum from the family protector and sent him to stand trial before the assembly, a sort of premonarchic parliament vested with representative and judicial powers. If this assembly of chieftans or adult males there found him guilty, they handed him over to the family protector for execution. If found innocent, they sent him back to the city of refuge where he had to stay until the death of the high priest serving at that time. He stayed there to protect him and the family protector from retaliatory vengeance. Perhaps the death of the high priest, Israel's chief representative before God, could be said to symbolize the atoning death of Jesus Christ, the church's high priest, who made satisfaction for all sin, both intentional and unintentional."²⁴

- PP.** For Notes – “Verse 6 is confusing unless it is read in the light of Numbers 35; the verse is a summary of a much larger section that appears in that earlier text (Num. 35:25–29). The central focus of the passage is that if the killer is taken to trial and is found innocent, then he will live in the city of refuge until the death of the current high priest. The death of the high priest signals an amnesty: the killer may return to his home and the *gō'ēl* is released from his obligation of vengeance. There are various interpretations of why this is so. Some argue that the death of the high priest signifies the end of an old era and the dawning of a new one. Others believe that it is parallel to the amnesty granted to prisoners at the accession of a new king in the ancient Near East. Yet others believe that the death of the high priest is a form of expiation; as Harrison states, ‘The death of the high priest was interpreted as an atonement for the offence of manslaughter.’”²⁵

The 2nd focal point in Joshua's implementation of the Cities of Refuge is:

2) The Law to Extend Mercy (7-9)

Time to take notes

- A. Just like we had to define justice, now we need to define mercy. **Mercy is the withholding of wrath from those who genuinely deserve it.**
- B. Mercy doesn't come at the expense of justice. Being able to extend mercy to others doesn't mean that you forego justice. They are not mutually exclusive. They are actually dependent upon one another. With God, there is full justice **and** full mercy. For mercy to be extended to someone, there must be an establishment and declaration of guilt and the deserving of wrath.

²⁴ Waltke, B. K. (1994). [Joshua](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 255–256). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

²⁵ Currid, J. D. (2011). [Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained](#) (pp. 208–210). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

- C. But we don't want to hear about our own guilt. We love to pass blame to others. We don't want to hear how we fail and deserve wrath. Instead, we think everyone gets a trophy. However, the entire Bible is very clear that every single one of us is guilty of sin. We all deserve the wrath of God.
- D. **Ephesians 2:1-3** – “**And you** were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom **we all** once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”
- E. Every person that has ever lived has sinned against God. And that sin has caused us to be dead to God. But the story doesn't end there, and neither does that Scripture.
- F. **Ephesians 2:4-5** – “**But God, being rich in mercy**, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.”
- G. God extends mercy to those who trust Him. God withholds His wrath from us who genuinely deserve it if we cry out to Him for help. And God commanded His people to extend that mercy to others.
- H. **[7] So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. [8] And beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they appointed Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland, from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh.**

[Cities of Refuge Map - Cities.png](#)

- I. The order of the cities is given north to south in Canaan and south to north in Transjordan. “This inversion is a literary technique that indicates that the whole of the land settled by Israel is covered and everyone has access to one of the cities of refuge.”²⁶
- J. As we talked about a few weeks ago, the character of Caleb was astounding here. Hebron was part of the land that Caleb was given as his inheritance. Therefore, not only did he give up a portion of his inheritance to the Levites, but he did so in order to provide a city of refuge to manslayers.
 1. This is a prime example of stewarding what God gave him for the benefit and good of others. This is what it looks like to extend mercy.
- K. God gave these cities to the priestly tribes in order that established them as Levitical cities so that their innocence might be defended with greater fidelity and authority.²⁷

²⁶ Currid, J. D. (2011). *Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained* (pp. 210–211). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

²⁷ Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. (2010). *Commentary on the Book of Joshua* (pp. 240–241). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

- L. These cities of refuge point us forward to the Christ to come. So their names are applicable to him.
- a. **"Kedesh"** signifies "holy" or "holiness." Christ is holy in both his natures, divine and human. He is abundantly qualified to be our Mediator, Savior, and Redeemer. He is the fountain of holiness to His people and has made sanctification available for us.²⁸
 - i. [Cities of Refuge Map - 1 Kedesh.png](#)
 - b. **"Shechem"** signifies the "shoulder." Not only the government of the church and people of God is on the shoulder of Christ, but all our sins have been laid upon Him, and bore by Him. Every soul in conversion and every lost sheep, is found by Him and taken up and brought home on His shoulder.²⁹
 - i. [Cities of Refuge Map - 2 Shechem.png](#)
 - c. **"Hebron"** signifies "fellowship." The saints are called into fellowship with Christ, and our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Through Him alone we have access to God, communion with Him now, and shall have uninterrupted communion with Him for all eternity.³⁰
 - i. [Cities of Refuge Map - 3 Hebron.png](#)
 - d. **"Bezer"** signifies "a fortified place." Christ is the fortress, mountain, and place of defense for His people. He is the strong hold to which the prisoners of hope turn, the strong tower where the righteous run and are safe.³¹
 - i. [Cities of Refuge Map - 4 Bezer.png](#)
 - e. **"Ramoath-Gilead"** signifies "exaltations." It points both to the exaltation of Christ in human nature at the right hand of God and the exaltation of His people by Him. We are raised by Him from a low estate to sit among princes and to inherit the throne of glory while we exalt Him as our Lord.³²
 - i. [Cities of Refuge Map - 5 Ramoth-Gilead.png](#)
 - f. **"Golan"** signifies "revealed" or "manifested." Christ has manifested Himself in the flesh and is revealed to sinners when they are called by His grace. He is the hope set before us to whom we flee for refuge and lay hold of.³³
 - i. [Cities of Refuge Map - 6 Golan.png](#)
- M. [9] These were the cities designated for all the people of Israel and for the stranger sojourning among them, that anyone who killed a person without intent could flee there, so that he might not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, till he stood before the congregation.

²⁸ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 55609-55616). Kindle Edition.

²⁹ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 55609-55616). Kindle Edition.

³⁰ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 55609-55616). Kindle Edition.

³¹ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 44013-44034). Kindle Edition.

³² Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 44013-44034). Kindle Edition.

³³ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 44013-44034). Kindle Edition.

- N.** **J.D. Currid** – “A ‘stranger’ is an alien who lives and works among the native Israelites. The legal position of a ‘stranger’ is at best tenuous throughout the ancient Near East. Privileges are dependent solely on the hospitality of the natives of the country concerned. According to Israelite law, the stranger is to be treated with great respect and with due process under the law. He is subject to the laws of Hebrew society, and he also reaps the privileges of them. And the reason he is to be dealt with in such a compassionate manner is as follows: ‘You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God’ (Leviticus 19:34). Thus, with regard to the cities of refuge, the stranger has access to this zone of protection in the same way as the native Israelite.”³⁴
1. There is no differentiation between the native and the sojourner in how the law was to apply. The good news for one is the good news for all.
- O.** “Even here in the book of Joshua we witness God’s compassion to non-Israelites; that mercy is clearly manifest earlier in the book with the deliverance of the Canaanite Rahab and her family. Such a tenderness is then found in full bloom in the New Testament.”³⁵
- P.** **Exodus 12:43-49** – “And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the statute of the Passover. ... All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.”
- Q.** **Numbers 15:14-16** – “And if a stranger is sojourning with you, or anyone is living permanently among you, and he wishes to offer a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the Lord, he shall do as you do. For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a statute forever throughout your generations. You and the sojourner shall be alike before the Lord. One law and one rule shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you.”
- R.** **Romans 10:9-13** – “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”
- S.** Do you hear that good news this morning/evening?! “Christ is a refuge for Jews and Gentiles, for all sinners that flee to him.”³⁶ Christ provides His saving mercy to all who call on Him to be saved.
- T.** Unfortunately, Christians will often forget this truth. We will dip our toes into the waters of hypocrisy and, before we know it, we’re diving into those waters, drowning in them.

³⁴ Currid, J. D. (2011). *Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained* (pp. 210–211). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

³⁵ Currid, J. D. (2011). *Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained* (pp. 212–213). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

³⁶ Gill, John. John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (Kindle Locations 55627-55628). . Kindle Edition.

- U.** **KB** – “How you love a country's food more than its people? ... Yes, I love the kingdom more than I love my nation. Yes, I love my neighbor more than I love his papers.”³⁷
- V.** I'd be willing to bet a whole lotta money that you love some Mexican food like me. Papa's & Beer in Dallas or El Rey in Lincoln. Or maybe you love Japanese food like Japan or Hoshi in Lincoln. But do you love Mexican people? Do you let their immigration status dictate your love for them? Do you love Japanese people? Did you shy away from anyone who looked remotely Asian during the pandemic because you blamed Asian people for the Coronavirus?
- W.** Mercy isn't mercy if it's only for people like me. That's a flawed understanding of what mercy is and the level of mercy I've received. How we seek to extend mercy to others is a tell-tale sign of whether or not we've found refuge in Jesus. If we really live in the experience of God's grace and mercy, we **will** want others to live in that same experience, regardless of who they are, where they're from, or what situation they're in. To not extend mercy like that is to be a hypocrite.

X. Scriptures on God's care for the sojourner.

1. Exodus 22:21-24 – “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.”
2. Exodus 23:9 – “You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.”
3. Leviticus 19:33-34 – “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”
4. Deuteronomy 24:17-22 – “You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.”
5. Deuteronomy 27:19 – “‘Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’”

³⁷ <https://open.spotify.com/track/6fUxgWa744fqILNOVFrysp?si=756d549c461b4698>

6. Isaiah 1:16-17 – “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.”
7. Jeremiah 7:5-7 – “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.”
8. Zechariah 7:8-14 – “And the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.” But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the LORD of hosts. “As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear,” says the LORD of hosts, “and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and the pleasant land was made desolate.”
9. Malachi 3:5 – “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.”
10. Matthew 25:31-46 – “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

11. Acts 6:1-7 – “Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”
12. James 1:27 – “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.
- Y. **For Notes** – “But why is there no record in the Old Testament of a single instance in which this merciful provision of deliverance was utilized? Some critics suggest that these cities were not part of the Mosaic legislation but that this provision was instituted after the Exile. Yet the postexilic books likewise do not refer to their use, so other critics have suggested that the cities were not occupied till the time of Christ. In the face of such shifting arguments it is better to recognize the historicity of these accounts and to explain the silence of the record by the obvious fact that the scriptural authors were selective about what they recorded. Once the provision was made, it was apparently not important to document specific cases of its use.”³⁸
- Z. **For Notes** – “Israel’s benefit of sanctuary reminds believers of Psalm 46:1, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble,” and of Romans 8:1, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews may have had the Old Testament cities of refuge in mind when he wrote that believers may have great encouragement because they “have fled to take hold of the hope offered to” them (Heb. 6:18). The cities of refuge, then, seem to typify Christ to whom sinners, pursued by the avenging Law which decrees judgment and death, may flee for refuge. Paul’s frequent expression “in Christ” speaks of the safety and security possessed by every believer.”³⁹

Challenge:

The reason why KB says that he loves the Kingdom of God more than his nation and why he loves his neighbor more than his immigration status is:

³⁸ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 363). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³⁹ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 363). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

KB – “I've seen the Lord / The same I'll never be / Some say they've seen the Lord / But live on casually / I don't know what you saw / But The Lord ain't what you seen / Once you really seen the Lord / You're obsessed with what you see”⁴⁰

Keith Zachary – “When you’re in Christ, you’re a new creation. Nobody has to tell you you should go to church. You want to go to church. Nobody has to tell you you should read your Bible. You want to read your Bible. You want to pray. You want to sing. You want to be where God’s people are. If any man be in Christ, the evidence of it is you’re a new creation.”⁴¹

For the manslayer, there was one way to obtain refuge: to flee to a city of refuge. So it is with Christ. There is one way to be saved, one way to obtain refuge. Are you fleeing to Jesus Christ for your refuge? What do you need to leave behind to find life in Christ? What do you need to leave behind to be a refuge for others and to help them find life in Christ?

One beautiful principle we find in this passage is that God has provided refuge through community. That principle hasn’t changed. After the first coming of Christ and the beginning of His Church in the New Testament, that principle has been even more firmly confirmed. As you flee to Jesus Christ, God has given you a **family** of refuge to flee to. Finding life in Christ is not an isolated personal journey.

Sure, the manslayer could flee to the deserts or mountains of the Middle East and try to find refuge in isolation. But his chances of survival would greatly decrease. Either the heat of day, the cold of night, the treacherous terrain, or being found by the avenger would almost certainly guarantee his death. Or at the very least, his life would be less than the life-to-the-full that God had for the manslayer still within the nation of Israel and safe among God’s people in the city of refuge.

Likewise, if you seek to walk with Christ on your own, you are in a dangerous place. And at the very least, your life will be less full than the life God has for you within His family, His Church. So how can you experience the life and refuge God has for you within His family? Just like the paths to the cities of refuge were prepared and marked to be as easy as possible, here at Venture we’ve tried to make this as easy as possible for you too. We have a great small group ministry here that we call our Life Groups.

Application:

The 1st application is:
You need to be in a Life Group.

Some of you might be thinking, “I’ve heard you guys say that before and I just don’t see what the big deal is. I have my family. Or I have my friends. Or I have my coworkers. I don’t have time for another social group. I just don’t see why I need that in my life.”

Now, hear me out. I live in downtown Lincoln on one of the busier corners on the South side of town. If I truly love my kids, I will do everything I can do to prevent them from running out in the road and getting crushed by the cars and trucks that drive past. You would expect me to do that, and I would be a terrible

⁴⁰ <https://open.spotify.com/track/3U0ArXNKWLVik15xVVSQeL?si=9e0846a2401e4c45>

⁴¹ <https://daretoventure.org/sermons/the-test-of-genuine-faith/>

father if I didn't do that. Sometimes they can get so preoccupied playing in the yard that I need to yell at my kids to get them to understand that they're about to run out in the road. **"STOP!"**

Similarly, the type of thinking that begins to justify why you don't need to be in constant community with other Christians is like mindlessly running out in the road. Sure, you might get away with it here and there, but eventually you **WILL** get hit. You will be left in pain without hope of survival. Also, sometimes we do legitimately need to go out in the road. But that needs to be the exception, not the rule. That needs to be limited. The general rule is that my kids shouldn't be playing in the middle of the busy road. The general rule is that you should be in a Life Group so that you can experience the family of refuge that God has for you.

So, I want to say this as lovingly as possible because sometimes the most loving thing you can do is to startle someone out of their stupor and yell, **"STOP! STOP!"**

Wake up from your stupor. Stop making excuses. Stop justifying. What do you need to leave behind to find life in Christ in a Life Group? Just as the manslayer will meet certain death if he doesn't flee to the city of refuge, so your life will be void of the fullness God has to offer you through the family of refuge He has for you.

I say this with authority because this is my experience. This is my wife's experience. This is my family's experience. But this experience isn't uniquely ours alone. This experience has been shared for thousands of years across generations and generations of believers throughout the world from the time of the Resurrection of Christ until today. This experience crosses generational boundaries, racial lines, social classes, gender roles, and any other barrier you can imagine. And while I can't speak to the experience of others, I can point to your story after story and testimony after testimony that aligns with my experience.

I can stand before you today preaching the Word of God as a pastor in this church because of God's faithfulness to me through His Church via the small group ministries of 3 specific churches. I can testify that 10 years ago, my then fiancée and I moved to Lincolnton from across the state hours away. We didn't have family here. We barely had jobs here. And we only knew 4 people in Lincolnton. But those 4 people were part of a church that cared about small groups. We immediately dove in.

Several years went by and those 4 people we knew here moved away and we were left with only the relationships we had formed after we moved to Lincolnton. We could've easily felt like we got left on an island to live by ourselves as our own little nuclear family unit. But that wasn't the case. We worked hard to forge relationships that far exceeded just friendships. And I would argue that these relationships now easily exceed family. **They say blood is thicker than water. But I say that the Spirit of God is thicker than blood.**

What started as, "Hi, I'm Josh and this is my wife, Brie. What are your names?" turned into being visited at the hospital by these families to celebrate the births of all 4 of our kids. "Hi, I'm Brie," turned into handing the keys of my truck over to Eddie Sipe to be deep-cleaned after Brie gave birth to our lil Juju in the front passenger seat on the side of 85 because our little girl is stubborn and she didn't want us to make it all the way to the hospital. For those of you who know Juju, you know she ain't changed much since.

"Hi, I'm Josh," turned into Beth Sipe calling me in the middle of the night because her husband was being rushed to Charlotte with a heart attack. It turned into not only celebrating the wedding of their oldest daughter, Anna, but to me officiating the wedding of their youngest daughter, Liza.

Multiple miscarriages, multiple near-death health complications and hospital visits, multiple births of children, countless highs and countless lows. And then most importantly for me, almost 5 years ago, Eddie and Beth Sipe initiated the most painful yet the most sanctifying season of me and Brie's lives. You see, I was a paid staff pastor at a church, but I had some serious struggles with my anger. I've always had this struggle. But unfortunately, that would almost entirely be isolated to my home. My wife saw it. My kids saw it. And in my stupor, I didn't think it was as bad as it actually was. But because we intentionally put others in our lives, Eddie and Beth got to see this side of me and they brought up their concern to the pastors of our church. They yelled, "**STOP!**"

That led to me standing before that church one Sunday morning and confessing to the congregation that I was not meeting the qualifications of a pastor according to Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 and that I would be stepping down from my pastoral position. Among other things, that morning I said:

Let me also be very clear that it is the kindness of the Lord that brings me before you today. His kindness leads us to repentance and there is a godly grief that produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret. I pray this day brings continued repentance as I grow in this struggle against sin. I know, without a shadow of a doubt, that as difficult as this is now, 5, 10, 15 years from now my wife, my children, and I will look back at this day and see the overwhelming kindness of God in it as He graciously uses it to make me more like Him. I am now, and forever will be, grateful for today.

Eventually, God led us to Venture. We started watching online when the pandemic happened, and we knew we wanted to visit when the nursery opened back up. The first Sunday we visited in-person, we got to meet several people, including Joe and Stephanie Padilla. They invited us to their Life Group, and we joined them the next week. My memory is really terrible. Like, really, really terrible. I blame all the hockey hits to the head. So when I can vividly remember something, it must've been something truly special and significant. Well, I can still remember piling the kids in the van after our first Life Group at their house, sitting out in the road for a second, and being on the brink of tears as I had the overwhelming feeling that this church and this Life Group is where God wanted me and my family to truly begin to heal and get healthy.

When I left my pastoral position, my world felt like it was crashing down. A year later when God was calling us to leave that church, we stepped out into a world of unknown. We didn't know where to go and leaving that church meant leaving the **ONLY** relationships we had here. It felt **WAY** worse than packing up and moving to Lincolnton several years prior. Honestly, a year after I stepped down, I wasn't really any better. Our marriage was struggling, and we were simply just trying to keep our heads above the waters of life while we were thrashed against the rocks of life. We were just trying not to drown. But God had life in mind for us and He used Joe and Stephanie Padilla and that Life Group to breathe life back into our souls. They were the vessel God used to provide the refuge that we needed.

I am a living testimony to you of the grace of God that He provided to me, my wife, and my children through Life Groups, through a family of refuge.

While your circumstances may be different, I have no doubt that there are plenty of you here now and watching online that **NEED** refuge. Your soul is weak. Your spirit broken. You feel like the manslayer, and you are running for your life, looking for somewhere to find refuge for your weary soul.

Well, 2000 years ago, a betrothed couple were also looking for a place to find shelter. They stopped at inn after inn and found no room, no help. They then stumbled upon a manger, where this mother-to-be went into labor. On that quiet night in Bethlehem with Joseph by her side, Mary gave birth to the refuge for which the whole world longed. This seemingly insignificant, ordinary baby boy was the means that God used to deliver everyone who put their trust in Him from the clutches of sin and death.

John 3:16-18 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

Ultimately, the cities of refuge pointed forward to the birth, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as our only eternal refuge and lasting hope. And our Life Groups serve the same function. They are designed to point you to Jesus who is the one way of salvation, the one way of life and refuge. Like the cities of refuge, we have paved the way for you to find refuge in Christ and we’ve marked the way with, “**REFUGE! REFUGE!**”

Pastor Jonathan has put together a list of our Life Groups that you will get as you leave today. Use this resource to get in a Life Group. We have plenty of groups that would **LOVE** for you to join them the next time they meet. Live life with the family that God has provided for you. And experience the life that God has blessed you with.

The 2nd application is:
You need to lead in your Life Group.

This doesn’t necessarily mean you need to be a Life Group leader. It could simply mean to be a leader in one aspect of your group. Be an example. Be someone who points others to the refuge that you’ve found. This is how we put hypocrisy to death in the Church!

I want you to think about what it would’ve been like to live in one of these cities of refuge. Their primary function and entire identity were to be “a place of asylum for anyone who took the life of another person by accident.”⁴²

I picture an old western film when a tired, beat up, lonely cowboy slowly rides into town on his horse and the whole town stops and stares at him while he plods through the town streets looking for the saloon.

In our modern society, can you imagine the riffraff that these cities would attract if it was broadcast that all you had to do was to make it inside the city gates to find refuge from whatever you’re running from? There easily would be a stigma for those who rolled into town looking for refuge.

Children playing in the streets would see this newcomer and know exactly why he was there. Using their little active imaginations, they could easily fabricate a story that led to this man and his family needing to flee for his life.

⁴² Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Jos 20:1–21:45). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Women taking care of their homes would see this newcomer and know exactly why he was there. They could easily spread the word about who they saw and what kind of family they appeared to be. They could find out which tribe they were from and what their family lineage was like and spread all the gossip.

Men working would see this newcomer and know exactly why he was there. They could talk to the elders and hear this man's story and make a judgment about his presumed guilt before ever even meeting him and his family.

The men, women, and children of these cities of refuge could do all these things while having the view that their birth into the Levitical family that placed them in these cities was a burden. **OR** they could see their role in the kingdom of Israel as a blessing. Children could invite these new kids to come play with them and take their mind off the worries of being in a new city. Women could invite these new families to come have a warm meal after their stressful travels. Men could invite this manslayer to join them in their work so he could begin to earn a living in a new city to provide for his family.

You can do the same thing. You can look at your Life Group as a burden, one more thing you have to think about, one more night away from home, one more group of people who suck the life out of you. **OR** you can look at your Life Group as a blessing, a divine opportunity to extend to others the same mercy of God that has been extended to you.⁴³ What do you need to leave behind to be a refuge for others and to help them find life in Christ in your Life Group?

Psalm 121

- [1] I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
- [2] My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.
- [3] He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- [4] Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- [5] The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
- [6] The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
- [7] The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
- [8] The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

This is a declaration of the goodness of God that has been extended to me that I now want to extend to you.

Keith Zachary – “Whatever your position is in the Body of Christ, you're empowered to function. To live out that. We have a lot of times that we ask for volunteers to do a lot of things in the church, and that's good and

⁴³ <https://youtu.be/BjEvIVjaZV8?si=zpDoWiXHJoFUv4PY>

well and fine, but there are some things that only **you** can do, and you need to find out what that is. You need to love people. You need to minister to people. And you need to just believe God is going to show His gifts.”⁴⁴

Here are some examples of what it means to be a leader in your Life Group:

- Participate in discussions.
- Pray for others.
- Invite others to join you.
- Share missional ideas.
- Open your home.
- Provide food.

Luke 10:25-37

[25] And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” [26] He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” [27] And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” [28] And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” [29] But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” [30] Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. [31] Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. [32] So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. [34] He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. [35] And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ [36] Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” [37] He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

So I say the same to you this morning. **“You go, and do likewise.”** It isn’t enough to know what the right things are to do. You must **“go, and do”** those right things.

Flee to Jesus Christ for your refuge. Leave behind the hindrances to your pursuit of Christ. And eliminate the barriers to helping others find their refuge in Christ.

⁴⁴ <https://daretoventure.org/sermons/the-test-of-genuine-faith/>