**Lesson for September 1**

**Open the Conversation**: A couple of years ago our family drove to a nearby state park for a late afternoon trail walk through the woods. As we hiked and laughed through the trees, someone pointed out the beautiful afternoon sky rapidly turning dark and agitated. Checking the radar for the first time, we realized a dark red line of storms was bearing down. As the front edge of the wind blast arrived, leaves and branches shook loose and started to fall all around us. We reversed course back toward the car, running as fast as we could over the roots and rocks of the trail, breathing out prayers for protection from the falling bark and branches. We jumped into the car, soaked and wide-eyed from the unexpected adventure. The power and energy of the storm truly moved us—literally!

What is the strongest weather event you have experienced? What majestic experiences of something huge in nature are fixed in your memory? In light of the fact God created and has power over all of nature, what words or phrases could you use to describe Him?

**Introduction:** This bit of history is helpful--Ezekiel was one of the Jewish exiles in Babylon taken into captivity because of their rebellion against the Lord. Although they had received several warnings about the consequences of their disobedience, the Israelites persisted until God finally allowed them to suffer the punishment His prophets had foretold. Ezekiel was in the group taken captive by the Babylonians. After about five years in exile, Ezekiel received a prophetic vision from the Lord. As a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel, Ezekiel spoke to the Israelite exiles in Babylon while Daniel addressed those in the court of the King of Babylon and Jeremiah was tasked with speaking to the remnant of the Jews who remained in their homeland. Again, God used the name of His prophet as part of his message to His people. “Ezekiel” means “strengthened by the Lord.”

**Setting: Read Ezekiel 1:1-3**

* How would you describe the term “exile”? What examples of exile can you think of happening today that might help you better understand what the Israelites were experiencing?
* What can we learn about God that He continued to have prophets speak to His people from Him in many different areas? (At the same time Daniel was speaking to the King of Babylon, while at the same time Jeremiah was speaking to the remnant of the Jews who still remained in Jerusalem).
* What can we know from these verses about the message God was about to deliver?
* How do we hear from God today?

**Vision: Read Ezekiel 1:4-9**

* How would being in exile give the people an added level of desperation to hear from the Lord? How have difficult times tuned your ear to seek God more?
* Why might it be important for the people to be reminded of God’s past faithfulness to them and their ancestors (think about times God has used clouds and fire to minister to the Israelites)? Why is it important for us to remember God’s past faithfulness?
* What are some actions you can take to remember and reflect on God’s past faithfulness?
* Who can you have a conversation with today about how God has been faithful?

**Glory: Read Ezekiel 1:10-14**

* How do you see God’s glory in these further details of Ezekiel’s vision?
* Even as they faced the consequences of their rebellion, God reminded His people through Ezekiel that He still loved them and wanted them to know Him for who He is. **The Lord pursues the rebellious with His patient love.** How do you sense the Lord pursuing you with His patient love this week?

**Wrap Up:**

The many ways God reveals Himself to us is continual evidence of His love for us and desire to be known by us. We have His Word, the body of believers, and creation itself to testify to His love. He invites us to trust Him further, surrender our lives and confess with our words and our lives that He is Lord. We are created for eternal relationship with Him, and supernatural encounters like Ezekiel had serve as reminders God’s power backs up all His claims. He is trustworthy and no force can change or lessen Him.

If you have wandered from God, refused to listen to His truth and His word, and lived for yourself first, He is waiting powerfully and patiently for you. The time is now to turn toward Him in every part of your life. He has good, really big plans, better and more valuable than anything we could imagine.

We sometimes feel exiled from God—though exile can feel powerful, God is exponentially more so! You are not too far, because He has come to you in Jesus.

Where do you feel like you’ve gone too far to be redeemed by God? How are you encouraged by today’s study?

What next step do you sense God leading you to take toward Him? Tell a parent or a leader about how God is directing you and trust Him more as you take the step.

**Extended Cut:**

When you go through a strong storm of some kind or stand at a majestic view of a gargantuan mountain range, one thing becomes perfectly clear. Humans have no control over what happens in nature. We can try our best to observe and predict, but ultimately the power of nature testifies to the exponentially greater power and glory of God. God created all of nature, and used it to reveal His presence and His glory throughout Scripture as a reminder that He is all powerful and glorious beyond our control. The complex power of nature is a work of art by which we can observe much about the Creator.

**Ezekiel’s vision was clearly a recorded event that had significance and wasn’t to be disregarded as a folk tale of any kind.** Ezekiel included details about his ministry in Babylon and referenced the common practice of the Israelites to congregate at the river for their worship gatherings. He used language to specify that this vision was a word directly from the Lord.

Ezekiel’s vision began with him seeing “a whirlwind coming from the north” (v. 4). The Israelites often associated north with the judgment of God. Enemies had traveled from the north to overtake them and force them into exile. Hearing that the whirlwind was from the north would draw their attention to learn the rest of the vision. Imagine being taken captive, knowing it was deserved judgment for your rebellion, and now came an additional word from God about what was coming. The people would be eager to gain a glimpse of what to expect. **This was not a time for the people to ignore God’s prophets but to raptly absorb everything God spoke through the vision.**

Cloud by day and fire by night were the two main visuals the Lord used to guide the children of Israel and demonstrate His presence with them. Both these were included in Ezekiel’s vision. The continual fire might be compared to Moses and the bush that burned yet wasn’t consumed. The brightness in the vision emphasized the glory of the Lord—the main message of the book of Ezekiel.

**Every detail of this vision is awe inspiring and was intended to remind that God is glorious and worthy of our praise despite any circumstances we may be facing.** The specifics about the cherubim and how they moved with intention speak to the glory of God. Cherubim were typically associated with the presence of God and the sacred; the details of these creatures and this setting served to emphasize the greatness of God.

Though God’s people were in exile, He encouraged them and reminded them of who He is so they would know He had plans for them regardless of their past faithlessness. The Lord reached out to them through a vision given to Ezekiel. The various images Ezekiel received and shared pointed the people to the Lord. **God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.** Even when His people sin and rebel and face the consequences of their choices, God still loves them. He used familiar images in Ezekiel’s vision to communicate that He had not changed, and He still loved them enough to pursue them and offer a way out of their sin. The same is true for us. **When we turn away from the Lord, He is waiting and willing to restore us, if we repent and turn back to Him.**