God Receives the People’s Repentance

Summary and Goal
The kingdom of Judah had been led into sin and rebellion by her unfaithful kings. The book of the Law had been lost, and the people had become idol-worshipers. But young King Josiah sought to honor God, so we see him on a great adventure of destroying idols throughout the land. Yet when Josiah came face to face with the holiness of God revealed through the accidental discovery of God’s word, he repented and led his people to do the same. After Josiah’s repentance, he restored the worship of God and greatly influenced his culture. Josiah found his purpose in the worship of God through his repentance. This is the key to discovering our purpose as well. It’s through the darkness of repentance that we begin to live fully in the light.

Session Outline
1. Repentance involves removing and destroying idols (2 Chron. 34:1-7).
2. Repentance involves restoring and resuming worship (2 Chron. 34:8-11).

Background Passage: 2 Chronicles 29–35

Session in a Sentence
God desires that people repent of their sin and turn to Him in worship and obedience.

Christ Connection
Josiah was a good king whom God used to lead the people back to Him, but he was not the perfect king that the people needed. Jesus is the righteous King of kings who brings us to God by paying our sin penalty and giving us His righteousness.

Missional Application
Because we have been forgiven in Christ and have been credited with His righteousness, we seek to turn from all sin and cast aside all else that hinders our worship of the one true King.
**Group Time**

**Introduction**

**EXPLAIN:** Share the historical information on page 85 in the DDG about Alexander Fleming’s accidental discovery of penicillin.

In 1928, Alexander Fleming was experimenting with bacteria that cause staph infections. He left a Petri dish uncovered, and it became contaminated with mold spores. The bacteria grew all over the plate except in the area where the mold had formed. This was Fleming’s accidental discovery of penicillin, which would later be mass-produced for use in World War II and go on to save countless lives from bacterial infection.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

What medical marvel have you witnessed saving the life of a loved one, friend, or acquaintance? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

**SAY:** Penicillin is still saving people. However, it doesn’t have the power to really save. No matter how we cut it, one day our lives will fail us despite modern medicine, and we will go either to heaven or hell.

**SUMMARIZE:** In this session, we will see King Josiah make an accidental discovery that does have the power to really save. When Josiah came face to face with the holiness of God revealed through the accidental discovery of God’s word, he repented and led his people to do the same. After Josiah’s repentance, he restored the worship of God and greatly influenced his culture. Josiah found his purpose in the worship of God through his repentance. This is the key to discovering our purpose as well. It’s through the darkness of repentance that we begin to live fully in the light.

*For session-by-session training videos, please visit MinistryGrid.com/GospelProject.  
For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit GospelProject.com/additional-resources.*
Point 1: Repentance involves removing and destroying idols (2 Chron. 34:1-7).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read 2 Chronicles 34:1-7 (DDG p. 86).

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He did what was right in the Lord’s sight and walked in the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn aside to the right or the left.

In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a youth, Josiah began to seek the God of his ancestor David, and in the twelfth year he began to cleanse Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherah poles, the carved images, and the cast images. Then in his presence the altars of the Baals were torn down, and he chopped down the shrines that were above them. He shattered the Asherah poles, the carved images, and the cast images, crushed them to dust, and scattered them over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He burned the bones of the priests on their altars. So he cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. He did the same in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali and on their surrounding mountain shrines. He tore down the altars, and he smashed the Asherah poles and the carved images to powder. He chopped down all the shrines throughout the land of Israel and returned to Jerusalem.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 86) to point out how Josiah was a model of repentance and reform for believers, mentioning the three elements of his life that should encourage us to follow his model.

King Josiah served as a godly leader to his people and made tremendous reforms for his land. We can always hope and pray for our leaders to do the same. We also can look at Josiah’s life and apply his example of repentance and reform to our own areas of dominion, namely, our lives. Three elements of Josiah’s life encourage believers to do so: 1) Josiah’s Age; 2) Josiah’s History; and 3) Josiah’s Community.

• 1) Josiah’s Age: Josiah was only sixteen when he committed his way to the Lord, and twenty when he started implementing reform in his territory. God can call people of any age, young or old, to repentance and send them on a journey for His glory.

• 2) Josiah’s History: Josiah wasn’t raised with the example of a repentant father. He was the son and grandson of terrible kings who bent their knees to false gods. So more than likely, Josiah’s first religion was one of idolatry, but he became a worshiper of the Lord. As with Josiah, we must recognize that our history and our past don’t determine our future; repentance and living by faith do.

• 3) Josiah’s Community: Josiah’s first responsibility was for his own repentance. Second, as king, he was to lead his people in repentance, first by example and then by action. He couldn’t force a heart change in his community, but he could do as much as possible through his influence to turn them from idols and toward the Lord. We don’t have a kingdom to rule, but we do have a community of people we can influence through our faithful words and actions.
INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How can personal repentance of sin influence a community of people?
(demonstrates to others that your life is based on priorities unique from
the world’s; repentance often serves as a passive indictment on the sins
of the world; living in the light of God’s grace should be beautiful and
attractive to those who dwell in the darkness of sin)

EXPLAIN: Reference the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 86) as you make the case for the necessity of
repentance in responding to the gospel, for godly living, and for bringing about lasting reform in the world.

Josiah had a great opportunity to honor God as king. He easily could have been
overwhelmed, but instead, we see him boldly assault the evil he saw within his sphere of
influence. Josiah waged war against the evil in his kingdom because he was humble and
repentant before God. Lasting reform only comes from true repentance.

• Josiah tore down the altars of Baal, ripped apart the Asherah poles, executed the priests to these false
gods, and defiled their altars; he did so throughout Judah and also in the former territory of Israel
(2 Kings 23:4-20).

• Many try to attack evil, idolatry, and sin in their own lives with the brute force of human willpower, but
these attempts will leave us disappointed and tired. We are too weak to effect lasting change in ourselves.
Whether it is pornography reigning on our computers, pride lurking in our hearts, or tempers flaring in
our homes, the only way to tear down the idols of our hearts is through true repentance.

• Jesus’ first sermons were about repentance (Matt. 4:17), and His last words before He ascended into
heaven were about repentance (Luke 24:47). Jesus’ followers took note, and they all went out and
preached that people should repent (Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38). Repentance is key for responding to the grace
of the gospel; it is key for godly living.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 86).

Repentance: A response to God’s gracious call to salvation. It includes a
genuine sorrow for one’s sin, a turning away from one’s sin toward Christ, and
a life that reflects lasting change and transformation.

Essential Doctrine “Repentance”: Repentance is a response to God’s gracious call to salvation. It includes a
genuine sorrow for one’s sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one’s sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and
a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God’s
work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.
Point 2: Repentance involves restoring and resuming worship (2 Chron. 34:8-11).

READ 2 Chronicles 34:8-11 (DDG p. 87).

8 In the eighteenth year of his reign, in order to cleanse the land and the temple, Josiah sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, along with Maaseiah the governor of the city and the court historian Joah son of Joahaz, to repair the temple of the Lord his God.

9 So they went to the high priest Hilkiah and gave him the silver brought into God’s temple. The Levites and the doorkeepers had collected it from Manasseh, Ephraim, and from the entire remnant of Israel, and from all Judah, Benjamin, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 10 They gave it to those doing the work—those who oversaw the Lord’s temple. They gave it to the workmen who were working in the Lord’s temple, to repair and restore the temple; 11 they gave it to the carpenters and builders and also used it to buy quarried stone and timbers—for joining and making beams—for the buildings that Judah’s kings had destroyed.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 87) to point out that Josiah’s repentance led him to restore the temple so he and all the people could live according to God’s commands.

Josiah, in his eighteenth year of ruling over Judah, was merely twenty-six years old. He set his heart on honoring the temple of God, following in the steps of the good kings before him: David, Asa, Joash, and Hezekiah. The next step on his mission to weed out all idolatry and evil from his kingdom required God’s temple coming to life once again.

- If you go to modern-day Israel, there is no temple on the landscape, only a retaining wall. Instead, you see the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine. It is exquisite in size and design, but the temple built by Solomon would have superseded it.
- The Bible describes Solomon’s temple building as 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high (1 Kings 6:2). Its interior design would rival some of our finest modern-day professional buildings. The Lord’s eye for detail was keen, and Solomon’s direction and resources matched this vision. The same could be said of Josiah as he led his people to repair this ornate temple for the Lord.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

Why was the temple so vital for the cleansing of the promised land? (the temple represented God’s presence among the people in the land; the temple was God’s appointed place for sacrifices to be made for the atonement of the people’s sins; the temple helped to unify the people in their worship of the one true God; the construction and upkeep of the temple was a command of God that the people were to obey)
SAY: It’s been said that you don’t have to advertise a wildfire. You see it coming. You feel its heat. You sense its energy and its smoke, where it’s been and where it’s going. Josiah had become a wildfire, not by some self-actualization principles but because he had experienced repentance and the love of God, which fueled his passion for God’s glory.

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 87) to show how Josiah’s passion and fire for God’s glory overflowed to others through his leadership to restore the temple. Connect this to how the passion of Christians for God’s glory should overflow to other believers and draw non-believers to worship our Savior.

Josiah had become a wildfire, fueled by his passion for God’s glory, and his calling overflowed to others as he got them involved in the good work he was doing. Josiah enlisted a team of people to restore the worship at the temple: leaders, Levites, carpenters, builders, and more. This was always the purpose of God’s kings—to lead God’s people in worship and obedience to the Lord their God. So too with Christians.

- What we see in Josiah’s reforms is what we see in the early church as well. The early Christians were contagious, and their gospel message spread like wildfire, not because the people were burdened with responsibility but because they had tasted and known God’s love and forgiveness (Acts 2:41-47).
- When our hearts burn with God’s love, others will see and take note. Conversely, when believers fail to live with the purpose of worshiping God through their various gifts and calling others to worship Him along with them, they become bored with their faith and it appears boring to others. One can’t be bored, however, when viewing and living life like Josiah.

INSTRUCT: Ask group members to illustrate the level of the fire in their heart for repentance, faith, and obedience in the space in their DDG (p. 87).

SAY: The fire in our hearts roars or smolders based on our heart for repentance, faith, and obedience. The Lord stokes the fire of those who pray for His help, who repent, who step out in faith, and who obey His Word.
**Point 3:** Repentance involves recovering and obeying God’s Word (2 Chron. 34:14-15,18-21).

**READ** 2 Chronicles 34:14-15,18-21 (DDG p. 88).

> 14 When they brought out the silver that had been deposited in the LORD’s temple, the priest Hilkiah found the book of the law of the LORD written by the hand of Moses. 15 Consequently, Hilkiah told the court secretary Shaphan, “I have found the book of the law in the LORD’s temple,” and he gave the book to Shaphan.

> 18 Then the court secretary Shaphan told the king, “The priest Hilkiah gave me a book,” and Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

> 19 When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes. 20 Then he commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, the court secretary Shaphan, and the king’s servant Asaiah, 21 “Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for those remaining in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that was found. For great is the LORD’s wrath that is poured out on us because our ancestors have not kept the word of the LORD in order to do everything written in this book.”

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 88) to recall the discovery of penicillin talked about in the introduction. Emphasize its limitations as a human discovery, and contrast this with the unlimited power of God and His Word. Provide some of the history between Judah’s kings and the book of the law.

Penicillin was a life-changing discovery, but some bacteria have become resistant to it. With all human discoveries and inventions, humankind will always be limited. God’s power, however, is unlimited, and His Word will accomplish what He sends it to do (Isa. 55:11). In this case, it convicted the heart of King Josiah over the sins of his people.

- Josiah’s lack of knowledge about the book of the law is a mystery, as some of his ancestors had relied on the teaching of this book during their own reigns, namely, **David, Jehoshaphat, Amaziah,** and **Hezekiah** (1 Chron. 16:40; 2 Chron. 17:7-9; 25:4; 31:3).
- With this lineage of understanding that the book of the law did exist and that it was worth following, we must infer that knowledge of this book had fallen so far from the minds of the people during Manasseh’s and Amon’s evil reigns that it had slipped between the cracks, perhaps literally.
- When the book of the law was found, however, its power became evident once again. When the book was read to King Josiah, he didn’t frame it to commemorate his new renovation project—he tore his clothes because the words cut through him like a sharp sword.
Josiah experienced God’s power and holiness as they jumped off the pages of Hilkiah’s discovery. That same power and holiness can be experienced every time we open our Bibles today. May we never let His Word fall between the cracks of our lives.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

!? When has God’s Word overwhelmed you with its truth and power? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 88) to show how the power of God’s word in the book of the law anticipated the all-powerful Word that become flesh—Jesus.

Josiah was terrified upon hearing God’s word in the book of the law because he understood the wrath of God against Judah’s sin and disobedience of His word. Six centuries later, the very embodiment of the Word of God would be sent to earth, but curiously, He was not sent to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17). Josiah feared God’s wrath for his people’s disobedience and repented; Jesus came to die on a cross so God’s wrath would fall on Him and repentant people would be saved.

• **Jesus**—the Word (John 1:1,14)—is the Creator of all. He is the Sustainer of all life. He is the light to all of humanity that the darkness of this world cannot overcome. The source of power behind the word of God’s law that created such an overwhelming reaction in Josiah put on skin and became a Man who obeyed God’s law perfectly so He could die in the place of and save sinners who failed to obey God’s law.

**SAY:** God’s grace is available to every one who repents and believes. Josiah would be in awe of the Word made flesh. May we be in awe as well so we proclaim to the world the great grace of our God in Jesus Christ.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

!? What are some ways we should respond to the Word made flesh for us? (with repentance and faith in Him; with joy and gratitude for the salvation He bought for us with His death; with awe and praise that the Creator would take upon Himself creation to love and serve His rebel creatures; with humble and glad obedience to His commands; with praise and proclamation of His gospel to the world in need of a Savior)

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My Mission

EXPLAIN: In this passage of Scripture, we see a small speck of history played out in front of us. We can hail King Josiah as a great reformer. Certainly he was a gifted leader. But our real takeaway from this man was his repentance, his personal turning away from evil things and moving toward the light. Repentance for salvation is a one-time act, but for a fully engaged, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ, repentance must happen again and again. In his repentance, Josiah attempted to restore the temple, but that temple still crumbled. We have a greater temple through the blood of Jesus Christ. Because God longs to dwell with His people, He came to us in His Son and, through faith, has sealed us with His Spirit. We are now God’s temple, and nothing can separate us from His love. This gospel story of relentless love is what draws us back into repentance and faithful living again and again.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 89), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we have been forgiven in Christ and have been credited with His righteousness, we seek to turn from all sin and cast aside all else that hinders our worship of the one true King.

- What step of repentance and faith do you need to take in light of God’s wrath against sin and God’s grace in Christ?
- How can your group/church create a loving and caring environment that encourages, rather than stifles, confession of sin and the grace of forgiveness?
- How will you, with boldness from the Holy Spirit, share the good news of Jesus and call someone to repentance and faith?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You are the one true God worthy of our worship and capable of satisfying us. Help us to see Your command to repent from pursuing idols as good news since You have already atoned for our idolatry in the death of Your Son. Empower us by the Holy Spirit, who drew us away from our personal idols, to proclaim repentance and trust in Christ to those yet to be freed from their idolatrous sin. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 90-92), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 93) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 90-92) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 93) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 90-92) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 4 as a part of point 3 in the session: Often there will be earthly consequences for our sinful choices, rippling out and affecting the multitudes. So let us be wise, loving, and obedient.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 2: “Sin can easily creep in and pollute us both individually and corporately if we aren’t constantly returning to God. We must take sin seriously.”
- Day 3: “Every believer has been placed in his or her church, neighborhood, and community to influence it with the love of God.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 93) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to inquire whether or not their worship and approach to discipleship possesses a spirit of ongoing repentance.
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

Point 1: Repentance involves removing and destroying idols (2 Chron. 34:1-7).

“The chronological differences between Chronicles and Kings have provoked some discussion. The initiative for reform may not have been entirely due to Josiah, for in his boyhood he would have been under the influence and constraint of a regent or regents who might well have been from among the ‘people of the land,’ who no doubt saw the dangers of the religious policies followed by Manasseh and Amon and were anxious to return to a Yahweh-centered religious practice. One persuasive proposal is that the prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah had an influence on Josiah before the finding of the book of the law in 621 BC.”

According to 34:3, Josiah begins his reform initiatives at age twenty, while 2 Kings 22:3 indicates the reform coincides with the finding of the law scroll when he is twenty-six years old. The age of twenty was the age of majority in Hebrew culture and, more than coincidentally for the Chronicler, the age when the Levite began his service to Yahweh (cf. Num 1:3; 1 Chron. 23:24). The decline of the Assyrian empire after the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BC affords Judah an opportunity to reassert its own political and religious agenda after languishing as a vassal state since the time of King Ahaz. There is a growing consensus among scholars that Josiah’s reform movement predates the finding of the book of Law by Hilkiah the priest. It seems we can speak of Josiah’s early reforms prior to the discovery of the law scroll in 622 BC and his later reforms associated with the temple renovation and eradication of false worship centers.”

Point 2: Repentance involves restoring and resuming worship (2 Chron. 34:8-11).

“The Levites and priests had maintained their identity and had returned to work toward the end of Manasseh’s reign. When Josiah issued orders for the repair of the temple, they were available and ready to make their contributions to Josiah’s reform movement. Josiah had sent emissaries to collect silver for the repair of God’s house. This money was allocated to the high priest Hilkiah. He distributed it among the contractors, who gave it to the workmen, who passed it on to those who were providing the raw materials. The Chronicler reminds the readers that the destruction of the temple, while often carried out by invaders, was ultimately the fault of Judah’s kings.”
“The reforms and procedures for the temple’s repair are given in greater detail in Kings (34:8-13). Of the few changes that the chronicler makes to his source, one is the extent of the reform. The best Hezekiah could do was to courteously invite the northern tribes to the Jerusalem Passover (30:1). Josiah, however, carries his reform into the north with the will of an invader. He penetrates deep into the territories of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, not even sparing the ruins around their towns (34:6). (It is hard to explain how Simeon, traditionally south of Judah, should have holdings in the north.)”

Point 3: Repentance involves recovering and obeying God’s Word (2 Chron. 34:14-15,18-21).

“During this [repair] work, they discovered the Book of the Law that the Lord had given through Moses (34:14-15). Was this a copy of Deuteronomy or of the entire Pentateuch? The exact identity of the book is not known, nor are the contents of the book mentioned. But we are told that when it was read to the king, he tore his clothes as a sign of grief and repentance (34:16-19). Josiah asked the prophetess Huldah to consult the Lord on their behalf (34:20-22). She reported that God had irrevocably made up his mind to send all the curses written in the book because of the conduct of the people (34:24-25). She was probably referring to the curses mentioned in Deuteronomy (28:15-68). However, she announced to Josiah that, because of his humility before the Lord, these events would not take place during his reign (34:26-28).”

“It is significant that Josiah instructed his advisors, ‘Go, inquire of the Lord for me’ (2 Chron. 34:21), and they took the law scroll to a woman. She was a prophet, evidently prominent in Jerusalem, named Huldah. She is the most significant female figure in 2 Chronicles. The committee, made up of five of the most highly placed men of the kingdom, went to her to ‘inquire of the Lord … concerning the words of the book,’ and apparently nobody objected to taking the scroll to a woman for authentication. Her authority was undisputed, even unquestioned. Nobody asked for a second opinion. This fact raises doubts about the common assumption that women of the time were all uneducated and downtrodden. Huldah at least was a clear example of a learned and influential woman.”

References
3. Thomas Watson, The Doctrine of Repentance (Charles River Editors, 2018) [eBook].
The prophetic books of the Old Testament can be confusing, both to the newcomer to the Bible and the longtime reader. Where do these prophets fit in the overall narrative of Israel and Judah? What messages did they communicate? What was God doing in and through their work? The benefit of this volume of The Gospel Project is that it gives you a glimpse of the prophets right at the point their message was going forth to God’s people. We can ask questions of God with Habakkuk, look forward to the coming Suffering Servant with Isaiah, stand amazed at the stunning picture of relentless love in Hosea, and learn something of God’s extravagant love with Jonah.

As you work through the sessions in this volume, keep an eye on all the different ways God reveals Himself and communicates His messages of judgment and grace. Fall to your knees in awe, and then stand up and boldly proclaim the love of this great God, who inspired the prophets to deliver His word.