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ALLIANCE CHURCH

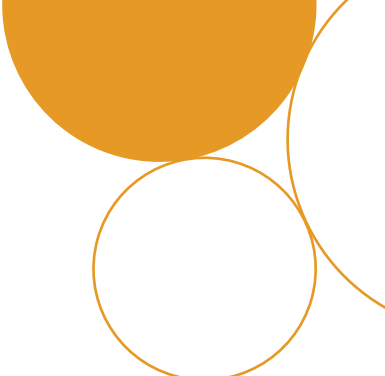
As children of the Heavenly Father, you became brothers and sisters in Christ. So while Christian faith is personal, it's not private. (Our identity is) actually quite public and intrinsically communal.

Stephen Kendrick

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When you and I look in the mirror and struggle to see evidence of a marvelous creation, it's simply because we're catching a glimpse of a work in progress. But in spite of our many flaws, we remain a creation of a masterful God who has nothing but affection for His work of art and anticipates its completion.

Michele Cushatt

"I Am: A 60 day journey to knowing who you are" 2017





weekone

DayOne

Week 1

Created and Designed by God

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-27, James 3:9

Who Am I?

What is the very first thing God's Word tells us about who we are? It's this: We are created in the image of God. Right away our humanity is dignified by the divine, and our status above all other creation is elevated (Psalm 8). Nothing else God created is given this sacred description. For every human—past, present, or future—this reality is foundational to our entire lives.

Furthermore, in Psalm 139 God says we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Remarkably, from womb, to birth, to death, we have been planned and wanted by God Himself. None of us are a mistake. Therefore, our identity is not rooted in what we can do or can't do, or what we've experienced, or even how we feel. It is rooted in the immutable image of God and His love for us.

Exactly what this means, “created in His Image,” is up for much discussion. But bottom line, as humans, we have the capacity to demonstrate something crucial about who God is and what He is like.

The enemy of our souls would like us to forget, minimize, or confuse this truth so that we get distracted and walk away from our purpose to glorify our Creator. As a result, when we look at humanity, it's easy to say, “I don't see much of God displayed.”

We can ignore or eliminate our Creator God from our lives, thinking we're pursuing true self actualization, yet in reality, we are merely plummeting to our corruption and destruction. Being created in the image of God means the more we learn about who God is, the more we can understand who we are meant to be.

Maybe the question isn't “who am I?” but “whose am I?”

What gives God the right to define us?

How does our culture like to define us?

How does the biblical truth that all of humanity is created in God's image challenge you? How does it encourage you?

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DayTwo

Week 1

Created and Designed by God

Scripture: Ephesians 1, Romans 6:16-18

Our Identity as Believers

Everyone is created in the image of God. Yet because of sin, that image is tarnished and broken in us. We are a flawed reflection of our Creator. However, when a person decides to follow Jesus, he or she gets a new identity.

We often think our identity is shaped by our accomplishments, roles, circumstances, or the opinions of others. This is not how God defines us. Ephesians 1:5 declares, “He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will.” The term “adoption” here carries profound significance. In Roman law, adopted children enjoyed the same rights and privileges as biological children, even if they had previously been slaves.

Romans 6 tells us that we were once slaves to sin but now, through our adoption in Christ Jesus, we are slaves to righteousness. This transformation should not only reshape our self-perception but also influence how we respond to life’s difficulties and failures.

Our adoption into sonship through Christ empowers us to live with boldness, confidence, and purpose, assured of God’s love, acceptance, and equipping. Our identity is no longer defined by our actions but by the fact that we belong to God.

Embracing this truth strengthens our resilience during trials and challenges, reminding us that as heirs of God’s promises, our identity is that of overcomers. Live out this truth with courage and determination, fueled by His strength, knowing you are a beloved and equipped child of God.

How does understanding our identity as adopted children of God reshape our perception of ourselves and our worth?

In what ways can we actively incorporate the truth of our adoption into sonship through Christ into our daily lives, especially during times of difficulty or failure?

Reflecting on the concept of being heirs of God's promises, how does this perspective influence our approach to challenges and our sense of purpose in life?

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Day Three

Week 1

Created and Designed by God

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:13, Hebrews 4:12

Walking Out Our Identity

Growing in spiritual maturity and confidently walking in our identity in Christ isn't a natural drift for humanity. That's why it's crucial to establish a framework for our journey with Christ. In Jeremiah, the Lord assures us that we will find Him when we seek Him with all our heart (Jeremiah 29:13). One of the most effective ways to do this is by integrating personal spiritual habits into our daily lives.

A foundational habit is making Bible reading a regular part of our rhythm. Through the Bible, we encounter the living Word of God, which is powerful and transformative (Hebrews 4:12). While we may understand this truth, we need to beware of falling into traps where we either intend to read the Bible but don't follow through, or we read it merely as an obligation, missing its life-changing impact.

Prayer is another essential practice for walking in our identity. We can pray Scripture back to God or express our requests, confessions, praises, and thanksgiving. Prayer keeps our conversation with God ongoing. It doesn't always have to be formal; find a quiet space or pray while engaging in daily activities, like driving to work, going for a walk, or doing the dishes.

Community plays a vital role in our faith journey. Having a close-knit group of fellow Christians for accountability and support enhances our ability to walk confidently in our identity. Together, we can share life's highs and lows, making the journey more successful and enjoyable.

As we commit to these practices—immersing ourselves in God's Word, engaging in heartfelt prayer, and embracing community—we can move forward

in a transformative journey of spiritual growth and healing, walking confidently in our identity in Christ.

How consistently am I integrating personal spiritual habits, such as reading the Bible and prayer, into my daily routine?

In what ways can I ensure that my engagement with Scripture goes beyond mere reading to experiencing its life-changing impact?

Do I actively seek and nurture supportive community connections to enhance my spiritual journey and accountability in walking out my identity in Christ?

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DayFour

Week 1

Created and Designed by God

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12, Galatians 6:2, Romans 12:5

Identity in Community

We not only have a personal identity in Christ, but we're also uniquely designed to live out our identity in community. Scripture teaches us that the church is a body, and each of us forms a distinct part of this body. Together, we represent Christ to the world.

Each of us has received a unique gift from God, intended to build up the church and glorify Him. These gifts are distinct and personally given to each of us. When we use our gifts effectively, we advance God's kingdom.

For instance, if you're a teacher, you can use your gift to teach the Word of God in a small group or with children or youth in the church. But your gift is not confined to the church. You can teach in a school, coach a sports team, instruct a musician, and more. As you walk in your identity and give God the credit, He receives the glory.

By engaging in a small group such as a Bible study or mini church, we can support each other in understanding and living out our identities. We are called to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:5).

Let's embrace our unique roles and gifts, contribute to the community, and bring glory to God in all we do. By doing so, we can truly support one another, fulfill our calling, and live out our corporate identity found in Jesus Christ.

How have you identified and utilized your unique gifts from God to edify the church and bring glory to Him? Can you think of new ways to apply these gifts within and outside the church community?

In what ways can you be more intentional about supporting others in your small group or community, helping them to understand and walk in their own God-given identity?

Reflect on a time when you saw someone use their unique gift for the glory of God, and consider how it impacted you and others around you.

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DayFive

Week 1

Created and Designed by God

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:8

Obstacles to Our Identity

As we contemplate the purpose and design of our identity in Christ, we encounter several formidable obstacles that hinder us from living life as God intended. One common obstacle is self-doubt and insecurity. While we may intellectually grasp what God's Word says about us, we often struggle to fully believe it. We may lean too heavily on our feelings rather than trusting in the truths of God's Word.

Another significant obstacle is the busyness or performance-driven lifestyle. This way of living is frequently encouraged by the world and even within the church at times. It distracts us from the crucial understanding that we are called to be before we do. This means we must first rest in God's love and acceptance for us before we attempt to accomplish anything for Him. Using our gifts and advancing the kingdom is important, but it should not be the foundation of our identity. Our security in Christ is complete without any additional work.

Additionally, the enemy poses a substantial obstacle in this area. In 1 Peter 5, we are warned that our "adversary the devil prowls like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." This verse emphasizes our internal struggles with sin, the influence of spiritual forces, and our need to rely on God's strength to overcome these obstacles.

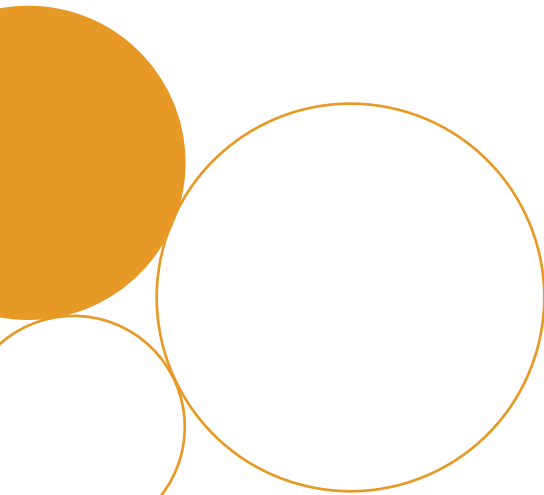
Remember, each challenge is an opportunity to deepen your faith and reliance on God. Embrace these challenges with courage and determination, knowing that you are equipped with God's Word and His strength to overcome them. Your journey in Christ is not just about enduring obstacles, but about growing through them and emerging stronger in your faith. Keep pressing forward, for you are more than a conqueror in Him!



If you don't teach what it means to be a man or a woman, it doesn't result in a nice neutral equality, it results in distortions.

John Piper

Theologian, chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary, author, and writer for "Desiring God" blog site





weektwo

DayOne

Week 2

Created Equal and Different

Scripture: Genesis 1:27, Ephesians 2:10

Gender Poetry

“So God created mankind in his own image,
In the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.”

Commentators believe this is the first occurrence of poetry in the Bible. Poetry is often used to convey intense emotion and drama. Thus, humanity is seen as the personal, passionate, artistic culmination of all creation.

Genesis 1:27 illustrates how God created humanity with two complementary parts, male and female, designed to work together to reflect the image of God, His glory, and His work. We see this especially in God's design for human sexuality in marriage. Male and female define humanity as a whole and provide the framework for all human relations.

Scripture is clear that God designed men and women as equal, yet different. In Genesis 2:22-23, we see how God created two genders. This passage is another example of Hebrew poetry. It tells how God brought Eve to Adam for the creation of marriage. Adam acknowledges she is of the same nature, therefore recognizing her equality, and yet her differences are also apparent. This equality and complementary distinctiveness is seen throughout the Bible (1 Peter 3:2).

Our culture believes gender is “non-binary,” meaning humanity has not been created as two distinct genders. But according to Genesis, God created specific distinctions and sexuality on purpose. Still, many struggle to understand who they are and what they are meant to be. Be encouraged! Ephesians 2:10 says that we are God's “masterpiece.” Notably, Paul uses the Greek word “poiema,” from which we get our English

word “poem.” You and I are God’s epic gender poem to the universe, born anew in Jesus! Jesus can be enough in the face of all our questions and struggles.

Why do you think so many people struggle with gender distinctions?

How can men and women reflect the image of God equally, but in different ways?

What do you think “created in Christ Jesus” means? (Ephesians 2:10)

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DayTwo

Week 2

Created Equal and Different

Scripture: Genesis 1:28, Isaiah 43:6-7

Designed on Purpose

Why were we created? The foundational answer is to “image” (or show) God, specifically, in how we live and work. This is demonstrated by God’s very first commandment to both men and women found in Genesis 1:28. It’s summed up in three words: rule, subdue, and multiply. This command is often referred to as the cultural mandate, or world mandate.

There is certainly a lot to be said about the world mandate with regard to humanity as a whole, but let’s make it more personal. God is the “owner” of the world, and this command equips each of us as His “managers.” As we account for the resources, experiences, and talents God gives us, how are we stewarding them in a way that reflects our Creator?

Authority in its most basic meaning involves decision-making, from the minor decisions of “what should I wear,” to the major decisions of “where should I live?” Every one of us has been given the authority to make decisions. Similarly, “subdue” involves bringing under control and diligently maintaining order. This can involve “subduing” and cleaning out the garage, to subduing a virus invading the body with the necessary medical knowledge.

Obviously, “be fruitful and multiply” has to do with procreation. God wants to fill the world with His image bearers. However, being productive is not only about having babies. Productivity involves everything we do to create value. We are called to be fruitful and live productively in every way.

The world mandate is given not only as a blessing, but notably, it makes all of us accountable. We often complain about the suffering in our world, and we like to blame God. However, God gave real authority to human beings.

One day He will bring each of us to account (Matthew 21:33-41). This is sobering but also comforting. One day sin and suffering will end. One day all accounts will be reconciled and justice will be done.

Take time to consider all the resources, talents, and experiences God has given you and how you can steward them.

In what ways is this a command a blessing? A challenge? Why?

How does your view of God affect your view of suffering?

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Day Three

Week 2

Created Equal and Different

Scripture: Genesis 2:7, 15-18

Adam

Beyond anatomy, how was Adam, the first man, created different than Eve? The first thing we notice in verse 15 is that the man was meant to “work” and “keep” the garden (i.e., to till and to guard). This points to a key difference between men and women. According to God’s sacred design, men should live with a higher sense of responsibility to provide and protect. But there’s another area of accountability in this text, isn’t there?

What was the deal with the tree? The tree represented an alternative to discipleship—an opportunity to keep or break the first commandment (Exodus 20:3). The tree showed the ability to disobey God, to trust in ourselves, to lean on our own understanding, to refuse to acknowledge Him rather than to live out Proverbs 3:5-6.

And here’s something you can’t miss: the command was given to Adam before Eve was created. The Hebrew is written this way on purpose. Adam in the pre-fall state was given the primary responsibility to lead in honoring God. This is a third key difference between men and women. According to God’s sacred design, men should live with a higher sense of responsibility to lead their families to honor God.

Authority downward is given only for the purposes of accountability upward. Any authority a man has in his family or church has been given to Him by God that he might provide for and protect them, and that he might lead them in living God-honoring lives. Far more than women and children, God will hold men most accountable in these three areas.

If God truly holds men most accountable for protecting, providing, and leading in honoring Him, how does that inform how he wants men to use their power?

If you're a man, what does it look like (in whatever phase of life you currently find yourself in) for you to live with a higher sense of responsibility in these three areas?

If you're a woman, how does this inform the way you view the men in your life?

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DayFour

Week 2

Created Equal and Different

Scripture: Genesis 1:31, Genesis 2, Genesis 3:20

Eve

When was the first time in the creation account when God said, “It is NOT good?”

When God created Adam.

Not because Adam himself was “not good,” but because the man was alone. God knew he needed a companion. So He created Eve.

Eve communicates humanity’s need for relationship and help. We are not self-sufficient. The word “helper” in Genesis 2:18 describes Adam’s need, not Eve’s inferiority. Elsewhere in Scripture this same word is often used to refer to God Himself, first in the Old Testament as a military term (God “helps” fight our battles), and in the Old Testament in relation to the Holy Spirit, our “helper.”

Adam names the woman “Eve,” (Genesis 3:20) meaning “lifegiver.” As daughters of Eve, women partner with God to bring life to the world physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is important to note that all women are symbolic of life-giving whether they have physical children or not. The even deeper significance of a lifegiver is seen when God uses feminine biology to describe the way He saves us, creating “spiritual children.” John 3:16 describes the salvation process as being “born again,” and Paul refers to believers as a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). God uses the woman (Mary) to give birth to Jesus. This is an intentional contrast to God presented as the masculine Savior.

Finally, throughout the creation account (until Adam) God says of His creation, “it is good.” After He creates Eve, however, God says it is “very good” (Genesis 1:31). And then God rested. Creation was finally complete. By God’s

grace, women add the superlative to creation. Eve completes, with a beautiful flourish, the picture of God's design.

Whether married or single, how does the creation account (Genesis 1, 2 and 3:20) give definition to what it means to be a woman in today's world?

Does this encourage you, challenge you, or confuse you? Why?

In what ways can you honor the women in your life?

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DayFive

Week 2

Created Equal and Different

Scripture: Romans 12:4-5

What Is Your Role?

A football team is made up of many different players with different backgrounds, skills, and opinions. As individuals, they might disagree or offend each other. But as soon as they walk onto the field, their differences subside. Everyone unites under a common goal to win the game.

This goal is best achieved if each teammate plays his assigned position. They can't all decide to play quarterback or defensive line; winning happens when each player does his unique job.

In the same way, as Christians we share a common goal—to glorify God. And we each have an essential, particular role to play in accomplishing that goal.

God modeled this concept for us in the Trinity. There is one God; God exists in three distinct persons, and yet each of those persons is fully God. Each has a distinctive role to play: Jesus submitted His will to the Father to accomplish the purpose for which He was sent (John 6:38), and the Holy Spirit also submitted by letting the Father determine when He would be sent (John 14:25-26). Furthermore, both Jesus and the Holy Spirit indicate that the words they speak are not their own, but from the Father who sent them (John 12:49, 16:13-15). Even though all three persons of the Trinity are rightfully God, two of the three submit to the Father to accomplish their common goal of glorifying God.

In our own relationships, we can find peace when we accept the positions God designed for us. Whether that means respecting leadership at work, church, and within our families, or stepping up to lead when God calls

us, we glorify Him when we set aside our own agendas and do what God asks us to do.

What role has God asked you to play in your home, at work, at church, or in other areas of your life? Are you in a position to lead or submit?


How well are you fulfilling the roles God has assigned to you?

How can you best support others on your “team” as you work together to glorify God?

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The impact of deception on the human race is such that the Bible's portrait of the human condition causes our moral compass to be skewed resulting in our desires to be so misdirected and distorted that we will do bad, thinking it is good.

Tim Mackie
The Bible Project





weekthree

Day One

Week 3
Broken Design

Scripture: Genesis 3:1-13

The Temptor

In the heart of Eden, Eve found herself looking to the one tree God had clearly marked as off limits. Everything around her screamed God's goodness—breathtaking flowers, friendly animals, and the joy of walking with God Himself. But then, Satan slithered in, planting seeds of doubt. He posed a simple question: "Did God really say you can't eat from any tree?" Of course that wasn't what God said, but it got Eve thinking. Suddenly she looked at the fruit differently. She desired it. And she began to wonder, was God holding out on her? Was He keeping something good from her? The serpent's words made her question God's goodness and His intentions.

He's been doing the same thing to you and me ever since. Why do we sin, even when we know better? Because sin looks tasty. It feels good. It fits in with what everybody else is doing. So we rationalize our pursuit of that which God says to avoid. We fall for Satan's old tricks again and again, allowing him to wedge doubt between us and God. And that doubt leads to sin, which leads to sadness, pain, and ultimately—as we see in Eve's story—death.

But there's good news. God's love and faithfulness never change. We need to remember that fact whenever doubt starts whispering in our ears. Just like God went looking for Adam and Eve after they messed up, our Maker is always reaching out to us, ready to remind us of His love and truth.

So next time you're feeling uncertain, cling to God's promises. He's got your back no matter what. Let's choose to trust Him, knowing that His plans are always rooted in His perfect love. After all, He's proven time and time again that He's worthy of our trust.

In what ways do you doubt God's goodness? Why is it so dangerous to determine goodness according to what looks or feels good?

Have you ever rationalized a sin? What was the result?

Satan works in all of our lives the same way he worked in Eve's—by tricking her. How can you recognize Satan's tricks in your own life?

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Day Two

Week 3
Broken Design

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

The Temptation

Ever notice how temptation often seems to strike when we're tired, stressed, or just plain bored? It's like when you're on a diet and suddenly all you can think about is chocolate cake. Temptation has a way of hitting us right where we're weak. But here's some good news: God has given us everything we need to combat it.

First, let's get something straight. God doesn't give us rules to make our lives miserable. Quite the opposite, actually. His guidelines are there for our protection. Think of them like the guardrails on a mountain road. They're not there to restrict your fun; they're there to keep you from falling off a cliff.

When temptation hits, one of the best defenses is knowing God's character. He's not some distant, uncaring judge. He's a loving Father who wants the best for His children. When we understand that, it changes how we see His commands. They're not burdens; they're blessings.

Take a look at Jesus's time in the wilderness. He was tempted by Satan after fasting for forty days. Talk about being vulnerable! Yet, each time Satan tried to lure Him, Jesus responded with Scripture. He knew God's Word inside and out, and He trusted His Father's goodness completely.

So how can we follow Jesus's example? Start by getting to know God better. Spend time in His Word and in prayer. The more we understand His heart, the easier it becomes to trust His guidelines. When we see His commands as acts of love, we're more likely to follow them, even when temptation is strong.

In what ways are you most tempted to sin?

When are you most vulnerable?

What guardrails can you place in your own daily life to protect you from giving in to temptation?

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Day Three

Week 3
Broken Design

Scripture: Genesis 3:15-16, 20-23; Genesis 4:7

Eve Gets a Name

The fall of humanity is expressed in different ways through Adam and Eve, but ultimately they lead us all to spiritual and physical death. To Eve, God says women will particularly suffer in the realm of life-giving. Yes, physically giving birth will be painful, but most would agree the whole system of the woman's life-giving capacities are filled with difficulties: from menses to menopause, infertility, miscarriages, hormonal imbalances, postpartum, and osteoporosis, just to name a few!

And let's not forget the spiritual and emotional pain of raising children. We may watch our children suffer unfairly, or we could experience a prodigal who never comes home. Both men and women contribute to the life-giving process, but women symbolize in particular the battle for life we all face: the resistance, failure, or corruption we encounter throughout.

Sadly, there is more. God continues by saying all our relationships will suffer because of sin. Especially our marriages. "Desire" in Genesis 3:16 is the identical Hebrew word in Genesis 4:7 where it is used to describe how sin "desires" to control and overpower Cain. Instead of complementing each other, the relationship between husband and wife will be one of selfish ambition. Instead of servant leadership, men will want to dominate and even abuse. Women will seek to manipulate and control rather than strengthen the relationship she was created for (Genesis 2:18).

Remarkably, Adam hears all this bad news and he immediately renames the woman Eve, meaning "mother of all living" (lifegiver). He sees two hopeful declarations in the middle of all this bad news. First, through the woman there would be life (children). Second, it would not just be any life, but conquering

life (Genesis 3:15). A woman, Mary, would be the means by which spiritual victory comes to the human race. The man, Jesus Christ, would ultimately reverse the curse. Sin, praise God, has an end date!

How does the biblical account of the fall (Genesis 3) help you understand some of the things you are suffering with?

What does this biblical account tell you about God, His character, and His love for us?

How does Adam's example of finding the good in the midst of bad help us realize God's love for us in the middle of our difficult circumstances?

mainpoint:

Day Four

Week 3
Broken Design

Scripture: Genesis 3:17–19

Consequences for Adam

Do you remember how Adam was uniquely created by God to live with a higher sense of responsibility to provide, to protect, and to lead in honoring God? If not, take a second to flip back to Week 2, Day 3. We see in the consequences God doles out in Genesis 3 that all three of Adam's roles become distorted as a result of sin.

Providing became painful. The ground that man was created to work would give him hardship his whole life, and he would one day be buried in it. Struggle in life is a result of the fall.

Protecting became domineering. The power (i.e., authority and strength) that man was given for the purpose of keeping his bride and family safe would now be abused in ways that hurt them. Harsh, unkind men are a result of the fall.

Leading in honoring God became contentious. The “helper fit for him” would now have a desire to buck and usurp his leadership. Cantankerous wives are a result of the fall.

Work is now hard, relationships now experience conflict, and God is dishonored by everyone everywhere. According to Romans 5:12, Adam's sin got us into this mess, and our sin perpetuates it. Don't miss the fact that the primary party getting a divine finger in their chest is the man. It's like this: As a father, if I say to my children, “I'm going to run a few errands; while I'm gone don't make a mess” and then turn to my eldest son and say, “I want you to make sure this place stays in order.” Then I return home to a messy house, who am I going to hold most responsible?

How do you see the consequences of Adam's sin reflected in your own life?

How does understanding the results of Adam and Eve's sin explain why our lives are so difficult?

Why does God ultimately hold Adam (the man) responsible for the spiritual condition of humanity?

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DayFive

Week 3
Broken Design

Scripture: Romans 5:18–19; Genesis 3:15

The Gospel Hope

Who will get us out of the mess Adam got us into? Think of the damage sin has done in this world. Life is filled with hardship. Relationships are fraught with conflict. Death has polluted our air and contaminated our water. No one is left unaffected. Paul writes, “just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Romans 5:12, ESV). We are all victims of sin, and we all become perpetrators of sin. And it all started with Adam!

If we get honest about sin, we'll admit that what it has done in this world is atrocious. The effects have been and continue to be abysmal. Every human attempt to rectify the problem throughout history has fallen predictably short. We can't climb out of the hole Adam dug for us; we only dig it deeper. This prognosis feels utterly beyond hope.

Solution: we need a better Adam. One who can do what the first Adam couldn't, and what we can't. One who obeys the Father's will rather than the serpent's word. One who would take our Adam-bequeathed sin and death upon His shoulders, and in exchange give to us His own blood-bought righteousness and life.

Praise God, the One better than Adam has come! On the cross, the serpent bruised His heel, but in the resurrection, He has crushed the serpent's head. Christ, the better Adam, is the One who can get us out of the mess! The only question is, do you trust Him?

Why is going our own way so harmful?

How is Jesus Christ the "better Adam?" (See Romans 5:18-19.)

How can knowing Jesus help us deal with our sin?

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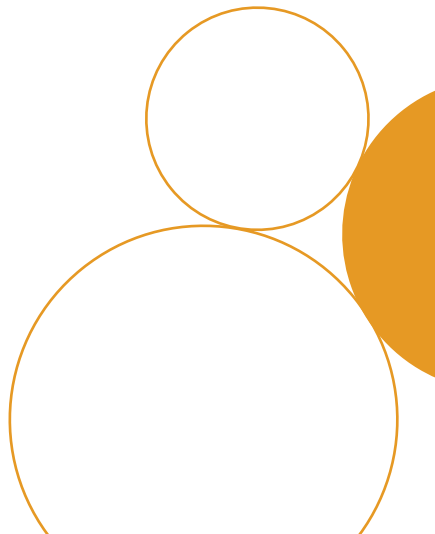
mainpoint:



Marriage forces us to wrestle with our selfishness and pride. But it also gives us a platform to display love and commitment.

Francis Chan

Preacher, teacher and author: "You and Me Forever" 2014





weekfour

DayOne

Week 4
Gospel Design

Scripture: Genesis 2:22-24, Ephesians 3:14-20

Living Up to the Family Name

We all have the same family name. And it's not what you think. Ephesians 3:14-15 tells us in the original Greek that God names the "family" after Himself! Family (in Greek: patria) is derived from God the Father (pater). This "naming" gives the family unique and profound significance.

God created everything with purpose and intent. Family gives us language and powerful insight into spiritual truths like adoption, brotherly love, inheritance, and family resemblance. Even those whose families are broken or dysfunctional understand and long for a healthy, ideal family. Let's consider three crucial spiritual insights the family, as God designed it to function, gives us.

First, family can potentially help us understand the cost and sacrifice God makes in John 3:16. A good parent can't fathom allowing a child to go through the kind of suffering Christ endured; how much more, then, must God Himself love humankind in order to make such a sacrifice? On the other hand, people whose earthly fathers were abusive or absent might struggle to comprehend the truth of a loving heavenly Father. This is why earthly fatherlessness is so harmful.

Second, the family illustrates Christ and the Church. In Ephesians 5 we learn that the relationship of a husband and wife symbolizes the relationship of Christ and His people. As Christ loved the Church, so a husband is to love his wife. And the wife, like the Church, is called to honor her husband.

And finally, the good news of the gospel is that God has a spiritual and eternal family, which supersedes our physical family. We are invited to become part of it. When we put our faith in Jesus, we are adopted by the Father

and become His children (Ephesians 1:4). God is all about family. And the truth is, the creation of family is far more about Him than us.

How has your family of origin influenced your thoughts on God the Father?

In spite of the challenges we have, what encouragement can you take away from the understanding of why God created families?

Our physical families are temporary; our spiritual families are forever. How does this reality challenge you? Encourage you?

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mainpoint:

DayTwo

Week 4
Gospel Design

Scripture: Ephesians 5:25–33

The Husband's Role - How Men Reflect the Gospel

What does God expect of husbands?

“Husbands, love your wives” is not a suggestion.

It's an imperative. Not an option you can consider, but a direct order. An unloving husband is in direct opposition to God.

Love means you sacrifice yourself.

...“as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...” Love is so much more than an emotion. It's a decision to sacrifice yourself for the welfare of your wife. When Paul says Jesus “gave himself up,” he's talking about dying on the cross. Jesus prioritized the well-being of his bride far above that of himself. Husband, you are commanded to do the same.

This is not helpful advice but timeless theology.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This was radically countercultural at the time, but it shouldn't have been. From the beginning, the theology of marriage is clear. When a man and a woman are joined in matrimony, the two become one. There's no longer “you and me” but only “us.”

This is not just “you ought to,” but “you're an idiot if you don't.”

“In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” You're one unit. So, if a husband is unloving toward his wife, he hurts himself, too.

When a husband's love for his wife takes the shape of the cross, it proclaims “CHRIST!” to the world around him.

“This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

Husband, do you want to proclaim the gospel to the world? To your kids? To your friends? To

young men in your life who are looking up to you? To other women who don't have godly men in their life?

LOVE. YOUR. WIFE.

How? As Christ loved the church...

How is love defined in this passage?

Husbands, in what ways do you live out this standard? In what ways do you fall short?

Wives, how can you support your husband's command to love you sacrificially? (1 Peter 3:1-6)

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Day Three

Week 4
Gospel Design

Scripture: Ephesians 5:21-33

The Wife's Role - How Women Reflect the Gospel

Biblical submission can be a touchy subject, but it holds incredible beauty and purpose when understood correctly. Submission in marriage is not about one person dominating another; it's about two people fulfilling different, yet equal, roles.

Think of your marriage like a car. It has a steering wheel (husband) and an engine (wife). The steering wheel leads the car in a certain direction, but without a working engine, the steering wheel won't work. Both parts have different jobs, yet they are equally vital to the car's purpose.

The world often distorts submission, viewing it as a loss of freedom or power. But biblical submission is quite the opposite. It's an act of trust in God, who is the ultimate source of power in our relationships. For wives, this means believing God will lead their husbands (however imperfect they may be) to make wise decisions for the family. That takes a double dose of faith in God's sovereignty.

Submitting doesn't mean wives are less valuable or have no say. In fact, a husband who loves His wife as God commands will seek her input and endeavor to please and protect her. In fact, Ephesians 5 gives eight commands to husbands and only one to wives: to submit. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the church—sacrificially, tenderly, and unconditionally. This kind of love, when done right, creates a safe space for wives to trust and submit, knowing their husbands are seeking their best. But even if the husband behaves selfishly, God honors the wife's trust in Him to work it all out for good (Romans 8:28).

Ultimately, we can trust God's perfect design for our marriages, even when we don't play our roles perfectly. God is sovereign over our victories and our mistakes!

Day Four

Week 4
Gospel Design

Scripture: Matthew 19:10-12

The Single's Role - How Singles Reflect the Gospel

Christian culture often focuses on marriage and family to the point where single adults can feel left out. Yet according to the Bible, singleness has a unique and beautiful purpose in God's kingdom. In Matthew 19:10-12, Jesus speaks of singleness as a gift. He acknowledges that not everyone can accept it, but those who do can fully devote themselves to God's work.

Singleness reflects the gospel in profound ways. Just like marriage, it's a picture of Christ's relationship with His people. When we're single, we have a unique opportunity to demonstrate our complete dependence on God. We're reminded that our identity and worth aren't tied to a relationship status but to our relationship with Christ.

In Matthew 19, Jesus says, "The one who can accept this should accept it." This doesn't mean singleness is a lesser calling. In fact, it's a high calling that allows for undivided devotion to God. Single men and women often have more time and freedom to serve others, to invest in deep relationships, and to pursue their passions in ways that reflect God's love and purpose.

Being single isn't a waiting room for marriage. It's a vibrant, fulfilling lifestyle in its own right. It's an opportunity to grow closer to God, to understand His heart, and to be used by Him in unique ways. Each believer, whether single or married, is a testament to the gospel, showcasing God's forgiveness and salvation for those who trust in Jesus.

DayFive

Week 4
Gospel Design

Scripture: Philippians 2:6-11

Who Has the Power?

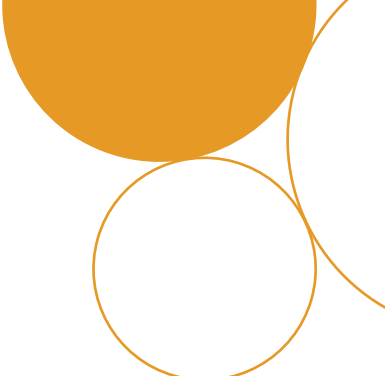
Power differential is the dynamic in every relationship that leaves one person with more power and the other person more vulnerable. This is present in almost every social system.

At times we see this power differential through circumstance and influence. A person with a weapon makes others vulnerable. A person with money holds power over those who do not. A person possessing sensitive information can quickly elevate to a place of power.

But more often, we see this power differential because of a given role. There is a power differential between boss and employee, coach and athlete, teacher and student, parent and child, and often husband and wife.

Jesus also recognized this power differential in His relationship with us. Jesus, being God, could have used that power to His own advantage, but instead He humbled Himself to become like us, human. God did not use His power to require obedience. Nor did He use His power to coerce our love. Instead, He emptied Himself of that power in order to relate with us, and to serve us.

In our own relationships, too often we use power differential to our advantage. We abuse it to meet our own needs and to serve our own agendas. Instead, like Scripture says, let's consider the same mindset as Christ Jesus who humbled Himself to serve us. He willingly set aside His appearance of glory in order to obey God and give us hope. By following His incredible example, we, too, can glorify God and point others to the one true source of power.



Proof of salvation is not the absence of temptation. We assume once we swallow the magic bullet of salvation we are immediately delivered from all earthly temptation. We are not. We are, however, delivered to a higher strength to resist temptation. We are delivered to a place where we can show our weaknesses to God and He shows up. He makes a way and we are empowered to resist.

Jennifer Rothschild

Author, speaker, blogger and 4:13 podcaster





weekfive

DayOne

Week 5
Twisted Design

Scripture: Ephesians 5:31-32

What Does the Bible Say About Sex?

Newsflash: God created sex. It's not dirty; it's a gift—within the covenant of marriage. That's because marriage reflects Christ's relationship to the church, and sex is a physical expression of that union. It symbolizes worship, celebrating God's design for a husband and wife and, ultimately, His kingdom as a whole.

On the other hand, sex outside of marriage is considered sin because it distorts God's design and takes something sacred out of its intended context. It turns an act of worship into something that not only dishonors God but can also harm us emotionally and spiritually.

This is not to suggest that sex within marriage is perfect. There are plenty of ways two sinful humans can use sexual intimacy to hurt one another. Again, if sex is a mirror of Christ's covenant with the church, then our role is the church, which is made up of faulty people. We're bound to be imperfect. No couple can completely eliminate their sin nature from their relationship.

Ultimately, our desires, including our sexual desires, are meant to point us to God. They remind us of our longing for intimacy, which finds its truest fulfillment in a relationship with Him.

By honoring God's plan for sex, we acknowledge His wisdom and goodness. We trust that His boundaries are there to protect and bless us. Embracing this perspective allows us to experience sexual intimacy as it was meant to be—a beautiful, sacred reflection of God's covenant love and a powerful expression of worship within the safety and commitment of marriage.

How do you view sex? As a pleasure, an obligation, a dirty deed? How do your views compare to God's design for sex?

In what ways do God's "rules" for sex protect us?

How does our humanity (i.e., tendency toward sin) marr God's designs for sex, even within marriage? How does the gospel give us hope in this area?

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DayTwo

Week 5
Twisted Design

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Flee and Pursue

The compilation of Jewish law written down by Moses outlines each sexual act that is considered sin. By the first century, this group of laws became known as a category of sins called sexual immorality. Jesus spoke of this category in his teachings, while Paul and John also used this category of sin in their letters to the first century believers.

As Christians, we look to Scripture to learn how to live according to Jesus's teachings, and when we look at the category of sexual immorality, it's easy for us to grade these sins on a spectrum of severity. We may rank homosexuality or adultery as more severe while ranking heterosexual lust and pornography as less severe. Not only that, but we may also choose to ask questions like, "how far is too far?" and "is it pornography if the image is not fully nude or the scene is not explicitly shown?"

We may want to grade on a scale of severity or mince words, but this verse does not: "Flee from sexual immorality" (2 Corinthians 6:18). Anytime we justify sexual immorality, we are walking around and near it, not fleeing from it.

But we are missing the point if all we take from this passage is a list of things not to do or to flee. We are to flee from sexual immorality and pursue honoring God with our bodies. This seems to say that we can use our bodies in such a way that God is honored or glorified by our actions. We can't be sure what this looks like, but it likely has to do with returning to our bodily service to God in the unadulterated Garden of Eden before the fall.

How are you tempted to rank sins within this category of sexual immorality?

How are you tempted to justify your actions as not fully counting as sexual immorality?

What action steps can you take to “flee from sexual immorality” and pursue “honoring God with your body”?

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Day Three

Week 5
Twisted Design

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11 and Hebrews 4:15

Is Same-Sex Attraction Wrong?

When it comes to same-sex attraction, it's important to distinguish between temptation and action. Even Jesus was tempted, as we see in Matthew 4:1-11, yet He remained without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Acting on our temptation will lead us away from God's plan.

The Bible teaches us to take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5). This means we need to be mindful of our thoughts, surrender them to God, and resist the urge to act on any thoughts that aren't aligned with God's will. It's a daily battle, but we're not alone in it. The Holy Spirit is within us, giving us strength to resist.

So, is same-sex attraction wrong? It's not God's design for us. It's a desire born of the sin nature. The challenge lies in how we respond to it. We're called to live in a way that honors God, which means refraining from actions that go against His design.

Resisting temptation can be tough, but we have practical tools to help us. Start by immersing yourself in God's Word. Scripture helps to renew our minds and keep us focused on His truth.

Prayer is another powerful tool. Talk to God about your struggles, and ask for His guidance and strength. Choose to feed your mind with the things of God rather than dwelling on the desire.

It's also important to surround yourself with a supportive community. Find friends or mentors who can encourage you, pray over you, and hold you accountable. Remember, we're all in this together, striving to live lives that reflect God's love and holiness.

Ultimately, choosing to follow God instead of temptation not only

honors your Maker, it's also the best path for your life. Trust that God knows what's right for you, and remember He's with you every step of the way.

Every sin starts with a thought. What are some practical ways you can resist temptation at the "thought" stage, before it becomes an action?

Do you know someone who struggles with same-sex attraction? How can you be a biblically sound support to that person rather than a judge?

Do you personally struggle in this area? Talk with a trusted friend, mentor, Bible study leader, or pastor. Your church community is here to help guide you in truth and love.

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Day Four

Week 5
Twisted Design

Scripture: Romans 1:18-27

What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?

In Scripture, God's design for sexual intimacy is clear: it is meant to be between a man and a woman within the covenant of marriage (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). Same-gender sexual relations fall outside of this design, as highlighted in passages like Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27.

God's Word teaches that sexual intimacy is a sacred expression of love and unity within marriage, designed to mirror Christ's relationship with His church (Ephesians 5:31-32) as two people (one male and one female) become "one flesh." Any deviation from this design goes against God's plan and His purpose for human relationships.

While Scripture affirms the dignity and worth of every person, and we're called to love others in spite of their sin, God's Word also calls us to live in obedience to His commands. Humankind is often tempted to misinterpret those commands in order to suit cultural trends. However, God is the same today, tomorrow, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The Word is timeless. We must allow it to guide our beliefs and decisions even when culture disagrees.

This includes honoring God's design for sexual purity and fidelity. The Bible presents same-gender sexual relations as contrary to God's will, which is rooted in His love and desire for our flourishing.

As followers of Christ, our response should be marked by love and compassion, while also upholding the truth of Scripture. We are called to embrace God's design for sexuality and encourage one another to seek His will in our lives, trusting in His wisdom and goodness.

DayFive

Week 5
Twisted Design

Scripture: Romans 1-3

Warning Against Judgment and Hypocrisy

In a quick read of Romans chapter 1, we see that idol worship leads to homosexuality, wickedness, evil, greed, and much more. Many Jewish readers would have arrogantly pointed their fingers at the non-Jews, who are subject to judgment and wrath from God, agreeing with the author that they have no excuse (1:20). It is difficult for modern Christian readers to refrain from also pointing their fingers at the non-Christians of our age who also have traded the glory of God for idols (1:22) and have been given over to homosexuality, wickedness, greed, and the like.

But just like the ancient readers, as we read on to Romans chapter 2, we are faced with a harsh word of warning aimed directly at the rest of us claiming we also have no excuse (2:1). Like ancient Jews, we pass arrogant judgment as if we were God Himself (2:3), and we boast in our superior standing before God, convinced that we are to guide and teach those people (2:18-20).

Yet, we continue to read that we too are not perfect, and we also sin; we just sin differently. In Romans chapter 3, the apostle Paul strategically calls out the non-Jew and the Jew as equally sinful, just as we are equally sinful as the modern sinners of our day. This all builds up to one of the most basic, profound, and important statements Paul ever wrote:

“There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

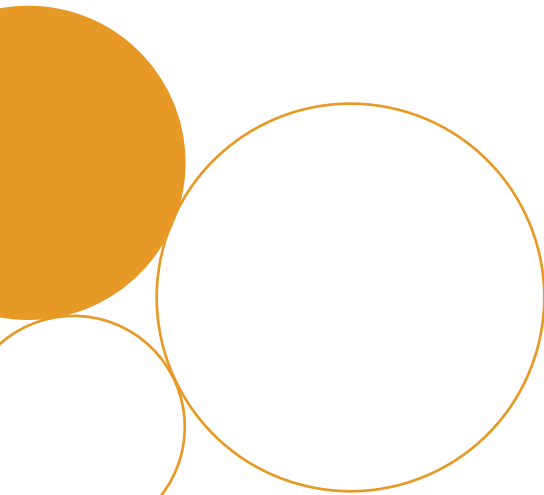
We need to remember this very clear response when we pass judgment on others who are far from God and far from living according to His kingdom.



The creation of the world seems to have been especially for this end, that the eternal Son of God might obtain a spouse, towards whom he might fully exercise the infinite benevolence of his nature, and to whom he might, as it were, open and pour forth all that immense fountain of condescension, love, and grace that was in his heart, and that in this way God might be glorified.

Jonathan Edwards

17th Century reformed theologian and pastor in North America





weeksix

DayOne

Week 6
God's Redemptive Design

Scripture: Song of Songs 8:6-7

The Real God of Love

Churches often avoid reading the book Song of Songs (also called the Song of Solomon) because of how awkward it is, and understandably so—the couple depicted in it is very much in love. But toward the end of the book, in chapter 8:6-7, we find what it's really all about:

“Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm;
for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.
Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.
If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be
utterly scorned.”

This speaks of the purest, most dedicated love, and while we get a glimpse of it through our human relationships, only God could be the source of such passionate kindness. This is because He Himself is love. Christianity is unique in that God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit have always existed in a perfectly unified relationship with each other.

This is called the Trinity, meaning there are three distinct persons within one divine being. The significance is that God already had relationship apart from us; He has never needed us to fulfill Him, and He does not require us to love Him back. Rather, because each person of the Trinity is pouring into the others, their love overflowed in a desire to create... us.

But we need Him. Our hearts will never rest until quenched in this kind of love—the love of One that knows our deepest flaws and wants to be with us anyway. The kind of love that even death cannot stop. This is our God.

How have you believed the lie that human love could satisfy you?

How does knowing God's love is perfect encourage you?

Knowing what Song of Songs is ultimately about, are you most apt to read it? Why or why not?

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DayTwo

Week 6

God's Redemptive Design

Scripture: Revelation 19:6-9

The Divine Love Story

The Bible is a love story between the Creator God and His creation of humanity. It begins with God, before any human being takes a breath. We see this when Jesus says to the Father, “you loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

Humanity was then created as an expression of God's love, created for His Son, made in His image, and created to love. That first love relationship was defined as a marriage between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:22-24), designed to reflect the greater reality of God's love for His creation (Ephesians 5:22-33).

But as in any dramatic story, there are tragic twists. When the first man and woman rebelled, humanity was doomed to death and destruction. All appeared lost! Yet God intervened.

God the Father sent His son Jesus, the perfect man, to come into this broken world to claim His bride. But first He needed to rescue her. Because of her rebellion, she had been sold into slavery. With great bravery and at immense cost, Jesus paid the price with His life and secured her rescue. Afterwards, He returned to the heavenly realms to prepare a place, while His bride remained to make herself ready.

Who is this bride for whom the King of the Universe gave up everything? She is us—the people from every age and nation who choose to place their trust in Jesus, the true King.

Righteousness and steadfast love are not the only qualities Jesus brings to His marriage, but also the qualities He creates in His bride. He will come back a second

time to marry and take her, His church, into the garden of His love and our joy forevermore.

Do you see yourself as part of God's big love story? Is this a new concept for you? How does it change the way you see God and the Bible?

How does knowing the "end of the story" give you strength and endurance to face the challenges of the present?

How does the Bible narrative of God's love help us understand the distinctions and purpose of God's creation of "male and female?"

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Day Three

Week 6

God's Redemptive Design

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:6-12, 16-18

Living Unsatisfied

Our hearts were made for heaven, but we live in this world where there is heartbreak, conflict, frustration, and disappointment. It is for this reason that God has given us lament, or permission to voice how hard life is. In order to keep our faith alive, we must admit when we feel the emptiness of this world, then allow ourselves to grieve that pain with fellow believers. This alleviates the pressure of hard times and old wounds, and gives us the people we need to survive the journey.

Lamenting breaks down the pain to create empty space for hope to fill, but the aches do not go away immediately. It can take a long time to let God's promises become the reality of our lives. We may be tempted to fill these gaps in our heart with the things this world tries to sell us, but we must remind each other to cling more tightly to God's truth and trust that His purposes are so much bigger than ours.

In this passage, we see how hope in God is not merely a future thing, but also what currently keeps us going. We have the very Spirit of God Himself in us, infusing each of our days with meaning and purpose and value, despite the fact that we are but "jars of clay," fragile and temporary. It is here, in our weakness, where God's glory begins to be revealed, and someday we will get to see that work completed.

Why do you think God allows sadness in His love story?

How do you usually deal with the disappointments of life? How can the concept of biblical lament encourage you? (Read Psalm 42 for an example.)

Relationships are filled with joy and sorrow, often at the same time. How can you glorify God in both circumstances?

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Day Four

Week 6
God's Redemptive Design

Scripture: Revelation 22:1-5

How the Story Ends

While reading these passages in Revelation, you may feel something shift inside of you. Your soul knows that this perfect place, where all humans and relationships will be made right, is what you long for because it is your true home.

This section of the Bible has been labeled “Eden Restored” by Bible scholars. The image here is that the perfection of the garden of Eden in Genesis will be recreated, uniting heaven and earth in God’s glorious plan. God will be with us in such a way that the earth and everything in it will become holy and wonderful. Heaven is not simply a happy place to go to, but the place where God dwells with us, and that is what it will be—perfect satisfaction in Him.

If you have ever read or watched a story like *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, or another piece of epic fiction, you may have felt a pull toward that other land where the hero struggles but then defeats the evil, pushing back the darkness and allowing peace and joy to reign in the end. This is our reality: we are in the middle of that story, when hopelessness is all around, but we must cling to the truth that good is coming, that Jesus has won the war, and that someday all evil will be gone. We hold onto the hope that the end is good, and indeed it will be.

When are you tempted to feel hopeless in your relationships?

What helps you to persevere?

We often think we are the main character in the story of our lives, but in reality, God is. How might this perspective inform our responses to our circumstances and relationships?



*main***point:**

DayFive

Week 6
God's Redemptive Design

Scripture: Revelation 22:16-17

Waiting Faithfully, Together

So, like a bride eagerly anticipating her wedding day, let us wait. Let us feel our thirst and run to the only One who could ever satisfy. Let us give and receive kindness, knowing that this is but a taste of heavenly glory, where all evil will be gone and our hearts will be healed from the pain that it caused.

May we walk through our days with joy, knowing that we are not alone, no matter our relationship status.

May we love each other well, holding onto the promise that we will be in heaven together and that this life is only the journey there.

May our desire to be with God make us homesick—not in a way that tempts us to create our own version of heaven, but that we may live God's glorious design today.

Pray for His speedy return, when all will be made right, but also pray for the courage to live in His presence now, to be a light for those living in darkness.

In a world that is suffering, pray that your heart would be soft and compassionate toward everyone around you, just as Jesus is. And pray that we can point them to Him—our Bridegroom, the One who loves us.

Let us pray: "Father... Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

And His people say, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

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*main***point:**

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.



*Special*Thanks

Our sincerest thanks to each author who contributed their time and talent to this devotional book:

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Most of all, we thank God for his insightful Scripture, gentle teaching, and abounding love.

Weekly Questions

After each week, review these questions with your mini church:

- 1. How does this idea apply to people overall?**
- 2. How does this apply to you personally?**
- 3. What does scripture/God say about this topic?**
- 4. Why do you struggle to believe this is true/right/accurate?**
- 5. What would you do differently in light of this? What would you keep the same?**



Scan the QR code to view and share the questions online!

alliancechurch.org/reflection

