



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

# FROM CREATION TO CHAOS

ADULTS / DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE / FALL 2021 / VOL. 1



# GOD'S WORD TO YOU

## A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then in the fullness of time, in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. Repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

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# THE EDITOR

When I was a pastor, the hardest part of writing sermons was always the end—the application. Explaining the meaning of the passage was life-giving and, in a sense, easy. But when it came to explaining what to do in light of it, I struggled. I offered practical guidance on all kinds of different issues, but it always rang hollow to me. Eventually the reality hit me: I was feeding my people the Scriptures, but I was failing to testify to Jesus as I did. I was preaching moralism, telling people to live better lives in their own power. I wanted them to change their behavior rather than be changed by the gospel.

I know I'm not alone in my experience. Many of us grew up hearing the Bible taught this way, and many of us have taught it that way. And this is why I love being part of The Gospel Project. I am grateful for God's kindness to allow me to be part of a resource that is helping people to place the gospel where it belongs—at the center of all we do.

Because if we are followers of Jesus, that's what we're called to be about. We're called to be people who are here for good news with good news to share with the whole world. And that begins not outside in the world but within the church. We need the gospel just as much as those who do not yet know Jesus. We need to be changed by it and to continue to be changed by it.

So whether you're reading this as a brand new Christian, an established believer, or someone still trying to figure out what you believe about Jesus, know that this is my hope for you: that as you study the Bible personally and in community, you will see how it all testifies to Jesus, week after week.

For His glory,

**Brian Dembowczyk**

Managing Editor of The Gospel Project

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its author; salvation for its end; and  
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# ALL AGES STUDY PLAN

## **VOL 1: From Creation to Chaos**

(Genesis) Fall 2021

**Unit 1:** The Heavens Declare the Glory of God (Gen. 1–2; Pss. 8; 96)

**Unit 2:** Let Us Make a Name for Ourselves (Gen. 3–11)

**Unit 3:** I Will Make Your Name Great (Gen. 11–50)

## **VOL 2: From Captivity to the Wilderness**

(Exodus–Deuteronomy) Winter 2021–22

**Unit 4:** Out of Egypt I Called My Son (Ex. 1–15)

**Unit 5:** To Dwell in the House of the Lord (Ex. 16–40; Lev.)

**Unit 6:** Be Holy, Because I Am Holy (Num. 13–14; 20–21)

## **VOL 3: From Conquest to a Kingdom**

(Joshua–1 Samuel) Spring 2022

**Unit 7:** Lord, Teach Me Your Statutes (Josh. 1; 3–4)

**Unit 8:** Fear the Lord and Worship Him (Josh. 2; 6–11; 23–24)

**Unit 9:** There Is No Fear of God Before Their Eyes (Judg.; Ruth; 1 Sam. 1–6)

## **VOL 4: From Unity to Division**

(1 Samuel–1 Kings) Summer 2022

**Unit 10:** Because of Your Hardened Heart (1 Sam. 8–15)

**Unit 11:** Create a Clean Heart for Me (1 Sam. 16–17; 2 Sam. 6–7; 11–12)

**Unit 12:** If You Walk Before Me with a Heart of Integrity (1 Kings 1–12)

## **VOL 5: From Exile to Rebellion**

(1 Kings–The Prophets) Fall 2022

**Unit 13:** What Comes Out of the Mouth Comes from the Heart (1 Kings 12–18; 2 Kings 1–5; Isa. 44)

**Unit 14:** Seek the Lord, All You Humble of the Earth (2 Chron. 24; Isa. 22; 25; 30; Zeph.)

**Unit 15:** He Has Made Every Nationality (Jonah; Nah.; 2 Chron. 36)

## **VOL 6: From Captivity to Restoration**

(The Prophets, Ezra, Nehemiah)

Winter 2022–23

**Unit 16:** The Lord Keeps His Eye on Those Who Fear Him (Jer. 29–30; Dan.)

**Unit 17:** Take Refuge in the Lord (Ezra 1–6; Zech. 13–14)

**Unit 18:** For Look, the Day Is Coming (Esth.; Neh.; Mal.)

## **VOL 7: From Heaven to Earth**

(The Gospels) Spring 2023

**Unit 19:** Here Is the Lamb of God

(John 1–2; Luke 2; Mark 1; Matt. 4)

**Unit 20:** God’s Love Was Revealed

Among Us in This Way (John 3–4)

**Unit 21:** Without Faith It Is Impossible to  
Please God (Luke 4–5)

## **VOL 8: From Wonder to Rejection**

(The Gospels) Summer 2023

**Unit 22:** The Works That I Do in My

Father’s Name Testify About Me

(Mark 4; 8; Luke 5; Matt. 9; John 10)

**Unit 23:** The Kingdom of God Is in Your  
Midst (Matt. 5–7; 13; 24; Luke 15; 17)

**Unit 24:** God’s Glory in the Face of Jesus  
Christ (Luke 13; John 11)

## **VOL 9: From Death to Resurrection**

(The Gospels) Fall 2023

**Unit 25:** Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Who

Kills the Prophets (Matt. 21–25; Mark 1;  
John 6; 14)

**Unit 26:** The Hour Has Come

(John 12; Matt. 26)

**Unit 27:** The King of the Jews

(Luke 22–23; Matt. 27–28)

## **VOL 10: From Many People to One People**

(The Gospels, Acts) Winter 2023–24

**Unit 28:** I Am with You Always (Luke 24;

John 20–21; Matt. 28)

**Unit 29:** You Will Be My Witnesses

(Acts 1–2)

**Unit 30:** Every Day the Lord Added to  
Their Number (Acts 2–5)

## **VOL 11: From One Nation to All Nations**

(Acts and Epistles) Spring 2024

**Unit 31:** Every Knee Will Bow

(Acts 5–8; Phil. 2)

**Unit 32:** The Power and the Wisdom of  
God (Acts 9–12; 1 Cor. 1; 12)

**Unit 33:** A Prisoner of Christ Jesus  
(Acts 9; 13–14; Philem.)

## **VOL 12: From This World to the World to Come**

(Acts, Epistles, Revelation) Summer 2024

**Unit 34:** Ambassadors for Christ

(Acts 15–19; 2 Cor. 5; Eph. 4)

**Unit 35:** That I May Gain Christ

(Acts 20–28; Phil. 3)

**Unit 36:** A New Heaven and a New Earth  
(Rev. 4–5; 19–22)

# HOW TO USE THE DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

*Central to your personal  
and group experience with  
The Gospel Project for Adults  
is the Daily Discipleship Guide.  
Here's how to make the most  
of your time with it:*

## BEGIN WITH PERSONAL TIME IN THE WORD

We recommend beginning your week with the daily devotions. These devotions lay a foundation for what will be explored and discussed in your group time as you build healthy rhythms of personal discipleship.



### DAY 1

#### READ:

Genesis 1:1-2:3

#### FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 1:1

#### NOTES



#### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #25: CREATION OUT OF NOTHING

The Bible teaches that God created the universe—everything both visible and invisible—out of nothing (sometimes expressed in the Latin phrase, “creation ex nihilo”). This means that before God created anything, nothing else existed except God Himself. God alone is eternal, every created thing has a beginning. Therefore, the eternal God rules over all of His creation and He alone is worthy of worship. Denial of this doctrine has implications for God’s sovereignty over and providence in creation. Because God created out of nothing, creation has meaning and purpose and points us to the Creator.

The word prequel was not a normal part of English parlance until the last twenty years. Why? Mainly because of movies, and more particularly because of the Star Wars films. As is well known by moviegoers, the first film in the Star Wars saga, which was released in 1977, began in the middle of a larger story, carrying the subtitle “Episode IV: A New Hope.” The film dropped the audience into a story with an assumed history to which they had no access other than the allusions made within the film itself.

The perspective of Star Wars fans in the late 1970s matches on some level with the experience of the ancient Hebrews (or, later on, Israelites). With their exodus from Egypt (Ex. 13–14), the Hebrews were reintroduced to the one true God, Yahweh, through a great act of redemption. Having some knowledge about God’s promises to their ancestors, the Hebrews rediscovered that they were in the middle of God’s story, with the Book of Genesis providing the background for this story of stories.

So, Genesis was the prequel of sorts that the Holy Spirit led Moses to compose in order to give the people of Israel their backstory, which is God’s story. The God who made promises to their ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—was the God who created the heavens and the earth. Therefore, Genesis 1:1 gave the formerly enslaved Hebrews the proper outlook on who this redeeming God is, namely, the maker of heaven and earth (cf. Gen. 2:4b).

Yahweh was not just another deity among the pantheon of gods the Hebrews heard about from their neighbors. He is the God, the Creator of the universe, the only God and the only Savior (Isa. 43:10–11), the God of gods and Lord of lords (Deut. 10:17).

**Why do we need to be reminded that the God who saved us is also the God who made the universe?**

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## STUDY THE BIBLE WITH YOUR BIBLE

Reading and studying the Bible is absolutely life-changing, and we believe the best way to study the Bible is to use the Bible you own. Whether you read from the CSB, ESV, NIV, KJV, or many other translations, the Daily Discipleship Guide helps you engage with the session not only with our book but your Book.



## GET BACK TO BASICS

As you read and study, we recommend using the tool found in your Daily Discipleship Guide called the Seven Arrows of Bible Study. The Seven Arrows guides both novice and experienced students of the Word through the basic mechanics of Bible study by asking a few key questions of any passage (see page 10 for more information).

## DISCUSS AND APPLY IN COMMUNITY

Each session concludes with a two-page discussion guide. This guide includes the key points of the session along with interactive questions and activities designed to address the needs of a variety of learning styles. Mark up the discussion guide, make notes, fill in the blanks, do the activities, write out questions and thoughts—make it yours!

### 7 ARROWS OF BIBLE READING

by Matt Rogers

There is often a vast disconnect between the awareness of the need for disciple-making and practical tools that actually aid in this work. Three factors are essential: Scripture, relationships, and time. Discipleship happens when the life-changing truth of Scripture is infused into genuine relationships over an extended period of time.

Our desire was to create a simple, reproducible strategy that would facilitate this process. This led us to develop a simply strategy for small clusters (2-3 people) to meet together regularly and talk about the Scriptures and apply them to their lives.

The seven arrows of Bible reading were an attempt at developing a tool for proper hermeneutics to power these relationships. We did not want our people to simply talk about the Bible. We wanted them to understand the Bible and know how to apply it to their lives. Each cluster would read a predetermined passage of Scripture and discuss it using these seven arrows.

What does this passage say?

What did this passage mean to its original audience?

What does this passage tell us about God?

What does this passage tell us about man?

What does this passage demand of me?

How does this passage change the way I relate to people?

How does this passage prompt me to pray?

10



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**What does this passage say?**



**What did this passage mean to its original audience?**



**What does this passage tell us about God?**



**What does this passage tell us about man?**



**What does this passage demand of me?**



**How does this passage change the way I relate to people?**



**How does this passage prompt me to pray?**

**ARROW 1:** The goal was for the clusters to start by summarizing the main point of the passage as succinctly as possible, ideally in one sentence.

**ARROW 2:** Next, the clusters sought to discern authorial intent for the passage by asking what it meant to its original audience. Since a text of Scripture can never mean what it never meant, it is necessary to begin by discerning what the text meant. Often this may require the clusters to consult other study tools or cross-reference other biblical texts to arrive at the meaning of the text.

**ARROW 3:** Thirdly, we asked what the text tells us about the nature and character of God and specifically His work through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

**ARROW 4:** Fourthly, the text was analyzed to see what it tells us about humanity. Bryan Chappell refers to this as the “fallen condition focus” of the text. What does the text reveal about sin and humankind’s need for the gospel?

**ARROW 5:** Then we moved the clusters to application. Since we had rooted the clusters in the meaning of the text, they were now positioned to rightly apply it’s meaning to their lives.

**ARROW 6:** From there we wanted our clusters to apply the Scripture to their relationships with others. Ideally, they would discuss how the text shaped both how they related to other believers and how they lived on mission in the world.

**ARROW 7:** Finally, the clusters rooted their prayers in the Scriptures. Hopefully, the previous six arrows kindled the flames of passionate prayer in the lives of the clusters—both for their own sanctification and for their mission to the lost.

With this model, we touched on three important areas for discipleship:

**Scripture**—Disciple-making was rooted in a rightful understanding of Scripture and not in simply doing life together, unpacking another sermon, or dependance on classroom instruction.

**Simplicity**—Disciple-making was simple enough for everyone to get involved. All believers could take these principles, a Bible, and a relationship with a young Christian and get to work.

**Stickiness**—Disciple-making through understanding and applying Scripture was etched in the minds of our young church. They could use these same arrows not only to guide their cluster discussions but also their personal Bible study, small group leadership, and comprehension of sermons.

These arrows have proven to be a unique tool in our disciple-making toolbox that the Lord is using to call and build faithful and fruitful followers of Jesus.

Matt Rogers is the teaching pastor at The Church at Cherrydale in Greenville, South Carolina. His church developed the Seven Arrows tool to help people read and understand Scripture within their small groups. The concept has gone on to form the basis of a 52-week devotional for teens from Lifeway Students, the Seven Arrows Bible from B&H, and is now featured in The Gospel Project for Adults and Students.

# UNIT 1

+

**THE HEAVENS**

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**DECLARE**

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**THE GLORY**

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**OF GOD**

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# “Let There Be Light”

by Jen Oshman

We followed the guide through the natural doorway carved into the side of the mountain. The tunnel was barely taller than we were, the air noticeably chillier than where we had been standing a moment ago. A drip, drip, drip echoed in the distance, and we breathed in that distinct after-the-rain smell. With each step we descended farther into a labyrinth of limestone.

Uneasy whispers arose and we all zipped up our jackets and pulled on our hoods. We could see our breath. After several minutes of walking with care so as not to scratch our heads or our sides, the tiny tunnel finally fanned out. We then took in the grandeur of hundreds of stalactites and stalagmites reaching out for one other like the fingers in Michelangelo’s “The Creation of Adam.” Lights permanently installed on the cave ceiling above shone on the emerald green water below. With eyes wide and mouths agape, we beheld this underground treasure.

And then the lights went out. Our guide had just murmured something about how we should get ready for it to be dark, but we didn’t fully comprehend his words in time. We weren’t prepared for a darkness that was total and complete. My husband, children, and I all reached out to feel each other. People nervously laughed and little ones tried not to cry. The dark just feels sinister, uncertain. It makes you shiver and wonder what’s out there. When the switch was finally flipped back on, a collective sigh of relief echoed off our stone surroundings. With the flood of light came a flood of comfort and gratitude.

## LIGHT OVERCAME DARKNESS

In the beginning, before God fashioned the heavens and the earth, darkness was over the deep. Was it dark like that cave? Or was it much darker? Light was absent. It simply did not exist until God said, “Let there be light.” On the first day of creation, light overcame the darkness, as it always would from then on.

On the first day  
of creation,  
light overcame  
the darkness,  
as it always would  
from then on.

Our Creator God continued, speaking everything into existence: the Himalayas and the Yellow Sea, aloe vera and giant sequoias, the stars Sirius and Betelgeuse and Pollux, the whale shark and the lesser goldfinch, the heifer, the Komodo dragon, and the red-eyed tree frog. Just like my family in the cave, we now take in God's wondrous works with eyes wide and mouths agape. The heavens declare God's glory and the earth resounds with His praise.

On the sixth day, God breathed life into the very first humans, and the Bible tells us He made them—and He made you and me—in His image. All 7.8 billion people currently on the planet and every person who has lived before us and everyone who will come after us bears God's image. Just think about that. Every man, woman,

and child of every color and country, of every ability and age, of every tribe and tongue, no matter his or her wealth or circumstances or skills or setbacks bears the image of the one true God. To bear His image is to be like Him. Not in every way, of course, as we are not God and we are sinners, but we resemble Him. In some fashion, by nature, we all point each other to Him, and we all receive His gracious care.

God's care for us is stunning, beyond comprehension. Indeed, at our earth's birth God brought forth light, but He didn't stop there. Jesus, the Creator of light itself, said, "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). The Maker of light is Himself light.

"For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). At our re-birth, God brought forth light into our hearts. Darkness was over us. But God—our Creator, our light-maker, our redeemer—came down to rescue you and me.

---

The Maker of light is Himself light.

# Show them the light, for without Jesus we are all lost and have no hope.

---

## **CALLED OUT OF DARKNESS AND INTO THE LIGHT**

How very good of our God not to leave us in the cold and complete darkness. While we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us, trading our sin for His righteousness (Rom. 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:21). Though we deserve darkness, death, and hell, we are instead given light, life, and eternity with our good God and Savior. How kind and merciful of Him to come. He has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light so that we might proclaim His excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9).

If you are in the light—in Christ—praise God above and proclaim Him. Shine in the darkness for others. By God's grace and His power, reveal to others the treasure that is hidden from their view. Show them the light, for without Jesus we are all lost and have no hope. There is nothing you or I or anyone else can do to conjure up the light on our own. It must be given to us, and once we have it, we must share it wherever darkness remains.

That cold, dark cave that my family visited falls woefully short of the darkness that yet persists in this world and the darkness that awaits in the next for those who don't know Christ Jesus as Lord. But

the cave stands as a physical symbol of a spiritual truth. We were once in the dark, but now we are in the light. We who have been redeemed were once lost, but now we are found. We were once blind, but now we see. God's matchless beauty, goodness, and majesty has been revealed to us through the light of creation, the Light of the world, and the light that we redeemed image bears bring with us wherever we go.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus calls us to let our light shine before men in such a way that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16). For God's glory and for the good of all people, may you and I shine like the bright lights in that dark cave, pointing to the eternal, glorious, and immeasurable treasure found in Jesus.

We are made in God's image. In Christ, we are children of light. Let's shine.



# IN THE BEGINNING

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God created everything out of nothing, and all of creation reveals Him.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Genesis 1:1–2:3; Hebrews 11

**+** **SETTING:**

Before “In the beginning,” there was God. Before time and space was, there was the timeless, boundless, infinite Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The triune God—one God in three Persons, perfect in love, unity, and holiness—creates. All that we see, all the science we study, all the history we know and experience—everything owes its existence to the One who created everything out of nothing, and everything serves the purpose of bringing Him glory.



# DAY 1

## READ:

**Genesis 1:1–2:3**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 1:1**

## NOTES



### **ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #25: CREATION OUT OF NOTHING**

The Bible teaches that God created the universe—everything both visible and invisible—out of nothing (sometimes expressed in the Latin phrase, “creation *ex nihilo*”). This means that before God created anything, nothing else existed except God Himself. God alone is eternal; every created thing has a beginning. Therefore, the eternal God rules over all of His creation and He alone is worthy of worship. Denial of this doctrine has implications for God’s sovereignty over and providence in creation. Because God created out of nothing, creation has meaning and purpose and points us to the Creator.

The word *prequel* was not a normal part of English parlance until the last twenty years. Why? Mainly because of movies, and more particularly because of the Star Wars films. As is well known by moviegoers, the first film in the Star Wars saga, which was released in 1977, began in the middle of a larger story, carrying the subtitle “Episode IV: A New Hope.” The film dropped the audience into a story with an assumed history to which they had no access other than the allusions made within the film itself.

The perspective of Star Wars fans in the late 1970s matches on some level with the experience of the ancient Hebrews (or, later on, Israelites). With their exodus from Egypt (Ex. 13–14), the Hebrews were reintroduced to the one true God, Yahweh, through a great act of redemption. Having some knowledge about God’s promises to their ancestors, the Hebrews rediscovered that they were in the middle of God’s story, with the Book of Genesis providing the background for this story of stories.

So, Genesis was the prequel of sorts that the Holy Spirit led Moses to compose in order to give the people of Israel their backstory, which is God’s story. The God who made promises to their ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—was the God who created the heavens and the earth. Therefore, Genesis 1:1 gave the formerly enslaved Hebrews the proper outlook on who this redeeming God is, namely, the maker of heaven and earth (cf. Gen. 2:4b).

Yahweh was not just another deity among the pantheon of gods the Hebrews heard about from their neighbors. He is the God, the Creator of the universe, the only God and the only Savior (Isa. 43:10–11), the God of gods and Lord of lords (Deut. 10:17).

**Why do we need to be reminded that the God who saved us is also the God who made the universe?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Genesis 1:1–2:3**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 1:2–5**

## NOTES

What is time? Augustine (354-430), a church father, famously quipped, “I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me” (Confessions XI.14).<sup>1</sup> On the first day of creation, we see God begin to fashion time as a gift to His creatures. We often speak figuratively about “making time” or “taking time” when it comes to our schedules, but God actually made time in the most straightforward of terms. Just as we require space, we as finite creatures also need time in order to exist.

On Day 1, God gave order to what previously was unordered. He brought forth light amidst the darkness and used the light to distinguish between daytime and nighttime. But God did not do this as though He needed a watch. No, God is timeless (Ps. 90:2), and time is part of creation. God instead created time for His creatures’ sake, accenting His goodness in making a world for the benefit of others than Himself. We see this further demonstrated on Day 4 with His appointing the sun, moon, and stars to their roles for the sake of His creatures (1:14-19). Later, with His resting on Day 7, God even had His creatures in view when He blessed the Sabbath (2:2-3; Ex. 20:8-11). Time, then, is an especially important gift of God.

The next time you thank God for His good and perfect gifts, express your gratitude to the Father of lights for His gift of time (Jas. 1:17). Where—and when—would we be without time?

**What does God’s creation and the ordering of time reveal about Him?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Genesis 1:1-25**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 1:24-25**

NOTES

“Save the Best for Last”—not only the title of the 1992 song performed by Vanessa Williams, this is also the message of Genesis 1 on some level.

In the Genesis creation narrative (1:1–2:3), we see God’s wisdom and goodness at work as He arranges the cosmos into a “good” home suitable for His variety of creatures. He is presented as a thoughtful and considerate host, as it were, who prepares to share a home with His guests whom He intends to welcome as permanent residents.

During Days 1–3, God formed particular creaturely realms (e.g., day/night, seas/sky, dry land), and during Days 4–6, He filled them with corresponding creaturely rulers (e.g., sun/moon/stars, sea creatures/birds, land animals). By focusing on the creation account only up to this point in Day 6, we can’t help but notice what—or rather who—remains absent. On Day 6, after creating the land animals, God would pause to contemplate the arrival of His chief creation and guest of honor: humankind (cf. Ps. 8:3-8).

The rest of creation was ordered with human beings in view; the party was planned with the guest of honor principally in mind. By their delayed entrance, the author’s unfolding of the six days of creation purposely led up to God’s crowning achievement: “Let us make man in our image...” (Gen. 1:26ff).

God saved the “best” for last.

**What are some ways we can affirm the goodness of all God’s creation and creatures?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Hebrews 1

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 1:1-3

NOTES

The human author of the Book of Hebrews wrote primarily to a Jewish audience, yet this Word of God, inspired by God's Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16-17), speaks to all who have ears to hear. And its message? Simply put, Jesus is better!

Jesus is better than the animal sacrifices to cover sin that were prescribed in the Old Testament (10:1-18). Jesus is better than the priests who offered those sacrifices (4:14-9:28). And here in Hebrews 1, we read that Jesus is better than the angels because, though He took on our humanity, He remains the divine Son of God, worthy of all worship (1:6).

When the Son took on flesh and entered the world through a human womb, He became the pinnacle of what God wanted to say to human beings, God's image bearers. Here was a human being who radiated what God is like—pure, holy, loving, and just—He is the image of God (Col. 1:15). The Creator of all entered into His creation like one of His creatures so we could know the Creator God in all of His glory.

But to know God in this way, that which separates us must be removed. Our sin has built a wall between us and our Creator, and had He not spoken to us through the prophets and now His Son, we would remain utterly adrift in the sea of our deserved judgment. But God loved the world, so He spoke and He sent (John 3:16). Jesus is God's message that saves.

**What has the coming of Jesus taught you about the Creator God?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

Hebrews 11

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 11:1-3

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The body's eye did not recognize the God of all as creator; instead faith instructed us that God, who has always existed, created what did not exist. There is, after all, no example of this among human beings; yet though learning nothing of the kind from nature, we have in faith a teacher of the unexpected. Human beings, of course, make something out of something, whereas the God of all produced what exists out of nothing."<sup>2</sup>

-Theodoret of Cyr (c. 393-457)

How we understand creation and the beginnings of our universe is a matter of faith. None of us were there at the beginning of all things. None of us saw the surging waters, the formation of the land, the igniting of the stars, or the explosion of living creatures. None of us heard the silence broken by the Word of God speaking all these things into existence. But we must believe these things were so because God has told us so in His inspired Word (see Gen. 1; John 1:1-5).

The world offers various and competing views for the origins of the stuff we see. Some are purely natural; others are mythological—but all require faith, whether their adherents want to admit it or not. People frame and speak of their beliefs in a certain way so they may be found acceptable to the scientific establishment or to a specific religious group, sect, or cult. This could even be the case in the church, but first and foremost, our faith in the biblical understanding of creation leads to approval from God because we are taking Him at His word.

In general, people struggle to believe in what they cannot see, what they cannot test, what they cannot touch. It seems easier to shrink our world to what we think we know and what we can find out through our senses. But God places a premium on our faith—faith is the avenue through which God has chosen to save us. By nature, faith rests in what is not seen, that which is beyond our senses. By faith, God's people believe that everything we see came from nothing at the command of God. And those who believe His Word without seeing are blessed (John 20:29).

**What distinguishes a Christian's belief in "creation out of nothing" from being a blind faith?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Nothing comes from the hand of God that is not intrinsically good. He is the good God who does all things for good."<sup>3</sup>

-Barnabe Assohoto  
and Samuel Ngewa

### POINT 1: God created everything good (Gen. 1:1-5).

Genesis 1:1 is foundational for the biblical creation account and the whole of Scripture because it introduces us to the main character of the Bible— \_\_\_\_\_.



**How should we read the Bible knowing that God is its main character?**

God called His creation \_\_\_\_\_ as He brought \_\_\_\_\_ to it through His word.



**What are some ways you have seen the goodness of God's creation?**

### POINT 2: God created everything by design (Gen. 1:14-19).

God's design in creation demonstrated God's \_\_\_\_\_ toward humanity and His \_\_\_\_\_ as the one true God as He formed and filled the creation by His words.

Day 7: _____			
FILLING	Day 4:	Day 5:	Day 6:
	_____, _____, and _____	_____ and _____	_____ and _____
FORMING	Day 1:	Day 2:	Day 3:
	_____ and _____	_____ and _____	_____ and _____



**What are some ways human beings have twisted God's good design in creation?**

### POINT 3: God created everything for a purpose (Heb. 11:1-3).

#### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #25: CREATION OUT OF NOTHING

NOTES

The Bible teaches that God created the universe—everything both visible and invisible—out of nothing. This means that before God created anything, nothing else existed except God Himself. God alone is \_\_\_\_\_; every created thing has a beginning. Therefore, the eternal God rules over all of His creation and He alone is worthy of worship. Denial of this doctrine has implications for God's sovereignty over and providence in creation. Because God created out of nothing, creation has \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and points us to the \_\_\_\_\_.



**How should belief in the biblical account of creation affect the life of a Christian?**

### MY RESPONSE

Because God created everything to reveal His glory, we seek to fulfill our purpose of making much of Jesus so that others might trust in Him and know and enjoy the Creator too.

- **HEAD:** How might you need to stand for the truth about God's creation in your home, community, and workplace?
- **HEART:** What are some ways your group/church can worship God and reflect and honor God's goodness through your use of His creation?
- **HANDS:** Who will you introduce to Jesus Christ, our Creator, Savior, and Lord?

#### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"<sup>4</sup>

—Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

# MADE IN HIS IMAGE

## + SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

People were created as God's image-bearers, providing all of humanity with a unique purpose and relationship with the Creator.

## + BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Genesis 1–2; Psalm 8

## + SETTING:

In the beginning, God made everything good. Everything was exactly the way He intended: the earth and sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, the creatures that live on land, in the sea, and travel through the air, and even time itself! But His creative work didn't end with any of these. He was saving the best—the pinnacle of creation—for last. In His final creative act "in the beginning," God created *us*.



# DAY 1

## READ:

**Genesis 1:1–2:3**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 1:26–28**

NOTES



### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #28: IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY

The image of God in humanity is understood as mirroring God's attributes in our nature, actions, and relational capacities. In Jesus, we see the true image of God. He perfectly mirrors God's attributes, fulfills God's will, and enjoys a perfect relationship with the Father. The Bible continues to speak of the image of God in humanity even after our fall into sin, even though our ability to rightly reflect God has been marred.

Children are a reflection of their parents. While each of us is distinct from our mothers and fathers and, if we are parents, our own children are distinct from us, we can easily recognize our shared characteristics—both the good and the bad. Just as this is true in relation to parents and children, it is even more so in relation to God and humanity, God's image-bearers.

Humans were made with this intention in mind—that we would reflect something of God's perfect nature and character into the world around us. Everything in us, everything about us, was made for this. In the beginning, we, and more specifically, the first two humans, could truly reflect His goodness and perfection. They were good because God is good, and He called them good—"very good," in fact (Gen. 1:31).

But as we know from the rest of the Bible's story and from our experience in the world, they didn't stay that way. Because of our sins against God, our nature as image-bearers has been distorted. We still bear God's image because we can't not. It is who and what we are. But the image we reflect is distorted. We are stewards who subjugate, cultivators who exploit, twisting what is good and beautiful and true of our nature, like a reflection in a funhouse mirror.

But we are not without hope. Though we cannot perfectly reflect God's nature and character to the world on our own, there is One who can—Jesus Christ. He is the image of the invisible God, the exact expression of His nature (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), the One who was in the beginning with God as God and through whom and for whom all things were made, including us (John 1:1–2). He is our hope, the One to whom we belong by faith and the One in whose image we are being remade day by day until the day we see Him face to face.

**What is one way you see God's nature reflected in your own character? What is one way you need to grow to reflect God's character more faithfully?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Genesis 2:4-25

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 2:4-14

## NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"What brings a person value, significance, and hope is not what he does, but *with whom* he does it. The call to live in continual communion with God means that every person's life, no matter how mundane, is elevated to sacred heights."<sup>1</sup>

-Skye Jethani

Every writer makes choices when telling a story, especially a true story. Every detail matters. Every word is intended to drive the story forward. That's true of the Bible as well. We can't forget that the Bible is telling a true story with crucial themes that carry through every page. So why would Moses, God's inspired human author of Genesis, seem to double back and revisit something he already wrote about in the first chapter of Genesis? How does that help move the Bible's story forward?

The answer is found in one of the most important of the Bible's themes: God's dwelling with humanity. This theme carries through the entire Bible, but it begins here with God's making a garden. Yet it is easy to miss. We often read this passage focusing on the details of the location, sometimes with the goal of identifying where it really was in the world (because, remember, this garden was a *real* place). But reading it this way risks missing the point that Moses had in mind.

Moses was describing a place that can rightfully be called a paradise, but it wasn't paradise merely because of its beauty and splendor. It was paradise because this was the place where God would meet with humanity, His image-bearers. This is God's desire, and we read about it on every page through the rest of Scripture—in God's response to humanity's rejection of Him, through the flooding and renewal of the world, in the promise and fulfillment of bringing a great nation from one man, and ultimately in the rescue of people from every people group and ethnicity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit to dwell in those who believe. This theme of God's dwelling finds its ultimate fulfillment in another garden—a garden-city, the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22), where Jesus returns to make all things new. God will one day dwell with His people forever.

**How will the present presence and the future promise of God to dwell with His people affect your life today?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

Genesis 2:15-25

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 2:18-23

## NOTES

With rare exception, we are conditioned to understand the word “helper” as, in some way, subservient. In our understanding of the relationship between the helper and the helpee (yes, I know it’s not a real word), the helper plays a secondary or supporting role to the one he or she is helping. In some communities, even Christian ones, this understanding is taken to a greater extreme. For example, some people implicitly and often explicitly cast a vision of women as of secondary value to men, a vision that finds its home in cultural conditioning and sin’s effect on our hearts and minds more than in the Bible itself. But when we take this misconception into our reading of the Bible, we miss the beauty of God making the woman to be a helper suitable for the man.

The Bible clearly describes the first man and woman as equals. Both were equally made in the image of God, without distinction or hesitation (Gen. 1:27). Genesis 2 expands and deepens this in its description of the woman’s creation, saying that she would correspond to, or complement, the man. We, male and female, are alike, equally distinct from the rest of creation, equally bearing the image of God. But we aren’t the same. Equal and same are not synonyms. The ways in which we bear God’s image are different. When the woman was called a “helper” (2:18), God was not declaring her nature as secondary; He was naming the specific way in which she bears His image, to be a helper as God is a helper and a source of support and comfort as God is to His people (Ex. 18:4; Ps. 10:14; 20:2; 121:1-2; 124:8).

The man’s unabashed delight at seeing the woman for the first time, the one who was “flesh of [his] flesh” (Gen. 2:23), reminds us about the value the Bible places on both of God’s image-bearers. Our equality is a joy. Our differences are cause for celebration. And together we bear God’s image fully.

**How can you celebrate the ways others uniquely reflect God today?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Genesis 2:15-25

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 2:24-25

## NOTES

Moses characterized the first humans' relationship in a way that, while sounding strange to our ears, is important: They were naked and felt no shame. These words are a picture of profound intimacy—two people, at their most vulnerable, with no fear, uncertainty, or anxieties casting a dark cloud over their relationship.

This is something no other human being since these first two has ever felt completely in any relationship. Even in our deepest relationships, whether romantic or platonic, we resist intimacy. In our experience, intimacy and vulnerability require the risk of getting hurt or of shame creeping in.

God's intention for human relationships was for just this sort of intimacy, free of the fears that prevent us from allowing people to truly know us. While we struggle with this, the perfect love of God in Christ casts out all fear (1 John 4:18). Christ's love doesn't only cast out our fear of God's wrath and condemnation or our fear of the consequences of our sins (though it certainly does that). His love also casts out our fears that prevent us from experiencing the profound intimacy for which God designed us.

Fundamental to our vulnerability with others is our experience of intimacy with God. Through the gospel, what once was lost is restored. We are known by Him (Gal. 4:9), and nothing is hidden from Him. None of our thoughts, fears, hopes, or dreams are unknown to Him. He cares about them all. Because of Jesus, the sins we commit no longer hinder our intimacy with God. We can know Him deeply right now, living in the light of His promises. Right now, today, we only know Him in part, as though looking in a mirror, but even though we can only know in part now, a day is coming when we will fully know Him, even as we are already fully known right now (1 Cor. 13:12). On that day, our intimacy with God on both sides will be complete.

**Would you describe your relationship with God as an intimate one? Why or why not?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**Psalm 8**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Psalm 8:3-9**

NOTES

If you ever wondered about the value God places on human beings, you only need to read this psalm. Humanity, which was made a little lower than God Himself (Ps. 8:5), rules over the rest of creation. We are God's representatives for the rest of the world. This is true of no other created being in heaven or on earth. Not even the angels are "crowned" with this glory and honor, to be called and function as God's image-bearers. They do not share in this special calling; they do not share in dominion or authority over the rest of creation.

But this uniqueness is not a reason for pride. It is a call to humility. As the psalmist questioned in verse 4, we have to ask ourselves: What have we done to be worthy of this glory and honor? Why should God care about us, His creatures? Why should He place such privilege on humanity? The psalmist, even in asking the question, provides the answer—nothing. Our value to God has nothing to do with what we do or have done. Our value to God is based on how He made us, on who we are.

This is exceptionally good news for those who are weary and heavy laden (Matt. 11:28). It is good news for all who sin and stumble and continually try to earn God's affection and approval. It is even good news for those who doubt that God exists. Our value to God is not something that can be earned. And while our inherent value does not remove the need for the forgiveness of our sins, it allows us to marvel evermore at the lengths God went to save us—sending His Son, Jesus, to become like us in our weakness, to become lower than the angels (Heb. 2:5-9), so that by faith in Him, we can be forgiven forever.

**How will you treat others because of humanity's inherent value as God's image-bearers?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"That the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."<sup>2</sup>

-Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

**POINT 1: We bear God's image in our roles** (Gen. 1:26-28).

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #28: IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY

The image of God in humanity is understood as mirroring God's attributes in our \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and relational capacities. In \_\_\_\_\_, we see the true image of God. He perfectly mirrors God's attributes, fulfills God's will, and enjoys a perfect relationship with the Father. The Bible continues to speak of the image of God in humanity even after our fall into sin, even though our ability to rightly reflect God has been marred.



**What are some specific ways we can faithfully reflect God as His image-bearers in our culture?**

**POINT 2: We bear God's image through our relationships** (Gen. 2:18-23).

Human beings, made in God's image, are \_\_\_\_\_ beings in a way that is analogous to (but also different from) how God is a relational being. While our triune God is self-sufficient, we \_\_\_\_\_ external relationships in order to flourish.

God made human beings male and female to exist as \_\_\_\_\_ and suitable \_\_\_\_\_ for one another. In the marital relationship, among others, we reflect God's image.



**How does a biblical worldview differ from the culture's on the issue of gender?**

### POINT 3: We bear God's image as a crown of glory and honor (Ps. 8:3-9).

Human beings in comparison to the greatness of creation seem \_\_\_\_\_ and insignificant. Yet it is only humans who were made by God to \_\_\_\_\_ over all of creation.



**How have you experienced the greatness of creation making you feel insignificant?**

Humans wonder at God's care in part because we are sinners, but God sent His \_\_\_\_\_ as "a son of man" so that we might be \_\_\_\_\_ through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (Heb. 2:6-9). Jesus, the image of God, is worthy of all glory and honor.



**What are some ways we can honor and glorify our Lord here on earth?**

## MY RESPONSE

Because every human is an image-bearer of God, we fulfill our mission of glorifying God by loving and respecting all persons and pointing them to Jesus, the only One in whom they can find life and purpose.

- **HEAD:** How might the truth that God created people different yet equal change your perspective on yourself and others?
- **HEART:** What individual or group of people might you struggle to view as God's image-bearers? How has this study challenged you in this area?
- **HANDS:** What is one action you can take this week to put God's character on display as His image-bearer?

NOTES

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For you have made us for yourself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in you."<sup>3</sup>

-Augustine (354-430)

# MADE FOR HIS GLORY

## + SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God's Glory—His matchless beauty, goodness, and majesty—is revealed through the worship of His people, the wonder of His creation, and ultimately through the revelation of His Son.

## + BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Psalms 96; 2 Corinthians 3–4

## + SETTING:

Before God created the heavens and the earth, God's glory was manifested and praised without measure and without end. Through His creation, God made a stage and an audience for His glory to fill. Giving God glory is our highest purpose as human beings. We were made for this—to witness God's glory and testify to it! The entire Bible, and notably the Psalms, helps us to direct our attention and our praises to our Creator God, especially as He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.



# DAY 1

## READ:

**Psalm 96**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Psalm 96:1-10**

NOTES

It's often said that worship is more than singing, which is true. To worship, after all, means to ascribe worth—and in the Christian faith, to declare the greatness of God over all others. Correctly understood, worship is the defining posture of our lives, shaping the way we live moment to moment. By definition, then, worship has to be about more than singing. But even against the backdrop of a comprehensive view of worship, it needs to be said: Worship is more than singing, but it is not less.

God's people are expected to sing praises to the Lord. We sing as a confession and declaration, as a reminder and affirmation, of God's greatness, splendor, and majesty (Ps. 96:6). We sing to one another of His wondrous works and to proclaim His salvation for all to hear (Ps. 96:2-3). Of course, we know the fullest depiction of His salvation came when Christ entered our world, died for our sins, and rose again for our eternal life and victory, which He will come again to bestow upon all who believe in Him.

In this, our singing isn't meant simply for our benefit. We don't sing only for ourselves. And although He is the object of our worship, we don't sing only for God. We also sing for the good of the whole world (Col. 3:16). Our singing to the Lord is a powerful way for the story of God's plan of redemption to be told throughout the earth. Through our worship, we declare the greatness of the God who is greater than all others. Our singing should be an invitation to people from every people, language, tribe, and nation to join in celebrating God's wondrous works and His splendor and majesty. We worship as a way to fulfill the mission Christ gave us—to go into all the world and make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). We worship so that through our worship more worshipers will emerge.

**How can your worship reflect a desire to see more people worship Christ?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Psalm 19**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Psalm 19:1-4**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #27: GOD'S GLORY

The glory of God is His manifest work, the way He represents His perfect character through His activity. It also refers to His excellent reputation and is given as one of the reasons we are to praise His name. Another sense of the word is the inherent beauty of God, the unbearable brightness and beauty of His being as He radiates His own attributes and characteristics for all to witness. The Scriptures speak of humanity as having “fallen short” of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23) because we have rejected the purpose for which God created us—to glorify Him.

The Bible’s narrative can seem so far away from our experiences today. In the Scriptures, we read of God acting in ways we don’t immediately recognize in our own lives or speaking to specific people directly in ways that we don’t see today. This can create a disconnect for us: Does God still speak? Is He really present? Does He have any interest in us and this world at all? When left to linger, this disconnect can grow to undermine our desire to worship God at all.

The truth is God is not silent. He is always speaking, always revealing His nature, character, power, and will, even if we don’t hear, see, or understand clearly. The psalmist recognized this truth and saw it as cause for celebration. “The heavens declare the glory of God,” he wrote (Ps. 19:1). Everything, from the human body in all its complexity to the intricate design of the natural world to the unfathomable beauty of distant galaxies, tells us something about God. God’s “invisible attributes ... his eternal power and divine nature” are manifested everywhere in His creation because God wanted all people to perceive something of who He is, even if He is beyond our comprehension (Rom. 1:19-20).

When we wonder if God is speaking, all we need to do is look at the world around us. Through creation we can see that God is communicating His existence to us. His creativity is on display. His love of beauty is plain to us. His orderly nature and power are there for us to see. Every moment, everything in this world speaks of His existence and His care for this world, even if only in a whisper. And our natural response as one of God’s created beings, not to mention His special image-bearers, ought to be to join the heavens in declaring the glory of the Creator God.

**How will knowing that God always makes Himself known change how you worship?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Psalm 96**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Psalm 96:11-13**

NOTES

From Genesis 3 forward, the Bible's narrative is marked by a sense of anticipation. God makes promises to people throughout history, promises that all build toward one shared fulfillment in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. But the anticipation doesn't stop there. It keeps building toward another promise, the promise of the final restoration of all things and the final establishment of God's kingdom in all of its fullness (see Matt. 6:10).

So what does that have to do with praise or worship? Wherever we see this sense of anticipation spring forward in the Bible, as it often does in the Psalms, it frequently turns to praise. Psalm 96, with its call to declare the splendor and majesty of God, starts by looking at the present moment, looking at who God is and what He has already done for His people. This is right and fitting. When we have experienced the grace of God in our lives, when we have seen and experienced His work in saving and sustaining us day by day, how can we not praise Him? Yet the psalmist's praise didn't stop with what God had already done. His praise pointed forward, anticipating something greater from the God who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Creation declares God's glory right now (Ps. 19:1) but does not do so as fully as it was meant to because of the curse of sin. Creation was meant to be filled to the brim with the celebration of God, but its praise is muted to a whisper. Yet we also worship looking forward, as the psalmist anticipated, waiting for the day when those whispers transform to shouts of joy (Ps. 96:12). That day is not here yet. But we can praise God now full of anticipation for the day it arrives, when Christ returns and makes all things new.

**What should it look like for you to live and worship with this sense of anticipation for Christ's second coming?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Isaiah 40

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 40:18-31

## NOTES

The Bible talks frequently about why we should worship God and that we should praise Him only. But why? Why Him and no one else? In pluralistic societies, the exclusivity that the Bible presents seems outdated, if not offensive. After all, shouldn't people be free to worship whomever and whatever they want? But this question, as posed, is often the wrong one. The issue is less a question of freedom and more a recognition of worthiness.

Human beings can and do worship many different things, even apart from their religious beliefs, including money, sex, power, and pleasure. But these gods, like the idols of wood, gold, and silver the Israelites pursued for generations—"gods" made in their own image, with no life, power, or voice—are hardly worthy of praise. They cannot compare to the one true God, the God who made everything, who is enthroned above the heavens and the earth (Isa. 40:22). The one God has the power to reduce kings and princes—the powerful—to nothing, and He is the everlasting God who gives strength to the weak and the powerless (40:29).

In Isaiah 40:25, God asks who is His equal? Who could possibly compare to Him? When we look at the world around us, when we see what God has made, when we recognize the creativity and power and beauty before us that only comes from Him, the answer is clear:

No one! There is no one like our God.

There is nothing like Him, and no one is worthy of comparison. No one and nothing else is worthy to be praised. Only God, the maker of all things, whose work can be seen all around us, the only one to give His Son to rescue us from our sins—only He is worthy.

**What in your life draws your attention away from God as the only one worthy of worship?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

2 Corinthians 3–4

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Corinthian 4:1-6

## NOTES

There's no question the world today doesn't look the way it should. It doesn't fit the "very good"-ness of God's creative design. It doesn't fully glorify Him the way it was intended, and neither do we. When we look at the world, when we look at the actions of the people God made—including, sadly, many Christians—it's easy to lose heart as darkness threatens to overcome us.

But even when we're seeing things at their worst, we need not lose hope. The proclamation of God's glory in the world might be barely a whisper, but creation still proclaims it (Ps. 19:1). Professing Christians may act deceitfully and distort the Word of God (2 Cor. 4:2), but God's Word stands true, even if the people who come in His name do not. People may be blind to the truth, blinded by the "god" of this world (4:4). But Christ is able to shine light into the darkness, just as He did in the beginning, and give sight to those whose minds have been blinded to the truth of the gospel—the light that saves sinners from the pervasive darkness of sin and death (4:6).

Darkness can never overcome this light. Jesus—the light of the world (John 8:12)—is always able to cast out the darkness, even in the darkest of hearts and circumstances. So we can continue to do what God has called us to as people created in God's image and by faith made part of God's new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). We go into the world and share the good news of the gospel, full of confidence that God will do what only He can.

Let us believe God's Word is true and that He still does miracles. Let us look for and respond to the evidence in people's hearts and actions that God has said, "Let light shine out of darkness," just as He did in the beginning (2 Cor. 4:6; Gen. 1:3).

**Who are you praying will come to faith in Jesus as the light of the world?**

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Since the divine nature is invisible and always remains so, it is seen for what it is in the humanity of Jesus Christ which shines with divine light and sends out its rays."<sup>1</sup>

—Theodoret of Cyr (c. 393-457)

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let ev'ry kindred, ev'ry tribe  
On this terrestrial ball, To  
Him all majesty ascribe, And  
crown Him Lord of all; To  
Him all majesty ascribe, And  
crown Him Lord of all."<sup>2</sup>

-John Rippon (1751-1836)

## INTRODUCTION

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #27: GOD'S GLORY

The glory of God is His manifest work, the way He represents His \_\_\_\_\_ character through His activity. It also refers to His excellent reputation and is given as one of the reasons we are to praise His name. Another sense of the word is the inherent beauty of God, the unbearable brightness and beauty of His being as He radiates His own \_\_\_\_\_ and characteristics for all to witness. The Scriptures speak of humanity as having "fallen short" of God's glory (Rom. 3:23) because we have rejected the purpose for which God created us—\_\_\_\_\_.

### POINT 1: God's glory is revealed through the worship of His people (Ps. 96:1-10).

We are to declare God's glory as the most excellent \_\_\_\_\_ who is greater than all other gods. Compared to Yahweh, who made the heavens, all other "gods" should be regarded as \_\_\_\_\_.



**What are some ways our worship of God matters in this world?**

In our leading all of creation in worship, we should confess \_\_\_\_\_ who God is by celebrating His \_\_\_\_\_.

### POINT 2: God's glory is revealed through the testimony of His creation (Ps. 96:11-13).

\_\_\_\_\_ revelation helps us understand the purpose and proclamation of \_\_\_\_\_ revelation.



**What does it say about God that He reveals Himself in different ways, such as in nature and in literature like the psalms?**

God's creation points to the glory of the Creator, though its message is muffled due to the \_\_\_\_\_ of humanity. But one day the praises of creation will ring loud and clear when the Lord comes again to \_\_\_\_\_ the earth and set everything \_\_\_\_\_.

NOTES

### **POINT 3: God's glory is revealed through the proclamation of His Son** (2 Cor. 4:1-6).

The gospel radiates more clearly when believers \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the truth.



**What are some ways we can detract from God's glory in the gospel?**

The proclamation of the gospel, coupled with God's \_\_\_\_\_ of calling \_\_\_\_\_ out of the darkness of our hearts, helps us to see our salvation is all about God's glory in Jesus Christ, God's Son.

## **MY RESPONSE**

Because the Son of God came to earth so that we might come to know and experience the glory of God, we live as a sent people, telling others about our glorious Savior, Jesus Christ.

- **HEAD:** How will the knowledge of God's glory in Christ shape your outlook on life in this world?
- **HEART:** What earthly delights and desires do you need to repent of so you can worship the Lord?
- **HANDS:** How will you proclaim Jesus as Lord through your words and actions this week?

### **VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY**

"God ... did not leave us in absolute ignorance. For the knowledge of God's existence has been implanted by Him in all by nature. This creation, too, and its maintenance, and its government, proclaim the majesty of the Divine nature."<sup>3</sup>

—John of Damascus (c. 675-749)

## UNIT 2

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**LET US MAKE**

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**A NAME**

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**FOR OURSELVES**

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# “Only Wickedness All the Time”

by Ronnie Martin

Here's what we know as our journey unfolds through the Book of Genesis: God had initially created an unblemished world. And not just a world but a universe that reflected the loving and communal bond that has existed for all eternity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And not just a universe but a union, which bore the image of Himself in the form of a man and woman who reflected the joyful attributes that would uniquely characterize Christ the Creator.

But when the serpent entered, and succeeded in deceiving Adam and Eve, rebellion against God reshaped the heart of humankind, and the decay process of all creation began. Unlike the lie the serpent told Adam and Eve, God proved true to His word. The day He told Adam and Eve that eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would kill them—on that day, they would die—He was being loving, not lying (Gen. 2:17).

What follows are some of the saddest chapters in Scripture as we see the generations of Adam and Eve, now polluted by sin and spiritually dead, physically die off one by one, just as God promised they would if Adam disobeyed His gracious command.

At the root of Adam's sin was pride, which is a desire to elevate ourselves above all others as a way to achieve significance. Although God had already planned to send a Savior—His Son—to atone for the sins of the world (Acts 2:22-23), this prideful heart would be passed down to all of Adam and Eve's descendants for as long as the world existed.

## LIFE IN A (BROKEN) NEW WORLD ORDER

As generations continued to live and die under this new world order, the world increased in wickedness to the point that God decided He would no longer tolerate this excessive evil. He would send a flood to destroy humankind, but not everyone.

Far more significant than making a name for ourselves, Jesus redeems our identity by restoring our desire to give glory and honor back to Him, where we find fullness of joy and eternal pleasures.

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He would spare a family of eight led by a man named Noah, who found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). It was this unmerited favor, or grace, that led God to rescue Noah, who was described as a righteous and blameless man among the people on the earth. Rather than walk in the paths of his contemporaries, Noah “walked with God” (6:9).

Through no merit of his own, Noah was spared from God’s just and holy wrath against the wickedness of the world. And when the flood had subsided, God graciously gave Noah the same charge He had given Adam in the garden of Eden—to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (9:1). God established a covenant with Noah, promising never again to use a flood to destroy all of His sinful image-bearers and His sin-cursed creatures (9:15).

But as much as God blessed Noah, the man was still a sinner by nature who was saved from God’s wrath only by God’s grace. Though the world had been wiped clean, the hearts of Noah and his family

were anything but, as evidenced by Noah after the flood when he became drunk with wine and his shameful nakedness was witnessed by his son (9:20-23).

Despite their imperfections, Noah’s family obeyed God’s mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Unfortunately, by the time we get to Genesis 11, not only do we have a population explosion but we have an explosion of pride in the hearts of people who have become united together as one voice. We might read this today and wonder what was so bad about a people united under a common language, but what they desired to accomplish in their union with one another illustrates the problem.

God wanted His image-bearers to “fill the earth,” to reflect His glory across the globe. But like their forefather Adam before them, they desired to make a name for themselves through self-exaltation, garnering the glory that’s reserved for God alone. They would do this by building a tower that reached into the heavens (11:4). Like all humankind since,

the people of Babel sought significance and immortality through the allure of created things rather than through their Creator. In yet another act of grace through judgment, God dispersed the people by confusing their language, which divided them and sent them out to multiply and fill the earth as God had originally commanded.

## TRANSFORMING OUR CRAVING FOR SIGNIFICANCE

Sadly, the rest of history reflects this tragic tendency we carry in our DNA to “make a name for ourselves.” The “name” is not the problem, however; it’s the “making it for ourselves.” We all crave significance, and we would do well to remember that the longing for significance is not an earthly or wicked desire. It comes from being made in the image of God, who created us, declared His creation good, and commissioned us to fill the earth with His glory and goodness. As image-bearers of God, we have been exalted above all other creatures. We are more valuable than many sparrows, as Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 10:31.

The problem is not whether we are significant, it’s that we seek our significance in things that are insufficient to provide significance for us. But there’s nothing new going on here! All of our new-school ways of making a name for ourselves—building platforms, achieving greatness, garnering fans, attaining financial success, or receiving clicks and likes—are as old school as the Tower of Babylon.

The sin of Babylon was just a repeat of what happened in the garden of Eden. And it happens again every time we elevate our own name above the name of Jesus, “the name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).

Although the sin of pride will continue to be at the root of our most besetting sins, Babylon paves the way to a far more redemptive narrative. God came down to observe the people’s tower, and in His judgment, He disciplined the Babelites to limit the peril of their own pride. Jesus—God incarnate—humbly came down as one of us to lovingly deliver us from our pride. Far more significant than making a name for ourselves, Jesus redeems our identity by restoring our desire to give glory and honor back to Him, where we find fullness of joy and eternal pleasures (Ps. 16:11).

The problem is not whether we are significant, it’s that we seek our significance in things that are insufficient to provide significance for us.



# RELATIONSHIPS BROKEN

## + SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Adam and Eve's transgression of God's command resulted in dire consequences, both short-term and long-term, for them and all of humanity.

## + BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Genesis 3

## + SETTING:

God's creation was good (Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25), and with the addition of the first man and woman, it was very good (v. 31). This couple resided in the garden of Eden, a glorious paradise for our first ancestors to tend and grow as they walked in communion with their glorious Creator. But then evil slithered into the garden of Eden and set off a chain of events that has affected humanity's experience with creation and the Creator to this day.

# DAY 1

## READ:

Genesis 3

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 3:1-5

NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #37:

### SIN AS TRANSGRESSION

The word *transgression* means “to cross over” or “to pass by” and is often used in reference to transgressing God’s explicit commands. When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is disobeyed, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is law-breaking.

How do you define freedom? In the garden of Eden, before the Fall, Adam and Eve were the freest people. Free from sin. Free from oppression. Free from guilt. Free from shame. Free from trouble. Free from grief. Free to live as they were made to live. Free to enjoy. Free to laugh without end. Free to hope tomorrow would be even better than today.

Then deep inside their hearts, Adam and Eve came to a new definition of freedom and acted upon it. They considered their present sense of freedom, found it wanting, and reached for a greater portion. But instead of finding themselves to be like God, they only found slavery. By listening to the serpent, they offered themselves as obedient slaves to evil (Rom. 6:16).

What was the result? Death (Rom. 6:21). The serpent denied God’s warning that death would result from disobedience. Adam and Eve chose to believe the serpent rather than God. The serpent opened the prison doors, and our original parents locked themselves inside to await their punishment of death.

God kept His word. They did die. But He also made a new promise (see Gen. 3:15). Eve’s offspring has come, and now the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23). Jesus came to free the captives. Paradise was lost, but in Christ, it is found.

**How are you tempted today to reach for a freedom that is, in reality, only enslavement to sin?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Genesis 3

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 3:6-7

## NOTES

There are two broad categories of sin: sins of commission and sins of omission. Sins of commission are those sins we actively commit, such as lying and lusting. Sins of omission, on the other hand, are sins we commit passively by not doing what we should. In the narrative of the Fall in Genesis 3, we find both types of sin present. While both Adam and Eve sinned by commission in eating the fruit, Adam provided the first example of a sin of omission.

Have you ever wondered where Adam was while Eve and the serpent talked? Genesis 3:6 says Adam was right there beside his wife. It is possible Adam didn't hear their conversation. Perhaps he wasn't close enough. Maybe they whispered. But in the Hebrew text, the serpent used the plural "you" throughout their conversation.<sup>1</sup> Adam passively watched it all. He took it all in and did nothing to stop it. His first sin was one of omission—not doing anything as his wife was deceived.

In the New Testament, Paul wrote that Adam was not deceived (1 Tim. 2:14). Commentator Philip Ryken says, "Unlike Eve, [Adam] knew full well what he was doing when he ate the forbidden fruit. The woman fell partly because Satan blinded her to the true nature of sin, but the man sinned with his eyes wide open."<sup>2</sup> In other words, Adam stood by, let it happen, and then followed. His sin of omission led to his sin of commission.

What should Adam have done? He should have cast the serpent out of the garden. When Satan came twisting God's word, Adam should have straightened it out. But he didn't. Thankfully, a second and last Adam has come to make straight the crooked paths. He repelled the devil in the wilderness when Satan attempted to twist God's word. Jesus, the last Adam, is the model for us all.

**What are some sins of omission you need to repent of today?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

Genesis 3

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 3:1-11

## NOTES

We all have them. They pop up from time to time and we go back and forth with them in our minds. We open a web browser and type it in, scrolling through the thousands of useless links that include some of the words but miss our meaning entirely. We go to the experts. We find podcasts. We ask our pastors. We read books. They drive us onward, but whether they drive us upward or downward depends all on the answers we find.

What are we talking about? Questions. We all have questions. Genesis 3 is filled with them. The serpent opens up the Q&A with its half-smiled, “Did God really say...?” Then Eve’s wheels start turning. She rolls the question over in her mind, considering it from all angles. In the end, she concluded God did not mean what He actually said but was holding out on them. They deserved better.

Not all questions are bad, of course. Not all lead down the tunnel to death and destruction. But they certainly have the power to do so, especially when behind the question is a questioner like the serpent. Satan wasn’t looking for answers; he thought he already had them. He sought to plant doubt through queries. We think of the devil with a pitchfork, but perhaps we would do better to imagine him like the Riddler: question marks are the clothes he wears.

There is another place questions can take us. When God came in the cool of the day to walk in the garden, He had questions of His own: “Where are you?” “Who told you?” “Have you eaten?” God’s questions have the power to undo the serpent’s questions. The problem was Adam and Eve didn’t answer well. God was drawing them upward, but the downward spiral of sin had begun.

Questions matter, and so do the answers because on the other side may be death or life.

**How can you respond today to the grace of God’s questions and His searching of your own heart?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

### Genesis 3

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

### Genesis 3:8-13

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"This is the picture of all of us as we are apart from Jesus Christ. We ought to run to God, as Adam and Eve should have run to him. He has not changed. He has not harmed us. He has done us no wrong. On the contrary, we have received nothing but good from his hand. No, we have wronged him. We have returned evil for good, and now we flee."<sup>3</sup>

-James Montgomery Boice  
(1938-2000)

There's a cartoon I love that shows a red crayon and a blue crayon standing in a room together. Blue crayon marks cover the wall. Standing in front of a taller crayon representing the adult, the blue one points to the red one and says, "He did it."

Inside each of us is a blue crayon pointing the finger at someone else for our sin. Adam did it so long ago in the garden. God asked who told him that he was naked and if he had eaten from the forbidden tree. Adam replied that it was the woman's fault, the woman God had given to be with him.

It's called the blame game, and it's in our genes. By now, we're full-blown experts. When caught red-handed, it is the first of our many options. We could confess. We could be honest. We could apologize. We could ask for forgiveness. We could do any number of things. But so often we choose to point the finger elsewhere. We do that because we cannot stand to be found out. Our pride takes a direct hit each time our sin finds us out, but if we can deflect, we can reserve at least a little pride.

Or so we think.

But there is a better way. When our sin confronts us, it is an opportunity to repent. It is an opportunity to walk into the light of Jesus where we find His cleansing blood (1 John 1:7). The next time you feel the urge to point the finger and play the blame game, remember the One who took the blame for you. Forget your excuses and accept His pardon. That is the better path by far.

**What sins are you blaming others for right now, and what would happen if you spent that energy in going to Jesus for forgiveness instead?**



# DAY 5

## READ:

**Genesis 3**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 3:14-24**

NOTES

It is easy to miss simple graces. We overlook them all the time. It should not surprise us to see little graces everywhere in the Bible, even in the most tragic and devastating of passages, such as Genesis 3.

In Genesis 3:15, we find the first hint of the gospel, the protoevangelium. This is the forerunner to so much of the grace found throughout the rest of the Bible. But there is also a little bit at the end of verse 21 that we must not overlook—God clothed Adam and Eve. Such massive grace in such a small phrase!

Remember the context. Adam and Eve sinned. God was about to cast them out of the garden of Eden, away from His presence, out into the big, wide world without the comfort of His physical protection. There they were, aware of their nakedness and clothed in fig leaves.

What did God do? He made clothing from animal skins, and He clothed them. Grace upon grace.

The classic definition of grace is unmerited favor. The skin coverings God fashioned certainly qualified. Adam and Eve deserved their fig leaves that would wilt and rot, exposing them. But they received grace.

Throughout our lives, God is caring for us in thousands of ways we may never take notice of. Each moment under His gentle care, we are being provided for. We don't deserve any of it, yet He gives graciously to all.

Theologians call this "common grace." It is the grace that God gives to everyone indiscriminately. Jesus described such grace in Matthew 5:45 by saying that God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on all people, regardless of their goodness or the lack thereof.

God is the God of grace. Let us be on the lookout for evidences of it.

**What are some evidences of grace in your life that you can praise God for right now?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY


"As distrust of God's command leads to a disregard of it, so the longing for a false independence excites a desire for the seeming good that has been prohibited; and this desire is fostered by the senses, until it brings forth sin."<sup>4</sup>

-Carl Friedrich Keil (1807-1888)  
and Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890)

## INTRODUCTION

THE GARDEN OF EDEN	THE WORLD TODAY

### POINT 1: Sin is transgressing God's commands (Gen. 3:1-6).

 How do temptation and sin relate to doubts about God and His Word?

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #37: SIN AS TRANSGRESSION

The word transgression means "to cross over" or "to pass by" and is often used in reference to transgressing God's explicit commands. When God gives a \_\_\_\_\_ command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is \_\_\_\_\_, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is \_\_\_\_\_.

### POINT 2: Sin brings shame and harm (Gen. 3:7-13).

The lie of sin is that life will get better once we do or take what we want. But the first man and woman quickly discovered that sin brings \_\_\_\_\_ and harm, alienating us from \_\_\_\_\_ (fig leaves) and from \_\_\_\_\_ (running and hiding).

Sin and shame lead to a compounding problem as those who sin against God and others try to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ their sin by blaming it on others, even \_\_\_\_\_ Himself.

NOTES



**What are some ways we try to cover up and run from our sin and shame?**

**POINT 3: Sin comes with a great cost**  
(Gen. 3:14-21).

God warned His image-bearers that sin would come with a cost—\_\_\_\_\_. Human beings also experience other \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in life and relationships.



**What are some ways people experience the cost of sin in their lives?**

In the midst of pronouncing judgment, God also promised hope for humanity (Gen. 3:15). God saves through the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

## MY RESPONSE

Because we have been so greatly forgiven in Christ, with hearts full of gratitude, we carry the gospel message forth to the nations, sharing how others too can be forgiven of sin.

- **HEAD:** How does understanding the origin of sin and its consequences help us see our need for a savior?
- **HEART:** How do you need to receive or respond to the gospel, the remedy for our sin, today?
- **HANDS:** What sin do you need to confess before God and perhaps another person today?

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Wherefore, the seed, Jesus Christ, in his bruising the head of the serpent, must take away sin, abolish death, and conquer the power of the grave. But how must this be done? Why, he must remove the curse, which makes sin intolerable, and death destructive. But how must he take away the curse? Why, by taking upon Him 'flesh,' as we ... and by being 'made a curse for us.'"<sup>5</sup>

—John Bunyan (1628–1688)

# SIN SPREADS

## + SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

After the first transgression, sin and its consequences spread rapidly throughout all people.

## + BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Genesis 4–5

## + SETTING:

Sin began its tragic, virulent spread the moment Adam and Eve took and ate. In consequence for their transgression, God condemned our first parents to exile and death, among other curses related to the Fall. Still, God graciously gave new life through children. Adam and Eve's family made a life east of Eden, multiplying in number but sadly also in transgression. The curse of sin and death impacts every generation, but the promise of an offspring to crush the serpent's head and bring salvation still remains.

# DAY 1

## READ:

Genesis 4

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 4:1-2

NOTES

Some of the best Internet videos are those of gender reveals gone wrong. Those poor parents just wanting to reveal the gender of their baby become viral sensations as the over-the-top production slides off the rails. It's hard to fault them, really. Becoming a parent is a joyous occasion, and who doesn't need more reasons to celebrate in life?

Eve certainly found reason to celebrate upon the birth of her son, a joyful occasion she recognized had occurred with the Lord's gracious help (Gen. 4:1). In a fallen world, away from the presence of God, banished from the garden, perhaps Eve thought this day would never come. Maybe she imagined a lonely existence. Adam remained by her side, but even that relationship paled in comparison to what they once were together. Sin separated them from God but also from one another. Once naked and unashamed, now skins hid the parts of them they didn't want each other to see.

But out of the sorrows of death came new life in Cain. Just as God had commanded, they were being fruitful and multiplying. Things were different, yes, but God was bringing fresh life into the world.

Of course, Cain wasn't as "good" as his parents were originally. He was born in sin and born under sin. His life eventually proved it. But before there was the first physical death, there was the first physical birth. Eve was doing one of the things God made her to do. She was the mother of all the living.

God's grace is evident in such things. Our sin separates us from Him, but that doesn't mean He's removed entirely. God still cares. He created His people for a purpose, and He will see to it that it is accomplished. Eve had a baby with the Lord's help, fulfilling her mission to fill the earth.

God was gracious to her, and He'll be gracious to you too. When He is, it's a reason to celebrate.

**How are you experiencing God's grace over you today?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Genesis 4:1-5; Hebrews 11**

## FOCAL PASSAGES:

**Genesis 4:3-5;  
Hebrews 11:4**

## NOTES

Hebrews 11 is a very special chapter of the Bible, known by many as the “Hall of Faith.” Included in its 40 verses are numerous Old Testament examples of people who lived by faith, trusting God would bring a Savior as He had promised time and time again. All the people you would expect are there: Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and so on. There are so many examples that the author of Hebrews doesn’t have the time to address all of them, so he resorts to quick, one-phrase summaries of unnamed “heroes” to include as many as he can (Heb. 11:32-38).

The very first inductee into this Hall of Faith, however, is Abel, one we likely would not expect (Heb. 11:4). The second-born of his father, Adam, Abel is a man whom we know best as the brother murdered by Cain—the first human death in the Bible, the first human casualty of sin. His brief life was marked by two things: he tended flocks in the field and he offered a sacrifice that pleased the Lord.

Just as in Genesis 4, Hebrews doesn’t say anything more than Abel’s offering was better than Cain’s. No reason is given. There is no mention of the livestock to indicate that perhaps God appreciated a blood sacrifice more than grain, nor any mention of Cain’s or Abel’s works to put the men in the position of earning their way into God’s favor. The only distinction mentioned is Abel’s faith—not something he did but his belief in the One to whom he offered his sacrifice.

Abel was a righteous man who offered a better sacrifice not because he had no sin but because he trusted God. His life was cut short before he was full of days. But he still speaks through his faith. In the final analysis, faith is all that matters. Not faith in ourselves, of course, but faith in the One whose blood speaks a better word (Heb. 12:24).

**What does it look like to live by faith, and how does Abel’s example show us the way?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Genesis 4:6-16**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 4:6-7**

## NOTES



### **ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #44: TEMPTATION AND SIN**

Temptation is not the equivalent of sin. Temptation can refer to natural and good desires that are twisted and directed toward pleasing of self rather than giving glory to God. Jesus was tempted like we are (Matt. 4), and yet, He never sinned but faithfully resisted temptation and followed the will of His Father. Knowing our weakness, we are to be on guard against temptation that may lead us to sin (Matt. 26:41), and we pray for God to deliver us from evil (Matt. 6:13).

One of the remarkable things these early chapters of Genesis show is the interaction between God and human beings. After Adam sinned, God came with questions (3:9,11). And when Cain was tempted to sin, God again came with questions.

Does God still ask questions today? He may not speak in the same way as He did in this instance, but does He still communicate with us? Does He still come after we've sinned or in the moment of our temptation with questions to clarify our motives and lead us to repentance and faith?

The only right answer to this question is yes. No, God doesn't come walking in the evening with a question on His lips, but He does abide with us by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). The Spirit reminds us of God's Word (John 14:26). He convicts us of sin (John 16:8). He guides us to the truth (John 16:13). He helps us in our weakness (Rom. 8:26-27).

Through the Holy Spirit, God's presence is still with us. When we open our Bibles, the Spirit helps us understand. He asks questions of our hearts. He convicts us when we need it. He does for us today what God did for Adam and Cain so long ago, now primarily through His inspired Word.

The only real question remaining is a simple but profound one: Are we listening? Is God's voice the one we listen to? Are we responding, or are we like Cain, who made no response to God's warning and ignored His wisdom and counsel altogether?

**How might your life be different today if you opened the Bible and listened to God's Word?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**Genesis 4:17-26**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 4:19-24**

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Lamech is a type of the world, by which Moses wishes to show what sort of a heart, will, and wisdom the world has. It is as if he were saying: 'This is the way the seed of the serpent conducts itself. This is the way the children of this world conduct themselves. They amass riches; they pursue pleasures; they strive after power, and by their tyranny they misuse it against the true church, which they pursue and kill. But while they commit such great sins, they have no feeling of alarm; but they are proud and smug.'"<sup>1</sup>

—Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Lamech is a particularly awful character in the early pages of the Bible. He appears in Genesis 4:19-24 as a polygamous murderer. What is his purpose? Why did God see to it that he wasn't overlooked in the biblical narrative?

Lamech is a lesson.

Lamech's sins were heinous. He not only killed but boasted about killing. He not only married multiple women but related to both as a brute, sharing his ugly deeds with them through his sickening song, making them share in his misdeeds. No one could stand in his way. If Cain was to be avenged seven times, then Lamech would be seventy-seven times (Gen. 4:24)!

If Cain didn't get the job done, then Lamech is the sign to the careful Bible reader that sin has done a thorough job of spreading from generation to generation. Lamech was merciless. He was the kind of man we would not want to work with, live near, or befriend. Yet the lesson isn't only not to associate with such people but also not to become one!

Jesus shows us a better way. One wonders if Jesus had in mind Lamech's boast as He taught His disciples years later. Peter asked Jesus how often he must forgive a brother who sins against him. Peter, in an attempt to sound gracious, offered seven as a reasonable number. Jesus said not even close. Instead of seven times, he should forgive seventy-seven times (Matt. 18:21-22).

In God's economy, it is not the vengeance we take upon others but the forgiveness we grant that leaves a legacy. A quiet life of forgiveness never makes the news. It never reaches the top of the dogpile. It probably won't win an award or make a big splash. But it is of heaven. It is the kind of life Jesus calls us to and one that will never leave a bitter taste in our mouths.

**Whom do you need to forgive today that you have so far only harbored ill will toward?**



# DAY 5

## READ:

Genesis 5

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 5:1-5

## NOTES

Andrew Peterson has a song based on Matthew's genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17) on his Christmas album, Behold the Lamb of God. Most people don't take the time to even read the genealogies. Peterson sings them!

The album is an overview of the Christmas story. Beginning with the exodus story, the listener goes all the way to the birth of Christ. You can't get there without the historical record of the Old Testament, including all the names.

Genealogies are a big part of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. We can't read too far into Genesis before finding the first one. Adam and Eve have sons, and those sons have sons, and so forth.

What can we make of a list of names? At first glance, maybe not much. Most of the stories behind the names are lost to history. All we know about them is said in who they were fathered by and whom they fathered. But without them, we lose the line of people that takes us to Jesus.

When Seth was born in Genesis 5:3, it was the beginning of the line that eventually takes us to Christ. Without Seth, there would be no Noah. Without Seth, there would be no Abraham or Isaac or Jacob or Boaz or David or Solomon or Mary or the Christ child in a manger two thousand years ago. Jesus came into the world through a lineage of people—sinful, every one of them, which is why He came (Matt. 1:21).

The next time you come upon a genealogy in the Bible, don't overlook it to get to the next story. It is a story—part of the family story of the Savior and His people.

**Think a moment about the long line from Seth to Jesus. How does this increase your gratitude for God's plan of redemption?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Whoever hates is a murderer. You may not have prepared any poison or committed a crime. You have only hated, and in doing so, you have killed yourself first of all."<sup>2</sup>

-Augustine (354-430)

### POINT 1: Transgression spread throughout the generations (Gen. 4:1-8).



What do you see in these verses that shows the effects of sin in the world?

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #44: TEMPTATION AND SIN

Temptation is not the equivalent of sin. Temptation can refer to natural and good desires that are twisted and directed toward pleasing of self rather than giving glory to God. Jesus was tempted like we are (Matt. 4), and yet, He never sinned but faithfully \_\_\_\_\_ temptation and followed the \_\_\_\_\_ of His Father. Knowing our weakness, we are to be on \_\_\_\_\_ against temptation that may lead us to sin (Matt. 26:41), and we \_\_\_\_\_ for God to deliver us from evil (Matt. 6:13).



How can we rule over sin?

### POINT 2: Wickedness spread throughout the generations (Gen. 4:17-24).

Cain's line of descendants grew, fulfilling God's \_\_\_\_\_ mandate (Gen. 1:28), even after their forefather's heinous \_\_\_\_\_ of his brother. This is an example of God's \_\_\_\_\_.



What are some ways we have experienced God's grace through people fulfilling God's cultural mandate?

Though God's grace was active, wickedness continued to spread deep in the hearts of sinners. Lamech, as an example, followed the path of his forefather, Cain, and \_\_\_\_\_ murdered a man in \_\_\_\_\_.

### POINT 3: Death spread throughout the generations (Gen. 5:3-5).

The genealogy of Genesis 5 reveals God's \_\_\_\_\_ to His word. First, though righteous Abel was murdered by wicked Cain, God provided another son, Seth, through whom would come the promised "\_\_\_\_\_."



**Why might death cause us to question the faithfulness of God?**

Second, God was faithful to His word that Adam's sin would end in \_\_\_\_\_, and we all suffer under the consequence of our forefather's choice. But God's faithfulness in this punishment \_\_\_\_\_ we can trust Him for our salvation in Jesus.



**How have you seen God prove Himself faithful even through seemingly impossible circumstances?**

## MY RESPONSE

Because sin is an affront to God and brings great harm to us and others, we are to fight against sin in our lives and stand against sin in our culture, all while declaring and resting in the forgiveness found in Christ Jesus.

- **HEAD:** How does a proper understanding of sin prepare us for a proper understanding of the gospel?
- **HEART:** What does the gospel say to us when we feel the weight of our sins upon us?
- **HANDS:** What sins do you need to confess and repent of today?

NOTES

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Love is the great divide between the children of God and the children of the devil. Those who have love are children of God, and those who do not are children of the devil. Have anything else you like, but if you lack this one thing, then all the rest is of no use to you whatsoever. On the other hand, you may lack almost anything else, but if you have this one thing, you have fulfilled the law."<sup>3</sup>

—Bede (c. 673-735)

# A WORLD PURGED

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God is righteous to judge sin, but He is also gracious to provide a way of salvation.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Genesis 6–9

**+** **SETTING:**

Once upon a time, God saw all that He had made and called it good. Then God saw what His creatures did and called it evil. The first sin involved disbelieving the judgment of God was real. Now just a few chapters later, judgment comes. God's judgment, however, is not an end to all things. In His gracious hands, judgment becomes the means of salvation.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**Genesis 6:1-8**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 6:5-8**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #46:

### THE WORLD OPPOSED TO GOD

There are times in Scripture where the term “world” refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under Satan’s control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and deceit that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by faith in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).

God cares about human sinfulness. Genesis 6:6 says as much: The sinfulness of humankind on the earth “grieved” Him. The same language is used a few other times in the Bible. Isaiah, looking ahead to the day of the Lord’s vengeance, stated, “But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit” (Isa. 63:10). The apostle Paul, in talking about turning from sin as believers, commanded Christians in Ephesians 4:30 not to “grieve” the Holy Spirit.

Every sin is ultimately against God. In Psalm 51, David confessed his sins that certainly affected other people, including Bathsheba, Uriah, and the entire nation of Israel, but he sinned first and foremost against God (Ps. 51:4).

When we sin, Scripture sometimes uses the language of “grieving” God. It’s uncomfortable for many of us to speak about God in this way. Isn’t He sovereign over all? Isn’t God above us, unable to be affected by what we, His little creatures, do down here on earth? Well, yes, God is sovereign, and no, we cannot truly bring harm to God. Yet He takes genuine, personal interest in His creatures. God cannot change His perfect character and infinite being, and He also couldn’t love His creatures any more than He already does. The God of the Bible is not the god of the deists, who sits a comfortable distance away from his people, watching disinterestedly. The true God is a God who draws near (Ps. 34:18), who makes His dwelling with humanity (Ex. 29:45), who sends His Spirit to live in the hearts of His people (1 Cor. 3:16). Our sin is not nothing to God; it is a grievous affront to His deity, to His grace, to His Godhood. But our sin is also no surprise to Him.

Affirming how the Bible speaks to us about God’s grief over sin is not a reason to run from Him but a reason to run to Him. He will forgive. He has mercy and grace for all who sin against Him. His big heart is big enough to accept you back, even when you have grieved Him.

**What sins do you need to see as “God-grieving,” and in what ways do you need to repent today?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Genesis 6:9-22

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 6:9-22

## NOTES

We all know what it's like to be sinned against. However, unlike our tendency to lose compassion toward someone who sins against us, God remains personally invested in and unchangeably compassionate toward a world actively sinning against Him.

As wickedness increased on the earth, God was grieved, so He determined to no longer overlook the sinfulness of humanity. He vowed to wipe humankind off the face of the earth (Gen. 6:7). His holiness cried out for justice, and rightly so. Justice is the cry of the heart sinned against.

The Bible says the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Death was the original promised consequence, so we can't say God didn't warn us. Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree knowing their lives were on the line. They didn't listen, and we don't listen either. We are all sinners. No one is good (Rom. 3:10). Our badness requires God's justice. Yet God doesn't desire that any of the wicked should perish (Ezek. 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9). So what can be done? How can God punish sin while granting life to the sinner? How can justice be satisfied while sin remains?

There are two options, and Noah's story shows them both. The first option is a wiping out of all the sinners: death and destruction. The second option is a sacrificial pardon of the chosen: life through death. All but Noah and his family received the former. The world was wiped clean.

Yet sin still remained in Noah's heart. What would God do next? He would accept a sacrifice for sin. Years and years after Noah came one of Noah's descendants—God in the flesh. He had the power to judge the earth. Instead, He was judged on our behalf. Jesus became the sacrifice for sin so that the promise made so long ago to Noah could be given to all God's children.

**How does the gospel help us marvel at the grace of God in Noah's story? Write out the connections you see.**

# DAY 3

## READ:

Genesis 7

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 7:1-5

## NOTES

What does it mean that Noah found favor with the Lord (Gen. 6:8)? Did Noah do something amazing that caught God's eye? Was he just a really great guy at heart? What made Noah deserving of such an honor?

The answer is simple: nothing!

Nothing in Noah was deserving of God's favor. Noah was a sinner, and his sin was disgusting to God. In fact, if Noah deserved anything from God, it was death like everyone else. Yet Noah was saved. Noah was brought into the ark and passed through the waters and walked again as the new "first man" in the new age God created for humanity. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among all the people on the earth at that time (6:9), but he still wasn't deserving of a single good thing from God.

Yet God blessed Noah anyway. How do we explain such a thing?

People often read the Old Testament as the story of the God angry at the world for sin. That's partially true but tragically incomplete. The Old Testament is also the story of the gracious God showing steadfast love to His fallen creation. The only explanation for Noah's salvation is the grace that God poured out on him. God was angry at the world, yet He was gracious and merciful to Noah. Every person who has ever lived is looking for the kind of favor Noah received from God. Not everyone is aware of it, of course, but every heart longs for it (Eccl. 3:11). So how do you get it?

The favor of the Lord comes not from what we do but from what Jesus has done. The way into the smile of God goes through the anguished face of Christ on the cross. You can't buy it. You can't earn it. You can't achieve it. You can't even deserve it. You can only receive it with the empty hands of faith.

**Have you accepted the grace of God found in Jesus Christ? Who can you pray for that needs to hear this message?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Genesis 8:1-14

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 8:1-14

## NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The story of Noah and the ark shouts to all those who persist in living apart from God about what is to come. It invites all to accept God's offer of protection and safety found only by being united to Christ."<sup>1</sup>

-Nancy Guthrie

Don't you hate when a question is answered with "Maybe"? It is about as ambiguous as you can get. It's totally non-committal. It leaves the questioner without something to grab on to. It might happen. It might not. Time will tell.

Many of us look at the promises of God and see not a yes or no but a maybe. Will God bless me? Maybe. Will He forgive me? Maybe. Will I really be saved? Maybe.

But there are no maybes with God. The Bible says that God's promises are sure because God cannot lie (Heb. 6:17-18). God's oaths are not cosmic maybes; they are rock-solid assurances.

As the story of the Bible progresses, the record shows that all of God's promises come true. People doubt His word. Prophets question Him. His people stray from Him. Kings worship idols instead of Him. But God remains true to His word. There are no promises of God that end in a question mark.

Noah learned this during the flood. God promised the rain would come, and it did. God promised the world would be wiped out, and it was. God promised He would save Noah and his family, and God did. Every promise God made to Noah came true.

But God didn't stop there. He made promises not only to Noah but also to Noah's descendants. He would never again cause such a disaster. He hung up His battle bow in the sky as a reminder (Gen. 9:12-17).

There are no maybes with God, only assurances. You can take hold of them today without fear. All the good things God has promised His children are coming, just as sure as the morning sun. How do we know? All His promises are "Yes" in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

**What steps can you take to renew your confidence in specific promises God has made to us in His Word?**



# DAY 5

## READ:

**Genesis 8:15–9:29**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 8:15–9:17**

## NOTES

After the flood, when Noah de-boarded the ark and offered his burnt sacrifice, God said a surprising thing: He would never again curse the ground because of human beings, even though they continued to be sinful (8:21). The human heart was still evil? Was the flood not an event to cleanse the world? Noah was righteous; how can sin still remain?

Wiping the earth clean was God's just judgment on the sin of the world. But when God put His favor on Noah and determined to save him and his family, He knew sin would remain because it was deep inside them all. They were born with a sinful nature, just as their parents were. Noah was a sinner, and that's part of why his first act after stepping off the ark was building an altar and offering burnt offerings on it (8:20).

Noah's burnt offerings were a sacrifice for his sin and his family's sin. It was the new way in the world—a way later explained more fully in Leviticus 1—by which God would cleanse and forgive His people. By accepting the sacrifice, God was counting the death of the animals as payment for the sins of His people. This was the plan from the start. It was the reason for the greater number of clean animals on the ark with Noah (7:2-3).

From Noah onward, the Old Testament shows the blood of goats and bulls making atonement for the sins of the people in a temporary and provisional way. Sin requires a blood sacrifice, and God established a way for His people to “see” and receive His forgiveness.

But it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins completely (Heb. 10:4). Only a human death can atone for humanity's sins. So Jesus came, years and years after Noah's sacrifice, to be the sacrifice for Noah and all his children, to save them through His blood and usher them into a new age where sin no more remains and peace is forever found.

**How does Noah's story help you see the need for a sacrifice for sin?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The anger of God is not a disturbing emotion of His mind, but a judgment by which punishment is inflicted upon sin. His thought and reconsideration also are the unchangeable reason which changes things; for He does not, like man, repent of anything He has done, because in all matters His decision is as inflexible as His prescience is certain. But if Scripture were not to use such expressions as the above, it would not familiarly insinuate itself into the minds of all classes of men, whom it seeks access to for their good, that it may alarm the proud, arouse the careless, exercise the inquisitive, and satisfy the intelligent; and this it could not do, did it not first stoop, and in a manner descend, to them where they lie."<sup>2</sup>

-Augustine (354-430)

**POINT 1: God declares that wickedness will bring judgment** (Gen. 6:5-7).

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #46: THE WORLD OPPOSED TO GOD

There are times in Scripture where the term "world" refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an \_\_\_\_\_ and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under \_\_\_\_\_ control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and \_\_\_\_\_ that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by \_\_\_\_\_ in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).



**How does the world's understanding of sin differ from the way the Bible treats it?**

God is " \_\_\_\_\_ " by human sinfulness, and He acts to end and punish sin because it damages and \_\_\_\_\_ what God created as good.

**POINT 2: God offers grace as the means to escape judgment** (Gen. 6:8-9,13-14,17-22).

Noah found favor in God's sight, not by his own doing but by God's \_\_\_\_\_ through his \_\_\_\_\_.



**What would it look like to "walk with God"?**

God's offer of grace required Noah to build an ark. Noah \_\_\_\_\_ God's warning and provision and was \_\_\_\_\_ to do what God commanded.

### POINT 3: God provides salvation through judgment (Gen. 7:11-13; 8:15-16,20-22).

God's \_\_\_\_\_ against wickedness came upon the earth, just as God had said it would. And Noah and his family entered the ark, trusting that it would \_\_\_\_\_ them, just as God had said it would.



**How would you respond to someone who said a worldwide flood would be overkill to address the problem of wickedness on the earth?**

God saved Noah's family in spite of their sin. Seeking \_\_\_\_\_ for their sin and signifying their affection for God, Noah offered a sacrifice, which \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord. This too was salvation through judgment.



**How does this true account of the flood help to prepare us for the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

## MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus has provided salvation from our sins as an act of grace toward us, we declare the gospel with great humility and compassion toward sinners in great need of a Savior.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you fail to take sin seriously?
- **HEART:** Why is it important to show compassion to those around us, and what are some ways we can do that?
- **HANDS:** How do you need to offer yourself to God today in worship and service?

NOTES

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Be killing sin or it will be killing you."<sup>3</sup>

—John Owen (c. 1616-1683)

# A PEOPLE SCATTERED

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Rebellion against God and His ways is in the heart of all people; however, God's grace is greater than all our sin.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Genesis 10:1–11:9; Isaiah 65:1–7

**+** **SETTING:**

The pristine setting of Eden's garden is already a distant memory by the time we arrive in Genesis 10–11. The first act of human rebellion in Genesis 3 paved the way for countless more, and not even a worldwide flood could scrub the wickedness from our hearts. In Genesis 10–11, as Noah's offspring multiply on the face of the earth, they too turned away from worshiping and obeying God. Seeking to ascend to God, humanity repeats the folly of their first parents and rebels against God—a case study for the doctrine of sin as rebellion.

# DAY 1

## READ:

Isaiah 65

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 65:1-2

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The real attitude of sin in the heart towards God is that of being without God; it is pride, the worship of myself, that is the great atheistic fact in human life."<sup>1</sup>

—Oswald Chambers (1874-1917)

Isaiah 65:2 records God's charge that Israel had been a rebellious people who had chosen to walk a bad path. Though Isaiah was written long after Genesis 3, the echoes of Adam and Eve's choice to go their own way reverberate throughout God's accusation against His people in Isaiah. If we are honest, we'll admit the echo doesn't stop in Isaiah. It resonates within our own hearts and experience.

The thing is we know that rebellion against God's ways is foolish. We have watched human rebellion play out since the garden of Eden. As Adam and Eve were evicted from the presence of God in paradise, we see the folly of their fatal choices. As Genesis goes on, so does this foolish inclination toward rebellion. Cain rejected God's counsel and killed Abel, a crime against God and humanity for which he was cursed to the end of his days. Generations later, all the people on the earth chose to think and do whatever wickedness they could come up with, resulting in God's judgment of the flood. And in Isaiah 65, we watch with horror as the people chosen by God to bear His name refused to call out to Him who was ready to be merciful in the midst of their despair.

If we were to think about our own lives, we could provide ample personal accounts about the foolishness of rebelling against God's ways. So why do we, like dogs returning to our own vomit (Prov. 26:11), choose to persist in making our own way instead of following God's way?

Prayerfully ask the Lord to help you (1) pause when you encounter temptations to do things your way, (2) consider that rebellion is always foolish, and (3) choose to live God's way through the strength provided by the Spirit. May our lives give glory to the God who has saved us from the folly of our own rebellion.

**In what ways do you feel you are most inclined to go your own way rather than follow God's way?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Genesis 10:32–11:4**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 10:32–11:4**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #38: SIN AS REBELLION

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

The story of the Tower of Babylon, or Babel, is a relatively familiar and short account. It begins in Genesis 11:1 and is concluded only nine verses later. If we are not careful, the familiarity and brevity of this story can obscure the gravity of its message. And if we miss the weight of the story, we are likely to repeat the people's missteps.

Nestled in the middle of the admittedly silly human plans to build a tower whose top would reach heaven, the people of Babylon revealed their prideful motivations (Gen. 11:4). The rationale for their proposal displayed at least three attempts at rebellion.

- First, the people intended to build and settle in this great city so as to avoid the divine command to fill the earth.
- Second, the people were seeking to reach the heavens by their own ability and skill.
- Third, and perhaps the most insidious, they wanted to make a name for themselves.

Do you hear in this plan the whispers of a fresh articulation of the serpent's temptation in Genesis 3? The serpent got Eve to consider that God might be holding out on her. The fruit, so she believed, promised a way to make herself like God. So too, the people of Babylon took the bait of believing that their tower project might have made them something more substantial than what they already were.

**Where do you find yourself tempted to make a name for yourself by impressing others? What can you do today to pursue God's kingdom and to point others to Jesus?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Genesis 11:1-9**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 11:3-9**

NOTES

In the last hundred years, the amount of technology produced by humanity has grown exponentially. We build sturdier buildings to live in. We make more efficient vehicles to help transport us and to deliver the products we consume. We have developed electronic technologies that open lines of communication with others that allow us to overcome time, language, and space barriers. We have improved our medical technology so as to alleviate the symptoms and spread of many of the health problems we face in our world.

Most of this technology has been developed in an effort to make money, to increase personal security, to proliferate convenience, and to stave off the debilitation that comes from sickness. Much of this is the good work of people who are researching, developing, and stewarding God's world. Technology is not itself bad. However, technology and our ability to produce it can distract us from our ultimate dependence upon God.

Just like the people of Babylon determined that their own skill and ability as builders might provide them access to the heavens, we run the same risk of thinking we can protect and promote ourselves. Take inventory of your own heart and consider where you are tempted to trust in human technology, efforts, and understanding more than in God's providential care.

While the Lord often uses human agents and products to administer His kindness and protection, we must remember Jesus' encouragement to the crowds who were prone to store up riches and be anxious about their circumstances: God provides for the birds and He adorns the grass with flowers; have faith that He will take care of you in even greater ways (Matt. 6:26,30).

**How does Scripture help us to benefit from certain technologies while also being aware of their drawbacks or the ways they could lead us into temptation?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Acts 2

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:1-12

## NOTES

In Genesis 11, we see in the Tower of Babylon a display of human pride and self-glory. We also see the response of God to punish and judge the people of Babylon by multiplying and confusing their language, dispersing them across the face of the earth. However, despite the diversity of languages being rooted in God's judgment in the plain of Shinar, we see in the New Testament that God acted to reverse the curse of Babel. In fact, He did more than reverse the curse.

In Acts 2, when the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost on the early believers, the very languages of the nations that gave evidence of divine punishment in Genesis 11 become vehicles of gospel communication. Acts 2:5 records that on the day of Pentecost, there were people gathered in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven. The miracle of this story is that all of these people with different histories and backstories heard the apostles' gospel message in their own languages.

The details here are important. Rather than being made to understand Peter's language—a mere reversal of Babel's curse—these representatives of the nations received the message in their own languages. Not only did this communicate the fact that the message was for them, but it encouraged them to proclaim it among the peoples to whom they would return. They had received the message of the gospel in the very tongues that gave evidence of God's judgment against human pride. Yet God in His providence has now turned these languages into vehicles profitable for His purposes of making Himself and His salvation known.

Have you ever stopped to think about how unlikely it is that you have a Bible written in your language? It is not only a great privilege to have access to the words of God in our own tongues, it is also a great responsibility.

**How can you find ways to proclaim God's goodness to those around you today?**



# DAY 5

## READ:

**Revelation 7**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Revelation 7:9-10**

NOTES

At the beginning of this week, we contemplated the sinful rebellion that began at Babylon and that resulted in the confusion of human languages. Yesterday, however, we recognized that our great redeeming God demonstrated His curse-reversing power by allowing the languages of the world to become vehicles for gospel proclamation beginning at Pentecost in Acts 2. Today, then, it is good to consider the end to which history is headed and how eternity will prove God's redeeming work complete—even including the redemption of languages.

Though human rebellion is everywhere shown to be total and pervasive, God's mercy and grace endure and overcome so as to prove God faithful to His original purposes. God will dwell with His people who delight in offering Him obedient worship. We see this manifested in John's vision recorded in Revelation 7:9-10, where people of every nation, tribe, people, and language surround God's throne and shout that salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb—Jesus Christ.

God's salvation is so comprehensive that He is willing to receive praise through the languages that formerly evidenced His just judgment against human pride. Take a moment to give Him praise today and realize that the language you are using to worship Him proves His willingness and ability to redeem, restore, and re-purpose all things for His glory!

As we anticipate participating in this great multi-ethnic, diverse worship extravaganza glimpsed and recorded by John, we also should soberly consider our present situation. In the future envisioned in Revelation 7:9, we see evidence that one day there will be people praising God in their own respective languages who even today lack access to the Scriptures in those very languages.

**How can you be involved in supporting missionary efforts and Bible-translation projects that will be used of God to make Revelation 7:9-10 a reality?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Just as when holy men live together, it is a great grace and blessing; so, likewise, that congregation is the worst kind when sinners dwell together. The more sinners there are at one time, the worse they are. Indeed, when the tower was being built up against God, those who were building it were disbanded for their own welfare. The conspiracy was evil. The dispersion was of true benefit even to those who were dispersed."<sup>2</sup>

-Jerome (d. 420)

### POINT 1: Rebellious hearts seek to violate God's commands (Gen. 10:32–11:2).



Why might a common language contribute to multiplying expressions of human sinfulness after the Fall?

We've seen sin portrayed as transgression, but sin goes much \_\_\_\_\_ than an act. Sinful actions are an \_\_\_\_\_ of our rebellious hearts, which show disdain and \_\_\_\_\_ for God and His commands. We reject what God wants and \_\_\_\_\_ for what we want.



What are some implications of sin being a heart issue and not just a hands issue?

### POINT 2: Rebellious hearts seek to rob God's glory (Gen. 11:3–9).

Our rebellious hearts turn us away from God and exclusively to ourselves. We become \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, seeking to claim for ourselves what belongs only to God alone. Furthermore, we seek to \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves by our own standards rather than our Creator's.



What are some ways we might "make a name for ourselves" in rebellion against God?

God, who is holy and just, will not long endure the sinful rebellion of His image-bearers. From His throne on high in heaven, the Lord \_\_\_\_\_ rebellion, which is both a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ that sin would not have its full effect upon humanity.

### POINT 3: Rebellious hearts seek to live other than God's way (Isa. 65:1-2).

#### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #38: SIN AS REBELLION

NOTES

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and \_\_\_\_\_ disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.



**How can we turn from the path of rebellion and instead walk the road that leads to life?**

#### MY RESPONSE

Because in Christ our rebellious hearts have been replaced with hearts of love for God, we obey our calling with joy as we scatter throughout the nations, desiring to make God's glory known to all.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways we see self-worship on display in our culture and even in our own lives?
- **HEART:** How can we ensure we are seeking God's kingdom instead of building our own name?
- **HANDS:** How can you support missionaries and Bible translators who are taking the Word of God to the nations? More locally, how will you share the gospel with those around you who speak your language?

#### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Now, therefore, pray we heartily to God that this evil time may be made short, for the sake of the chosen men, as he hath promised in his Holy Gospel, and that the large and broad way that leadeth to perdition may be stopped, and that the straight and narrow way which leadeth to bliss may be made open by the Holy Scriptures, that we may know what is the will of God, to serve him with truth and holiness, in the dread of God, that we may find by him a way of bliss everlasting."<sup>3</sup>

—John Wycliffe (d. 1384)

## UNIT 3

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**I WILL MAKE**

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**YOUR NAME**

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**GREAT**

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# “God Planned It for Good”

by Jamaal Williams

Esteemed and seasoned pastor-theologian Dr. Tony Evans describes divine providence as “the hand of God in the glove of history ... the work of God whereby He integrates and bends events in the universe in order to fulfill His original design for which it was created. It is God sitting behind the steering wheel of time.”<sup>1</sup>

Whew! This description of providence makes me want to stop what I’m doing, close my eyes, open my heart, and turn from any cynicism and doubt toward the One who has His hand “in the glove in history.” We need to remember that if we are in Christ—if we believe the gospel—then God, who is sitting behind the “steering wheel of time,” is driving my life and yours to a beautiful end. God intentionally directs every believer’s life to the end where everything works together for our ultimate good and where His multicultural bride lives in perfect peace for all eternity.

Through the story of Abraham, we see the providence of God at work in powerful ways. I believe that part of what made Abraham’s faith memorable and foundational is that his faith became rooted in a deep belief that God is sovereign and providential. The writer of Hebrews talks about Abraham’s faith in a way that points to God’s ability to direct all events toward a certain end. He reflected: “[Abraham] considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking” (Heb. 11:19). Abraham took his one and only son of promise up a mountain to be sacrificed in obedience to the voice of God because he had learned to trust God through the most impossible of situations and circumstances. If God could provide a promised child through Sarah, who was 90 years old, and Abraham, who was 100 years old, then nothing is impossible with Him!

In other words, Abraham believed God as he experienced God's unmerited, unfolding, and unstoppable providence.

## GOD'S UNMERITED PROVIDENCE

When we meet Abraham in Genesis 11 (whose name was Abram at the time), we know little about him besides that he was in the lineage of Shem. If someone were reading the Bible for the first time and had no idea who the progenitor of the Hebrew people would be, then he or she would have a very slim chance of guessing that person based on the list of names given through the genealogy in the latter half of Genesis 11. But that's exactly the point!

Abraham comes into the story seemingly out of nowhere. Yet in Genesis 12:1-3, God placed His unmerited favor on Abraham, or what Christians might call grace. Abraham was plucked like a grain of sand from the seashore, one among millions, and blessed ridiculously. And over the next few chapters of Genesis, God lavished specific promises on him and repeated them to remind Abraham of His faithfulness as a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. God promised Abraham:

- land (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-15,17; 15:7,18; 17:8);
- a great nation of people through him (12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:2,4-7,16,19; 22:17);
- the promise of a covenant (17:7,19,21);
- and that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through him (12:3; 18:18; 22:18).

What's amazing is that the Bible never tells us exactly why God chose to reveal himself to Abraham. The Bible never answers why God revealed Himself to Abraham and Sarah at an older age. However, we do know that God did not call Abraham because he was a perfect man who impressed God. Abraham was a sinner like all of us. God kept His covenant despite Abraham's proclivity toward deceit. Abraham was called in spite of himself, and for all those who believe as he did, we share in the same grace God poured out on him. This is how God works (Deut. 7:7; Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:5). God in His providence saves people like you and me so that we cannot boast in ourselves but rather in Christ's finished work alone (Eph. 2:9).

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God in His providence saves people like you and me so that we cannot boast in ourselves but rather in Christ's finished work alone.

## GOD'S UNFOLDING PROVIDENCE

As you read Abraham's story, you see that although God told him the end from the beginning, God didn't give him all the details at once. God told Abraham that he would be a great nation, but He didn't say how or when. In fact, God allowed 25 years to pass before He delivered on the beginning of that promise. Within those 25 years, there were significant tests in addition to the pain of prolonged barrenness. There was internal family stress with Lot, Abraham's nephew, and there were numerous mistakes made on Abraham and Sarah's part because of a lack of faith in and patience for God's plan to come to pass.

Yet through all of this, God is glorified and we gain wisdom, warning, and encouragement from Abraham's story. As God's plan unfolded, Abraham experienced heartache, confusion, and pain mixed with joy. There were times when both Abraham and Sarah were tempted to doubt God's promises, but by His grace, they persevered. In the same way, we must learn to persevere when things aren't going the way we anticipate them to go. We know that God has a plan and, as Tony Evans has said, God is taking "what you and I would call luck, chance, mistakes, happenstance and stitching them into achieving His program."<sup>2</sup>

## GOD'S UNSTOPPABLE PROVIDENCE

God promised to make Abraham's name great and to lead him to a new land

that would be for him and his offspring (Gen. 12:2,7). But a lot happened between God's promise and its fulfillment. There were many victories, but there were also many losses, such as the division between brothers, slavery and imprisonment, and disobedience within Abraham's lineage. Yet through the providence of God, everything that God promised came to pass or is still in the process of coming to pass.

God's providence can be seen throughout Abraham's family story but nowhere as strongly as in the story of Joseph. After all that Joseph went through at the hands of his brothers and the Egyptians, he concluded powerfully, "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good" (Gen. 50:20). Joseph's story reminds us that God is for us even when things are at their darkest.

Ultimately, as Christians, we know that God's providence is unstoppable because of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Ever since the Fall, God has been orchestrating His perfect plan in the face of evil, human sin, and the weakness of His own people. Even against all of these things, God's plan to redeem those who place their faith and trust in Him came to pass. Any time you feel like your life is out of control, remember that in Christ, things are under control because God's providence is unmerited, unfolding, and unstoppable, and God is "behind the wheel."



# A PEOPLE PROMISED

## **+** SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God established a covenant people through whom He promised to bring blessing to the world.

## **+** BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Genesis 11:10–20:18

## **+** SETTING:

At this point, the world looked bleak. The people of the earth are still sinful, even after the flood of God's judgment. And now, after Babylon (or Babel), the people of the world are scattered and unable to communicate in a unified language. Will God's image-bearers ever be unified again, or will sin and judgment separate and destroy what God made very good? Enter Abram, a man whom God chose to receive a promise to answer this very question.



# DAY 1

## READ:

Genesis 11:10-32

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 11:27-30

NOTES

Over the course of Scripture, God uses people who commit terrible sins for His purposes. Murderers, adulterers, thieves, prostitutes, liars, and many other kinds of sinners cover the pages of the Bible. Not only that, it is easy to find examples of those who have lived terrible lives in our time yet the truth and power of the gospel has transformed their hearts and changed them forever. Still, we sometimes think that only the most elite are used in God's kingdom. We often are tempted to believe that it is those who are eloquent, winsome, charming, attractive, and have good connections that impact the world in Jesus' name.

This, however, is not how God tends to work. Instead, He uses people we would never expect to do His work. God used the family of Abram (likely a pagan idol worshiper; see Josh. 24:2-3) and Sarai (unable to conceive and have a child) to bring forth the nation that would ultimately bring forth the Messiah. Why does He do this? Because God has chosen to use the "foolish" and "weak" people in the eyes of the world to shame the "wise" and "strong" so that no one can even think about boasting in His glorious presence (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

We are all tempted to boast in our own skills and abilities, and we have skills and abilities because God has made us with them. Yet God chooses those who are insignificant and unlikely to bring about great things for His kingdom. The reason He does this is so gracious and kind. He does this so we are not able to boast. If we boast, then we put ourselves in the place of God and try to take credit for something we are not ultimately responsible for. When we boast in God alone, we trust that He is the One in control and He brings about anything that is significant and wise.

**In what areas of your life are you boasting instead of recognizing and praising the work of God?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Acts 17:16-34**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Acts 17:24-27**

NOTES

In a monarchy, the queen or king is revered higher than any other person. If you read the lyrics to the British national anthem, you'll see how the people view the monarchy:

God save our gracious Queen,  
Long live our noble Queen,  
God save the Queen!  
Send her victorious,  
Happy and glorious,  
Long to reign over us,  
God save the Queen!

The subjects of England are (at least on the surface) happy to be the Queen's people. They sing the line "Long to reign over us" with booming voices at sporting events or royal weddings. Queen Elizabeth II has reigned for more than 68 years, the longest monarch in England's history and in the top five longest monarchies of all time. Those who are her subjects are so by birth or citizenship. Most of them did not ask to belong to her kingdom or fight their way in. The Queen did not go on any quests to gather more subjects for herself. Rather, she rules the people belonging to her nation. Her subjects seem happy and her reign has been long indeed.

However, we know that there is still disunity, disagreement, crime, and brokenness under the Queen's reign. We know she is not a perfect ruler, nor will she live forever. But God is the true ruler over all. His throne was not made with human hands, nor will His time as ruler ever fade (Acts 17:24-25).

It is this throne of God that will last forever, and He has done the marvelous work of inviting all who trust in Jesus to be members of His kingdom and to reign with Him forever. He began this work with Abram, and He will continue it until all His children are home (Acts 17:26-27).

**Why is it important to remember that God is ruler over all?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

Genesis 12

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 12:1-3

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"When Abraham started, he asked no questions concerning how far or to what place he was journeying. He left that all in the hands of God. His faith put its hand inside the hand of its father, and he was content to be led wherever his father would lead him."<sup>2</sup>

—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Jim Elliot and four other missionaries were martyred in Ecuador on January 8, 1956. These men and their families set their hearts on an unreached people group to bring the message of the gospel to those who desperately needed it. These men knew the risks they were taking and that the Wuaorani people might be hostile to their message. And still they went because, as Elliot wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."<sup>1</sup>

The rest of the world likely saw these missionaries' efforts as wasteful and foolish. Why would people risk not only their lives but the lives of their entire families just so some potentially dangerous people might hear an ancient story? Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint, and Roger Youderian were not fools. They gave up their lives—something none of us can keep forever—and through their sacrifice, their families were eventually able to share the gospel with this tribe, and many souls were secured for eternity.

Sacrificing for God's glory and the salvation of others is never a foolish or wasted action. Abram may not have seen the fullness of God's plan when he left his father's land to obey God, but he did trust that he was not acting foolishly. We can trust that any time we are obedient to God's calling, we will gain something. It may not be riches or fame or anything else we want, but we will certainly gain eternal life with God, which can never spoil or fade. When God asks us to sacrifice something, we can trust that what we will gain will be a far better reward than what we are losing. Our Father knows what we need and what is best. If something hurts to give up momentarily, it will seem as nothing compared to what we gain in Christ Jesus.

**Is there anything in your life you would be unwilling to give up if God asked you to sacrifice it, and if so, how can you grow as one who trusts that it is not foolish to give up anything if God asks?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**Galatians 3**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Galatians 3:27-29**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #80: PEOPLE OF GOD

Scripture describes the church as “the people of God” (2 Cor. 6:16). Comprised of both Jew and Gentile, the church is created by God through the atoning death of Christ. The term “church” is used in two senses—of individual local churches composed of people who have covenanted together under the lordship of Christ and of the universal church composed of all believers in Christ in all times. As the people of God, the church seeks to live under God’s ruling care while we are protected and cared for by Him.

In the Marvel movie franchise, Thanos is introduced as the universe’s most powerful and destructive villain. His mission is to obliterate half of all life in order to restore “balance” to the universe. Thanos functions as a sort of anti-God figure. He even sacrifices the only one he has ever loved so that he might achieve his version of salvation. To some, he grants life, but to many, he punishes them with death. Contrary to his perception, there is no mercy, properly defined, involved in Thanos’s plan. He does not look to create a people who love him but demands a people who kneel and die to his stolen power. But the people of the earth do not want Thanos to reign, and eventually a massive army of heroes thwarts his plan.

This harsh, impulsive, selfish power is not at all what the real God is seeking when He creates a people for Himself. God possesses all power in and of Himself. He is not only all-powerful, but He is also loving and merciful. God shows His deep love through Abram, whom we know as Abraham.

God called Abram out from his family and land and promised him an heir, land, and that he would bless the peoples of the earth. Abram believed and obeyed, and all of his descendants receive the benefit, if they too believe. God does not seize the hearts of people by force but rather patiently, tenderly, and graciously shows His love for us, calling us to faith, repentance, and obedience (2 Pet. 3:9). God fulfills His promise to Abram by giving him a son and land, but even more than that, He fulfills His promise by blessing the earth through Jesus, Abram’s promised descendant. Now all those who receive Christ are recipients of the promise given to Abram (Gal. 3:29).

**Why is it important that we remember God fulfilled his promise to Abram?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

Genesis 15

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 15:1-6

NOTES

A broken promise can be one of the most hurtful things anyone can do to you. If you've ever been around children, you know that if they say, "I promise I won't ever do that again," there is a good chance they will not keep their promise. Is it malicious on their end? Maybe sometimes. But more often than not, they simply forget the promises they make. Adults are no different. Think of all the times you've said, "Yes, I promise I'll get that done!" about a project at work or to a friend and failed to do so. Even in marriages, promises that are made on the wedding day are not always upheld. We are not trustworthy people.

When someone makes a promise to us, we want to believe him or her but might be filled with doubt or distrust if we have experienced hurt before. No one on earth has ever kept every promise he or she has made. Whether as a child or as an adult, we are not people of our word, even if we really want to be! Distractions or even unpreventable circumstances that make it impossible for us to keep our promises may come up.

God is categorically different from us in the realm of promise-keeping, and we should be so thankful for this! God has never once broken a promise that He made. Even through seemingly impossible circumstances, God always ensures He will keep His word. Because He is perfect and holy, it is impossible for Him to be something that He is not. This means that He cannot be a liar (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). If God has made a covenant or a promise, it is the most trustworthy, unbreakable, perfect promise ever to be spoken.

**What promises of God do you need to believe today, knowing that God will keep His word?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The blessings of God were not restricted to Abram and those who were good to him, but were to flow from him to all peoples on earth. This is the first hint of God's ultimate purpose for Abram and his descendants."<sup>3</sup>

-Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj

### POINT 1: God chooses to work through unlikely people (Gen. 11:27-30).

God began creating a people for Himself with Abram, an unlikely person from a family of \_\_\_\_\_ worshipers and a place marked by \_\_\_\_\_.



**Why does God often choose unlikely people to carry out His plans?**

Through Sarai's barrenness, we will see that God works through impossible circumstances to bring \_\_\_\_\_ to the world and \_\_\_\_\_ to Himself.



**What are some ways God has used impossible circumstances in your life to bring Himself glory?**

### POINT 2: God promises a new people through Abram (Gen. 12:1-3).

God called Abram to leave everything he knew— \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and his \_\_\_\_\_ —to follow Him to a new land of promise.



**What are some things God has called you to leave behind in order to obey Him in faith?**

God's promises are trustworthy: He will bring \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_ through Abram—a step closer to fulfilling the promise of Genesis 3:15.

### POINT 3: God uses imperfect people (Gen. 15:1-6,17).

God grants righteousness to those who \_\_\_\_\_ in Him. God's people are those with the \_\_\_\_\_ of Abram.

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #80: PEOPLE OF GOD

Scripture describes the \_\_\_\_\_ as “the people of God” (2 Cor. 6:16). Comprised of both Jew and Gentile, the church is created by God through the atoning death of \_\_\_\_\_. The term “church” is used in two senses—of individual local churches composed of people who have covenanted together under the lordship of Christ and of the universal church composed of all believers in Christ in all times. As the people of God, the church seeks to live under God’s ruling care while we are protected and cared for by Him.

NOTES



**How can we, as imperfect people, grow in faith and believe that God will keep His promises to us?**

## MY RESPONSE

Because we are brought into Abram’s family of faith through Jesus Christ, we live as a united people used by God to proclaim the greatest blessing—salvation—to the world.

- **HEAD:** How will you address the areas in your life where you are doubting God or working to earn your salvation instead of trusting in Jesus?
- **HEART:** When you are tempted to sin and disbelieve God’s character and faithfulness to you, how can you remind yourself of God’s trustworthiness and eternal commitment to you?
- **HANDS:** Who in your life needs to hear about the promised Savior, Jesus Christ, and how will you encourage them to have faith in Him?

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Abraham leaned wholly on the promise of God and the God of the promise. We are not saved by making promises to God but by believing the promises of God.”<sup>4</sup>

—Warren Wiersbe (1929-2019)

# A PRIEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

## **+** SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Abram tithed to Melchizedek, a priest to God Most High, which would point to a greater priesthood than the one that was to come through Aaron.

## **+** BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Genesis 14; Hebrews 5–7

## **+** SETTING:

From the moment the first two people sinned, a promise has weaved its way through the story of Genesis: the promise of an “offspring” (Gen. 3:15)—a descendant of the first humans who would defeat the serpent that led them to sin against God. Generations later, we are introduced to Abram, whom God promised He would bless and through whom all the peoples of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). God made a covenant with Abram that would never be broken and further confirmed it by a priest of God Most High.



# DAY 1

## READ:

Genesis 14

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 14:14-16

NOTES

The story of Abram fighting against four kings with his small gang of 318 men to rescue his nephew, Lot, sounds like the plot to an action-packed movie. But the difference between this true story and many movies we might see today is that Abram isn't the main character. Neither is Lot the main character. This story is not one about Abram mustering up enough courage or brawn to take on an impossible task. It's a story about Abram going in the strength that the Lord provides in order to restore his family member. The Lord, of course, is the hero of the story.

Similarly, our stories are not about us. Whether we've seen a lot of tragedy in life or we've seen little to none, the battles we face are meant to point us to something greater than ourselves. They're also meant to point the people around us to something greater than ourselves. We, or people we know, may have overcome much in life, but if that is all our stories are about, then our stories die when we die. But if our stories are about something eternal, then our stories will long outlast the span of our lives.

Ultimately, the paths we walk and the things we overcome in life are meant to point us and the people around us to God. If we boast in ourselves and our abilities, then people will remember us as long as we are boasting. But if we boast about Christ and the victory He's won for us, then the story that has outlasted countless generations will continue to be made known long after we are gone.

**How can you use your life today to boast about the strength that God provides through the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Genesis 14

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 14:17-20

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"But one who is victorious should not claim the victory for himself; rather, he should attribute it to God. This is the teaching of Abraham, who became more humble, not more proud, in victory. Indeed, he offered a sacrifice and gave tithes; for this reason too, he received the blessing of Melchizedek."<sup>1</sup>

—Ambrose (d. 397)

After Abram's battle with the four kings, he was met in the Valley of Shaveh by both the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. The king of Salem met Abram with refreshments for him and his army. When he spoke to Abram, he spoke words of blessing, a declaration of God's favor on Abram. It was also a declaration that God gave Abram the victory, and it was God who would continue to shower favor upon him.

Abram's response to Melchizedek, the king of Salem, was to give him ten percent of all he had. He did this both to honor Melchizedek and to affirm the blessing of Melchizedek. Abram's tithe to Melchizedek was a declaration of his trust in God to continue to provide for him and his household.

Whether precisely a tithe or not, when we give, in particular, to the local church, we are declaring that our ultimate allegiance is to God. Our giving to the local church is an acknowledgment that the Lord doesn't just own what we give but He owns it all. And the Lord doesn't just call us to give of our finances; He also calls us to give of our time and talents.

As the giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17), God is the One who gives us the ability to do all that we do. Our giving in response to that is an acknowledgment of God's ownership. Our giving, much like Abram's, is also an acknowledgment of the victory that Jesus won on our behalf on the cross. We give of ourselves to advance the gospel mission because God has so graciously and generously given Himself to save us from our sin.

**What are some ways you can give today to proclaim the gospel to the world around you?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

Genesis 14

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 14:21-24

NOTES

In the Valley of Shaveh, Abram was met by both the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. Previously we talked about how Melchizedek's blessing on Abram was a declaration of the hand of God in Abram's defeat of the four kings. Melchizedek's first words of blessing are in stark contrast to what we hear from the king of Sodom when he speaks.

Instead of acknowledging the Lord's hand in Abram's victory, the king of Sodom began by demanding he be given back all of his people who were taken in King Chedorlaomer's conquest of Sodom. And while the king of Sodom's offer for Abram to keep the goods that were taken seems honorable, his offering was completely devoid of any acknowledgment of the Lord. It seems as though he was saying that Abram was solely responsible for the victory.

Abram's response to the king of Sodom was to declare the glory of God in the battle he had just won. In a sense, the glory of God marks the presence of God. Abram knew and believed that without God's favor on his life, he would have had no chance of defeating the four kings. In this moment, Abram had the opportunity both to take credit for what the Lord did and to add to his wealth. But Abram chose instead to magnify the Lord's name and to rely upon Him alone.

We often have the opportunity to take the credit for the Lord's work in our lives and in others'. But we, like both Abram and Melchizedek, have to declare the glory of God in all circumstances—even when it may mean we don't get to reap the benefits of taking the credit. One of the realities we must remember about God's glory versus our own is that God's glory, or presence, alone can save. All our glory can do is puff us up and cause people to admire us temporarily. So rather than lift ourselves up, we should do everything for the purpose of bringing glory to God (1 Cor. 10:31).

**How have you seen God work in your life recently, and how can you use that work to glorify God among others?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

### Hebrews 7

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

### Hebrews 7:1-10

## NOTES

Hebrews 7 affirms what we've already talked about in terms of Melchizedek's blessing on Abram and Abram's subsequent tithe. Hebrews 7 reinforces the idea that Melchizedek is a picture of Christ. Other than Jesus, Melchizedek was the only person whom God ordained as both a king and a priest. As the king over his people in Salem, Melchizedek led his people in times of war. He also ruled over them as the governing head of the people. As priest, Melchizedek's job was to intercede on behalf of the people with God and to make atonement for their sins through sacrifices.

Melchizedek, therefore, pointed to the coming of Jesus. Jesus reigns as both king and priest. But in His first coming, He didn't rule like a king. Instead, He took on the form of a servant in order to save us from our sin (Phil. 2:5-8).

Though Jesus was the Creator of heaven and earth, when He came into the earth, He didn't come in pomp and power. Instead, He came as a baby. Jesus lowered Himself to become like us in order to save us from our sin. Our mind-set and attitude toward the lost has to be the same. We could live in a prideful manner, as though we deserve to be God's sons and daughters, unlike others who don't believe in Jesus. But if we do that, then we completely miss the point. Jesus' call upon all sinners is not only for us to sit on a throne but first to take up our cross.

**What are some circumstances in which you find it hard to humble yourself like Christ? How does the reality of Jesus' servanthood help you to walk humbly as He walked?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

Hebrews 5

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 5:1-10

NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #53:

### CHRIST AS PRIEST

As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the One whose perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).

Hebrews 5 shows us the weakness and frailty of human priests. Though we don't live now with priests having the responsibility to make atonement for our sins, we could probably imagine the difficulty of such a system. In the sacrificial system, as Hebrews 5 points out, priests had to make atonement for their own sins along with making atonement for the sins of the people. Therein lies one of the problems of the sacrificial system. Even the priest himself had to have his sins atoned for before he could intercede before God on behalf of the people. Not only that, sacrifices only made forgiveness of past sins possible. So in order to be made right before God, people had to go constantly before the priest in order to atone for their sins.

Jesus, as our Great High Priest, did something that no earthly priest could ever do—atone for our sins once and for all. When it was time for Jesus to atone for our sins, He didn't do so with a lamb, for He is the perfect and spotless Lamb of God (John 1:29). He was sinless and right before God the Father in every respect. He had done nothing to deserve death on the cross, but God sent Him to the cross in order to cancel the record of our sin debt once and for all. Jesus' death was sufficient for our salvation because He was the Lamb who didn't stay dead (see Rev. 5:6ff). He rose from the grave on the third day and has achieved for us eternal life.

Some of these gospel truths may seem obvious, but it is necessary for us always to remember them. As others have said, the gospel is not just what saves us, but it is also what sustains us in our salvation.

**How does the truth of the gospel sustain you every day of your life?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Likewise, in the priest Melchizedek, we see the sacrament of the sacrifice of the Lord prefigured according to what the divine Scripture testifies ... For who is more a priest of the most high God than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered sacrifice to God the Father and offered the very same thing that Melchizedek had offered, bread and wine, that is, actually, his body and blood?"<sup>2</sup>

-Cyprian (d. 258)

### POINT 1: God's servant rescues a captured relative (Gen. 14:8-16).

With concern for his relatives, Abram's small force pursued and defeated the armies of four kings who had just beaten the armies of five kings. God proved His \_\_\_\_\_, His \_\_\_\_\_, and His \_\_\_\_\_ through Abram's victory and recovery of Lot's family and possessions.



**What are some ways God has proven Himself on your behalf when circumstances seemed stacked against you?**

### POINT 2: God's servant is blessed by a priest to God Most High (Gen. 14:17-20a).

Melchizedek is an obscure figure in the Bible, but he is significant, in part, because he was both a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ to God Most High.



**Why might we struggle to grasp Melchizedek's significance in Scripture?**

Melchizedek's blessing of Abram reinforced the promise that God made to Abram: He would be a great nation to bless the earth because God was for him, giving him \_\_\_\_\_ over his \_\_\_\_\_.



**What are some ways God continues to bless us?**

### POINT 3: God's servant tithes to a priest to God Most High (Gen. 14:20b; Heb. 7:1-10).

A tithe is a \_\_\_\_\_, a representative gift acknowledging God's \_\_\_\_\_ of everything and declaring trust in God's continued \_\_\_\_\_.

NOTES

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #53: CHRIST AS PRIEST

As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of \_\_\_\_\_ us to God. He is the One whose perfect \_\_\_\_\_ is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and \_\_\_\_\_ for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).



**What are some examples of things you do that show that all of you belongs to the Lord?**

### MY RESPONSE

Because we have been given so great a high priest in Jesus, we live as priests in our land, pointing others to the sacrifice of Jesus and interceding before the Father for their salvation.

- **HEAD:** How does realizing that Jesus is both your Great High Priest and King change your understanding of the gospel?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you will bless the Lord because of the great victory over sin that He has accomplished for us through Jesus?
- **HANDS:** What are some specific ways you will give to support the mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus both locally and globally?

### VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The Bible recounts lives set in the ever-present context of relationships. And behind all the lives looms the Life, the Story, the great Lover, who from before time has envisioned and worked for a relationship with you and me."<sup>3</sup>

—George Guthrie

# A PROMISE TESTED

## **+** SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God calls on His people to place a deep faith in Him, a faith that believes God can do the impossible.

## **+** BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Genesis 21–22; Hebrews 11:17–19

## **+** SETTING:

For years, Abram lived believing God’s promise that he would have many descendants—that he would become a great nation and through his offspring all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. God’s promise carried him through trials and troubles, though at times Abram unwisely tried to help the process along. God even changed Abram’s name as a sign of this promise, and Abram became Abraham. Through many long years, Abraham’s faith in God did not waver. And then one day, Abraham’s faith became sight.



# DAY 1

## READ:

Genesis 21

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 21:1-5

## NOTES

One of the most comforting phrases about our God can be found in Genesis 21: “the LORD did what He had promised.” God is a God of faithfulness. There is no promise that God makes that He doesn’t subsequently fulfill. The proclamation about the Lord in Numbers 23:19 is apt, saying that God is not a man—He is not like those who lie or change their minds. If He speaks, He acts, and if He makes a promise, He will fulfill it.

God had promised to give Abraham and his wife Sarah a child even in their old age. The fulfillment of this promise stretched beyond Abraham and Sarah’s human experience. Sarah had never been able to have a child with her husband. But the promise that God made to her was sure because it was made by the Creator of heaven and earth. He has the ability to open and shut the womb at His will.

The most amazing promise that we find in Scripture, however, is God’s promise to save humanity from sin. That promise stretches all the way back to the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15). We see that promise fulfilled in the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God.

The promise of salvation is so secure for those who surrender to Jesus in faith that nothing can separate us from the salvation that He obtained for us by dying on the cross. As Paul says in Romans 8:38-39, that “nothing” includes death, life, angels, rulers, things in the present, things in the future, powers, height, depth, or any other created thing—which means everything except God is included in that “nothing.”

God’s promises are sure and true. He will never break them.

**How does God’s faithfulness to His promises give you hope in the midst of brokenness?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Genesis 22

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 22:1-2

NOTES

The testing of Abraham is one of the most startling passages in all of Scripture. The idea that God would ever direct one of His followers to sacrifice his or her son almost sounds like a cruel joke. But God did command Abraham to make a sacrifice of his son Isaac. Yet God was not instructing Abraham to do something immoral, nor was He changing His mind about what sin is. (Remember: God doesn't change His mind.) God was testing Abraham's resolve in His goodness, meaning that He was seeking to expose Abraham's willingness to obey Him even if it meant losing his most valued gift.

Abraham would choose to obey God's command, believing the outcome would be different than the death of his promised son. Abraham believed God to be good and true to His word, so he believed that Isaac would grow up to have a family of his own. Though God's command required a father to put his son to death, Abraham's actions show that his allegiance and obedience belonged to the Lord and to the Lord alone. Truly, God was his God.

Today, and everyday, God isn't asking His followers to put their children on an altar to be sacrificed, but God does want our complete allegiance and obedience. One of the hardest things for people to recognize is that the more we have in this world, the more our possessions cause us to desire this world over the next. Almost like a gravitational pull, the more we have, the more we are weighed down by our desire for this world. That's not to say that it's bad to have possessions, but we, like Abraham, must be willing to give up even our most valued possessions for the gospel of Christ.

**What do you have that you might find difficult to give up, even for Christ? What can you do to remind yourself that whatever that thing is, it belongs to the Lord?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Genesis 22:1-10**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 22:3-10**

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The Bible reveals that there is anarchy somewhere, real thoroughgoing anarchy in the heart of men against God; therefore the need is strong that something should come into us from the outside to readjust us, to reconcile us, to turn us round, to put us right with God. The doctrine of the atonement is the explanation of how God does that."<sup>1</sup>

—Oswald Chambers (1874-1917)

The level of faithful obedience Abraham displayed in his willingness to offer his only son as a sacrifice to the Lord can only be had through full confidence in God's promises. He believed that the Lord would raise Isaac up from the dead if necessary (Heb. 11:19). The language of Abraham reaching out to take the knife to slaughter his son is not an exaggeration. But he stretched forth his hand and gripped the handle in faith. He raised the knife in faith. And he would have brought the knife down upon his son in faith. God's promise to Abraham was how Abraham got his son Isaac in the first place, and that in spite of his and Sarah's old age. This same promise was the basis of Abraham's hope that this sacrifice would not end in the death of his son.

We can trust God's promise of salvation no matter what life might throw at us. Even in our worst sin, God's promise of salvation remains true for those who have trusted in Him. The promise of salvation, which includes the hope of our resurrected life with God for eternity, is the promise that gives us the freedom to be completely obedient to God even when it might mean great loss.

For most of us, we might not risk the loss of our lives, but we could still lose a great deal by being obedient to the Lord. Obedience could mean losing some of our closest relationships, perhaps even with family. It might mean giving time and finances to the point that it hurts. Perhaps one day it really could mean risking our lives for the gospel of Jesus. Whatever it might be, the promise of salvation—a relationship with God forever on a restored earth—is a promise that far outweighs anything we might risk losing in this world, even our lives.

**How does God promise of salvation give you confidence in your obedience to the Lord, even in the face of potential loss?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**Genesis 22:11-19**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 22:11-14**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #58:

### CHRIST AS SACRIFICE

There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy!" Those words must have filled Abraham with an amazing sense of relief. Imagine the rising level of apprehension within Abraham as he traveled for three days. Then ponder the tension tightening as he tied his son down to the altar and reached for the knife. Surely Abraham thought, "Is God really going to make me do this?" But though the scene gets more and more tense, Abraham's faith in God's promise never wavered.

From the very beginning of the journey, Abraham believed that God would provide something else for the sacrifice. He believed that even if he did carry out the Lord's command, the Lord would raise his son from the dead. Even though we get close, we never have to read of the miracle of resurrection in this story. Instead, as Abraham was about carry out the Lord's command, he was stopped by an angel. And when he looked up, he saw a ram caught in a bush. Just as he had believed, God provided another sacrifice.

This story is a great picture of what God the Father did in sending His Son. One of the main differences, however, is that there was no substitute for Jesus. In fact, He was our substitute. He was sacrificed on the cross on our behalf in order to reconcile us to God. We deserved the wrath of God, but instead, Jesus placed Himself on the cross because God loved us and He wanted us. We could never pay the penalty of our sin; we could never satisfy our debt. But God loved us so much that He was willing to pay the penalty in our place, so the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

**What are some ways you regularly remind yourself about Jesus' sacrifice for sinners like you?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**John 18–19**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**John 18:1-11**

NOTES

The story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane is a story that for many conjures up all sorts of sad emotions. In Gethsemane, we are faced with the reality that even though Jesus desired to save us, He didn't desire to suffer and die on the cross for its own sake. Crucifixion was the absolute worst form of torture during Jesus' day. The Romans had perfected it through much practice. It was also humiliating with the person being crucified and placed right outside the city gate, stripped naked, for all to see.

John's Gospel doesn't record the part of Jesus' prayer to God in the garden about "the cup." All of the other Gospels record Jesus' praying to the Father multiple times to let the cup of divine wrath pass from Him. Jesus, the Son of God, existed in perfect, unchangeable, and infinite bliss as a Person of the Trinity, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit—and always would. According to His human nature, however, Jesus, the Son, while on the cross experienced the curse of sin and separation from God that all humanity deserves.

Jesus' question in John 18:4—"Who is it that you're seeking?"—had an obvious answer. Jesus knew it was Himself whom Judas, the temple guards, and the Roman soldiers came to take. One of the reasons He asked them this question was to keep His disciples out of harm's way. With this question, Jesus essentially stepped in front of His disciples and said, "I am here to die for them."

If it were not for Jesus' sacrifice, no one would ever conquer sin and enter God's presence. However, because Jesus experienced the wrath of God in our place, we don't have to worry about divine wrath being poured out on us. By grace through faith we are saved (Eph. 2:8).

**How does Jesus' willingness to go to the cross on our behalf affect the way you see sin in your life?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"In the ram that hung in the tree and had become the sacrifice in the place of Abraham's son, there might be depicted the day of him who was to hang upon the wood like a ram and was to taste death for the sake of the whole world."<sup>2</sup>

-Ephrem the Syrian  
(c. 306-373)

### POINT 1: God provides the son of promise (Gen. 21:1-5).

Through many long years of God's \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
and in spite of some moments and choices of  
\_\_\_\_\_ on Abraham and Sarah's part,  
the Lord fulfilled His promise, and Isaac was born.  
\_\_\_\_\_ is impossible with God.



**How should this biblical account affect our hope in God's promises?**

The name Isaac means "he laughs." Abraham and Sarah previously laughed in \_\_\_\_\_ at God's promise, but later they laughed with \_\_\_\_\_ at the birth of their son in their old age.

### POINT 2: God demands the sacrifice of the son of promise (Gen. 22:1-10).

God tested Abraham not to \_\_\_\_\_ him or to  
\_\_\_\_\_ what would happen but to " \_\_\_\_\_ "  
Abraham's resolute faith in real time and space.



**What are some truths about God's tests that we should know?**

Abraham was willing to make the sacrifice of his son because he \_\_\_\_\_ God's purposes were unstoppable and His promises certain.



**How have you seen faith in God lead to extraordinary acts of obedience?**

### POINT 3: God provides a substitute for the son of promise (Gen. 22:11-14).

Abraham's willingness to give up his son was a \_\_\_\_\_ of what God Himself would do one day in the sacrifice of His \_\_\_\_\_ .

NOTES

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #58: CHRIST AS SACRIFICE

There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial \_\_\_\_\_ of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the \_\_\_\_\_ was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.



**How should we respond to the grace of God in providing His Son as a sacrifice in our place for our sins?**

### MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced God's resurrection power in Christ Jesus, we share the gospel with everyone, trusting that God can give new life to all who are spiritually dead.

- **HEAD:** How does Jesus as our substitute affect the way we see the need for repentance?
- **HEART:** How does Jesus as our substitute push us to seek accountability for our sin?
- **HANDS:** How might you share the gospel with someone who feels he or she can never be good enough for God?

### VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Real satisfaction comes not in understanding God's motives, but in understanding his character, in trusting in his promises, and in leaning on him and resting in him as the Sovereign who knows what he is doing and does all things well."<sup>3</sup>

—Joni Eareckson Tada

# A PLAN UNHINDERED

## **+** SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God's plan to bless the world continued, even in spite of the sin and dysfunction of His people, a people He was remaking in His image.

## **+** BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Genesis 25–33

## **+** SETTING:

Abraham died, but his legacy miraculously continued with his son Isaac, whose wife faced the same struggle as her mother-in-law, Sarah. Rebekah was barren, but God heard the prayers of Isaac and she had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. These brothers competed from the beginning, and early on, Jacob convinced Esau to give up his birthright. After this, Isaac followed in his father's footsteps and listened to the God of Abraham as he settled in Gerar, yet the descendants of Abraham also followed various paths of sin and dysfunction.



# DAY 1

## READ:

**Genesis 32**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 32:24-32**

NOTES

Spring is one of the most remarkable times of the year. If you live somewhere that experiences all four seasons, you know that winter is dreary and full of death with no green grass, no colorful plants, and few creatures out and about. It feels lifeless. Then sometime in March or April, that which seemed dead comes alive again! New leaves sprout, flowers bloom, birds chirp, and a rebirth seems to take place across the land. This is similar to what salvation is like. We were once deceivers, rebels against God, dead in our sins, and unable to breathe new life into ourselves. But God stepped in and claimed us for Himself! His salvation brought new life in us.

Like Jacob, who received a new name once he encountered God, so God makes us a new creation once we encounter the riches of His grace (2 Cor. 5:17). Unlike the trees that begin to sprout new leaves, we are an entirely different kind of tree! We no longer produce rotten branches and withering leaves but fresh and life-giving fruit.

Our transformation is not just for ourselves. We are not part of God's new creation for our own sake. Rather, God has reconciled us to Himself, and because of this, we are now reconciled to one another. All the strife we had with God is gone, and all the strife we have with one another can also be put to death. We are now ministers of the same work of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Our new life in Christ does not just manifest itself in our own hearts and minds but in the way we interact with others. Reconciliation for Christians means that we confess our sins to one another and choose to love others despite any differences we might have because we recognize that we have a common Savior and share the same Spirit.

**How does your new life in Christ through faith affect your relationships with God and others?**

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"During this struggle you are Jacob, but after your faith in the blessing for which you prayed you are Israel."<sup>1</sup>

—Hilary of Poitiers (c. 300-368)

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Romans 8**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Romans 8:1-11**

## NOTES



### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #83: NEW IDENTITY OF THE BELIEVER

When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Eph. 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a "new creation" in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

We are all tempted to believe lies about ourselves and others. The massive spread of misinformation across social media and various news sources is an indicator that we are more gullible than we care to admit. Even on the social level, we are tempted to believe anything we hear about our friends or our enemies without going to the source. Many destroyed relationships could have been prevented with a single question.

We also believe lies about ourselves. We are tempted to step into our old skin and believe that we are the person who is condemned. We may even identify with our sins and make them part of who we are. This, however, is not what God calls His people to do. When God determines that we are His, He determines that we are no longer what we used to be.

Consider Romans 8:1, which states that there is zero condemnation for those who belong to Jesus. Not even a little bit. The whole chapter of Romans 8 reminds us that we are not people of the flesh any longer, but we are people of the Spirit (v. 9). Our minds are not ruled by the flesh and our lives do not look like they used to. If we find ourselves believing that we are still the same people we were before, then we have not gone to the right source or asked the right questions.

Imagine if you were a thief before God saved you. You've experienced salvation, but you still think, "I was a thief and still struggle with the desire to steal, so this must just be who I am." You are going to the wrong source. You are believing the lies of Satan that you are still enslaved to the sins of your past. There is only one source who will tell you the truth—God, who is your Father—and it is God who declares that you are His child. The children of God are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus, and that is a verifiable truth (Rom. 8:37).

**Are there former sins that you still believe have power over you? If so, how does the fact that you are a child of God change the way you view your past sin?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**2 Peter 3**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Peter 3:8-9**

NOTES

If you grew up celebrating Christmas, you remember the anticipation of opening presents. Some kids hunt for the gifts before Christmas Day. They might sneak into their parents' room and look under the bed or in the closet to see if they can find the gifts. If a child gets caught in the act, the parent might say something like, "You have to wait for December 25<sup>th</sup> before you can open your presents!" We don't like waiting. Whether it is for Christmas presents or for something much more substantial, such as a spouse, a job, a child, or news about a health condition. Anticipation can cause anxiety and fear; it can even cause us to doubt God.

We tend to get stuck in our own timelines of how long something should take. Because we are not all-knowing, we cannot see all that is ahead of us and why events take place the way they do. The God we serve, though, can see all things. He is all-knowing and all-powerful. We are not God; therefore, we cannot assume we understand His ways and His plans. Often the question may arise, "How long, O Lord? How long must we endure the trials of this world?" The answer is found in 2 Peter 3:9, which teaches us that the Lord doesn't delay in keeping His promises but is patient so that people will repent and find salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. God's "delay" in our lives may seem purposeless, but He is patient and His timing is absolutely perfect.

Like Jacob, we may not understand why God seems to withhold something from us. But we know that our God gives us exactly what we need exactly when we need it. Trusting God is an act of faith, but He has proven Himself throughout all of human history as a patient, loving, forgiving, and perfectly-timed God.

**How can you grow in your faith that the Lord has perfect timing and He can be trusted?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**Psalm 105**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Psalm 105:5-11**

NOTES

Have you ever met someone with a remarkable memory? People who are able to hold massive amounts of information in their heads are always impressive. One of the more fascinating kinds of memory are those who have an eidetic, or photographic, memory. These are people who can look at an image or document once and be able to recite the entire document or describe the entire photo without any aid. Imagine the kind of work one could do as a lawyer, professor, or any other profession with this ability! Most of the world struggles to remember what they did two weeks ago.

Remembering can be a difficult task for those without incredible memories. Yet so much of the struggle we endure in this life is due to our inability to remember. After God wrestled with Jacob, the Israelites set up a way to remember what occurred: they avoided a particular part of animal meat. God provides many signs in the Old Testament to help His people remember all that He did for them. He established the Sabbath to remind them to rest as He did. He required they eat unleavened bread during Passover to remind them of their escape from Egypt. And through Jesus, He established the Lord's Supper to remember what Jesus did for us on the cross.

We see how often the Israelites forgot what God had done for them, but we are not unlike them. We regularly forget that God has saved us and redeemed us. It is certain that we will fail to remember at times for the rest of our lives. The good news, however, is that God is the One who never forgets. He has saved us, and He will not forget us. God remembers His covenant forever, and we can trust that our failure to remember Him will never overwhelm His ability to remember us.

**What are some ways you can grow in remembering God's commandments, promises, and work in your life?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

1 John 1

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 John 1:5-10

## NOTES

Light is a curious thing. When it is absent, all color, shape, and movement seems to disappear. You lose all ability to know what is near and what is far. All is hidden and unseen. Yet if you light a match in a completely dark room, all of a sudden, what was hidden is now visible. Turn on a light switch and you will be even more overwhelmed with the exposure of color and shapes before you!

God uses light to describe Himself in many ways in the Bible. In 1 John 1:5, we learn that God is light and there is no darkness where He is present. In John 8:12, we learn that the followers of Jesus will have life in His light. And in Revelation 21:23, we see God's throne room described as a place where His glory shines brighter than all other sources of light. Nothing is hidden before God because His light penetrates all darkness and sin.

Why, then, do we hide our sin as if the God of the universe is unable to see our thoughts and our actions? Rather, we should desire that our sins be exposed before God's light so they may be forgiven and erased, never to be seen again. Temptations and sins do not have power over us unless they are hidden in darkness. It is the light of God that allows us to repent and believe the good news about Jesus. Our Savior—Jesus Christ—is the light of the world, and if we walk with Him through this life, we will find forgiveness of our sin through His shed blood and fellowship with all the others who walk in His light (1 John 1:7). Bringing our sins to light gives us fellowship with God, fellowship with others, cleansing from sin, and freedom from sin's power.

**What areas of your life are hidden and need to be brought into the light?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"When we meet trials, we do not rejoice in the suffering they bring but in the faithfulness of God to use them to shape us, that we might become like Christ. God is faithful in the midst of trial, and faithful in the aftermath of trial to work all things for our good."<sup>2</sup>

-Jen Wilkin

### POINT 1: God's plan continues despite sin and deception (Gen. 26:7-11).

Isaac, the son of promise, deceived the Philistines to \_\_\_\_\_ himself above all others. This expressed a \_\_\_\_\_ faith in God.



**How does our faith relate to our actions?**

Our sin never just affects us but \_\_\_\_\_ affects those around us. Yet sin \_\_\_\_\_ stop God's plan and promises from going forward.

### POINT 2: God's plan continues despite family dysfunction (Gen. 29:31-35).

God provided sons for Leah, Jacob's neglected wife. She hoped these children would change her husband's heart toward her, but they did not.



**How have you experienced God's comfort in the midst of hardships or afflictions?**

Leah's focus changed from her husband to the Lord who loved her. Even through dysfunction, the Lord began creating the great nation of \_\_\_\_\_ and providing the \_\_\_\_\_ for her salvation.



**Why are God's plans more trustworthy than our own?**

### POINT 3: God's plan continues through changed people (Gen. 32:24-32).

Jacob wrestled with his brother, Esau, all his life, but here he wrestled with the all-powerful \_\_\_\_\_ and came away \_\_\_\_\_.



What experiences has God used to transform you the most?

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #83: NEW IDENTITY OF THE BELIEVER

NOTES

When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an \_\_\_\_\_ under God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved \_\_\_\_\_ (Eph. 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a " \_\_\_\_\_ " in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

## MY RESPONSE

Because we too are a broken people, forgiven and declared righteous in Christ, we serve God with humility and gratitude, pointing others not to ourselves but to God and what He has done.

- **HEAD:** What sins are we tempted to believe God cannot redeem?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you will express your praise for God's gift of Jesus?
- **HANDS:** What sins or weaknesses will you confess with others in the church that you may be healed?

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"With God, we have power and prevail, when we weep, when we cry, when we're broken, when we're pleading, when we're clinging, when our heads are bowed. The blessing comes when we're crippled, when we're hurt."<sup>3</sup>

—W. A. Criswell (1909-2002)

# A FAMILY PRESERVED

## + SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God works through adversity and even the evil actions of people to bring about good.

## + BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Genesis 37–50

## + SETTING:

We now enter the story of Joseph. We learn in Genesis 37 that Joseph was Jacob' favorite son, and once again, favoritism caused problems in this dysfunctional family. Joseph was one of the youngest of Jacob's children, yet in his dreams, Joseph saw his family bowing down to him (Gen. 37:5-11). In their jealousy and spite, the brothers sold Joseph, and he became a slave to Potiphar in Egypt (Gen. 37:36). Joseph earned great favor in Potiphar's household but was thrown into prison when Potiphar's wife lied and said Joseph had tried to sleep with her.



# DAY 1

## READ:

Genesis 40

## FOCAL PASSAGES:

Genesis 40:9-15, 20-23

## NOTES

Every person feels lonely at some point in his or her life. Friendships might not be as deep as you desire. A marriage might not meet your expectations. Church members might be less involved than you would like. There are many reasons you might feel lonely. Sometimes the feeling of loneliness could be based on real hurt done to you, and other times it could be a result of isolation on your end. Either way, it is a real and painful feeling.

Joseph surely knew this feeling well. He spent years in prison and likely felt the weight of loneliness more often than most of us ever will. Yet he knew God was present with him.

You might feel entirely alone, but if you are a Christian, you always have the presence of God with you. There are many places in Scripture where God reminded His people of His presence. Genesis 28:15, Deuteronomy 31:6, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 28:20, and Hebrews 13:5 are just a few examples of the times God told His people, “I am with you.” What’s more, those who are found in Jesus possess the Holy Spirit, which means God is not just with you, He is in you.

Our God is unlike anyone else. He does not abandon you when things get difficult. He doesn’t ignore you when you speak to Him. He wants you and cares about you and desires to be with you. This truth about God’s character is a great comfort in the midst of loneliness. If you are tempted to believe the lie that no one loves you, look again and see God extending His hand, inviting you into His presence.

**Where do you turn when you struggle with loneliness?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Genesis 41

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 41:1-16

NOTES

In the television series *The Blacklist*, there are a lot of unanswered questions. One of the main characters, Elizabeth Keen, seeks answers about her past, her childhood, her relatives, and her husband. As the story unfolds, small pieces of the puzzle are revealed, but each episode seems to demonstrate the puzzle has far more pieces than anyone realizes. There is one character, however, who seems to be all-knowing. Raymond Reddington, a notorious criminal, has answers but withholds them for his own purposes and often for the apparent protection of others. It is the pursuit of knowledge and information that sends Elizabeth and others into desperate emotional positions and causes many of them to wish they never knew anything at all.

We often want to have all the answers. We look at the way our lives turn out and wonder what God is doing. But God, unlike Raymond Reddington, actually does know all things and is not motivated by selfish reasons. And we, unlike Elizabeth and others, can actually trust God and know that His plan is good.

Our temptation is to doubt God and believe the lie that He doesn't know what He is doing. Imagine if Joseph decided God wasn't good enough at being God. What if he took matters into his own hands and argued with Potiphar or fought while he was in jail? We likely wouldn't have the rest of the story. Instead, Joseph knew he could trust God. God never failed him, so there was no reason to obsess over having all the answers. Joseph's faithfulness to trust God and believe that He was working all things for good is an example to us all.

**Where are you seeking answers for the hardships you endure in your life?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Genesis 42–45**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 45:1-8**

## NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Biblical forgiveness does release us, and not simply from our own anger and hurt. Biblical forgiveness releases us to bring the mercy we received from God out into the world to others."<sup>1</sup>

—Leslie Leyland Fields

Injustice seems to flood our news cycle, our cities, and the world around us. People are persecuted for their religion, discriminated against for their race, and abused for their gender. Various parts of the world have made some progress at setting policies and protections for people who are treated unjustly, but for the most part, the world is not as it should be. Christians, however, are lovers of justice because God is just (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 89:14).

It is not wrong for us to fight for justice in this world. Yet we must always remember that when we are wronged, we are not called to take revenge and bring down the hammer on our enemies. Rather, we want to make it our aim to live at peace with everyone, as much as it depends on us (Rom. 12:18).

This can be a difficult task when we have been wronged. Our temptation is to take matters into our own hands, to avenge ourselves. Joseph could have done this, but he did not. He resisted the temptation to exact vengeance upon his brothers. Instead, he showed them kindness. And his kindness was like fiery coals heaped upon their heads (Rom. 12:20-21). God does not call His children to respond with hatred toward our enemies but with kindness and care for them.

All throughout Joseph's story, God used evil for good. In Romans 12:18-21, in honor of our gracious and just God, we are called to the same task. This requires that we die to our desires and live according to the cross. Jesus bore our sins, and He did not deserve to experience that punishment. He overcame evil with good, and as His followers who have the Holy Spirit, we have the strength to do the same.

**How will you overcome the evils around you with good?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**Genesis 50**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Genesis 50:15-21**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #29:

### **GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION**

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

Joseph's kindness toward his brothers wasn't just due to his love for his father (although he did love his father very much). He loved them too. He reminded them repeatedly that they had nothing to fear from him and that he bore them no ill will because what they intended for evil God was working for good. Through his kindness, Joseph was reconciling his relationship with them.

To reconcile means to restore or to make right. This is one of the major themes of the Bible. Through the gospel, we are made right with God, reconciled to Him by faith in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (2 Cor. 5:17-18,21). This is such good news for all of us who have done wrong and sinned against God. Because of Jesus, we are reconciled to our Creator. Our relationship is set right once more. We should dwell on this good news, but we should not forget that our reconciliation is not for our benefit only.

We are reconciled for a purpose—to be ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador is an official representative of a nation or realm, and we are part of God's kingdom, which means we are representatives of His saving realm. We are sent out as those who have been reconciled so we can bring reconciliation to the whole world (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Our calling is to go and bring others into the fold of God's kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ. We invite others to be reconciled as we were. In this, we fulfill our purpose in life to worship and glorify God.

**How are you participating as an ambassador for Christ in this world?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**Ephesians 2**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

## NOTES

Let's be honest: Being part of the church can be difficult at times. Yes, we are fellow members of God's household, and doubly yes, because of the gospel, we are family. But therein lies the issue—we are family, and families often have disagreements. While it's likely safe to say that you have not experienced the same kind of family strife as Joseph experienced, the experience of disagreement and difficulties between family members is not unfamiliar. The image that we have in our minds of what the church should be and what our experience happens to be is often very different. That's not because the ideal of what the church is according to Scripture is bad or wrong. It's because we are people prone to the same sinful behaviors of all people since the first humans sinned.

That's why it's so important for us to remember that our union with each other was built on the very foundation that Joseph and all the other people in Scripture laid out. God was creating a way for all the people of the world to be reconciled to Him. He did this by establishing a covenant with Abraham and keeping His promises through Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and beyond. God preserved His people over centuries of strife and difficulty, through rebellion, idolatry, rejection, and legalistic obedience, and He is still preserving us today.

Any differences or disagreements we have ought to fade when we recognize that we are not strangers but family. We are being built up together by God in Christ and we share the same Holy Spirit. Our family is found in those who trust in nothing but the blood of Jesus. If we are tempted to argue or become disunified with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we must remember that we have the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, and we are now bound together by this Spirit. We can trust that even the hardest times in the church are worth the struggle because of what God is doing.

**How can you serve the church and participate in building it up by the power of the Spirit?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"There is no victory without opposition. God has not called you to a life of ease. He has called you to a life of victory through His Son Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

-Adrian Rogers (1931-2005)

### **POINT 1: God is faithful to be present with His people, even in adversity** (Gen. 39:21-23).

Though the worst circumstances put Joseph in slavery and in prison, God's \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ comforted Joseph in his situation.



**How can we know God cares for us in difficult circumstances?**

Joseph was \_\_\_\_\_ in his circumstances, but God's presence alone resulted in the \_\_\_\_\_ things that would follow.



**Why are we tempted to rely on our own strength or ability and not trust God?**

### **POINT 2: God is faithful to prompt forgiveness and reconciliation in His people** (Gen. 45:4-8).

Joseph forgave his brothers because he recognized God's \_\_\_\_\_ plan and \_\_\_\_\_ in what had happened to him.



**How does trusting in God's sovereignty factor into our willingness to forgive others?**

God's sovereign plan ensured that His \_\_\_\_\_ were cared for and \_\_\_\_\_ for during seven long years of famine in the land.

### **POINT 3: God is faithful to bring good, even from evil** (Gen. 50:15-21).

Joseph trusted the sovereign God to do what is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ even through the evil of human beings.

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #29: GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the \_\_\_\_\_ actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen \_\_\_\_\_ actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.



**How does Joseph's story affect the way you understand your life circumstances?**

### MY RESPONSE

Because we are a people who have been forgiven of our evil deeds, we forgive those who sin against us, recognizing that God is working everything for the good of those who love Him.

- **HEAD:** How will you change the way you think about the power of evil in this world?
- **HEART:** In what circumstances do you need to rejoice, knowing that God cares and provides for you?
- **HANDS:** How will you demonstrate the kindness and forgiveness you have received in Christ?

NOTES

### VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The cross shows us that God can take the worst possible evil and through it accomplish the greatest possible good—the destruction of evil itself."<sup>3</sup>

—Christopher Wright

# THE GOD OF PROVIDENCE

## **+** SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

The Lord, through His providential work in creation, holds all things together, rules over all, and provides all that is needed.

## **+** BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Psalm 103; Matthew 5–7; Colossians 1

## **+** SETTING:

In the wake of the flood and the scattering of humanity at the Tower of Babylon (or Babel), God's plans seem to be struggling, if not failing. His image-bearers largely reject His sovereign and benevolent rule. But things are not as they seem, for God continues to hold all things together and works in His creation and creatures to accomplish His will. God demonstrated this by calling Abraham and making a covenant with him and his descendants to bless the world. In spite of human sin, and often through it, God providentially took care of His people and worked all things for His glory and our good.



# DAY 1

## READ:

**Matthew 5–7**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Matthew 6:25–34**

## NOTES



### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #30: GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21–22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order but also the individuals and events within human history.

If you've ever bought or rented a home, you know that there are certain requirements to keep up the property. Homes need regular maintenance, like changing air filters or lawn care. But homes may also need emergency repairs for problems such as a burst water pipe or a failing air conditioner. As the owner or renter, it is your job to identify and notice these issues, which can be overwhelming.

We often think about our lives this way, don't we? It doesn't matter if we're talking about an aspect of our home, our work and family lives, or our standing before God Himself. If it appears to be broken, it's up to us to repair it. If it's in working order, it's up to us to maintain it. After all, if we don't, who will?

But the truth of God's providence undercuts this impulse. God creates and sustains all things—He is in control, not us. He repairs what we cannot; He maintains all that is beyond our ability. And through Christ and the Holy Spirit, we have grace and mercy that flow from Him, not from ourselves. As God's image-bearers, we are called to be obedient and good stewards; we are called to be faithful with what God gives us. But we are not called to be in control. When we confuse faithfulness with control, we try to take providence into our own hands with disastrous results (Gen. 3:1–7). We are not meant for that. And God, in His grace and mercy, did not put that burden upon us. God is in control, and we are not.

This might be the best news you hear all day.

**In what ways do you try to take God's providence into your own hands?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Psalm 103**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Psalm 103:15-19**

## NOTES

The popular drama series *The Crown* chronicles the lives of the British royal family. Though many scenes and storylines are clearly exaggerated for effect, there is no doubt that the British royal family has had its fair share of scandals. Queen Elizabeth II is often seen as the prototypical monarch, but her throne is often seen as nothing more than pageantry and a symbol—her power over the Commonwealth and even her own family is limited.

When we speak of God and His kingdom, we speak of a King who is in complete control. Beyond acting outside of His nature and character, God's power is unlimited and His authority unchallengeable. Whereas the scandals that rock the British royal family are shocking and sometimes irredeemable, the greatest scandal in God's kingdom is not brazen sin but the grace and mercy He shows to sinners.

We are not God's robots, so He doesn't force us to obey in perfect automation, but in His providence He saves us, renews us, and promises one day to make all things new. God's kingdom is not in disarray; rather, God's kingdom is perfect and presently overtaking the evil in this fallen, wicked kingdom on earth.

As sin ravages our hearts and the world around us, we have a King who is not merely a symbol. He is never surprised, and He is not disengaged. He is present with us—going so far as to become like us in our weakness in the person of His Son (Heb. 4:15)—and He is powerful to save.

**How does God's providence shape your view of God's power and promises?**

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Be persuaded to this by Christ, the Good Counselor who loves you. He became poor for us so that He might make us rich through His poverty, and 'gave Himself a ransom for all.'"<sup>1</sup>

—Basil of Caesarea  
(c. 330–379)

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Ecclesiastes 12**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**

NOTES

There is a well-known quip that goes something like this: “Don’t worship your belongings. You never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul!” Similarly, Ecclesiastes is one long, Spirit-inspired essay on the same point: You will toil all of your life to gratify your desires and accumulate wealth only to die and leave it behind. While the U-Haul illustration is humorous yet instructive, Ecclesiastes paints a grimmer picture. But as grim as Ecclesiastes might seem, the book’s author, likely Solomon, did not end on a note of hopelessness. Instead, he ended with a clear word of truth: We were made to fear God and keep His commands (Eccl. 12:13).

To take God’s providence seriously means to understand that He provides all that we need in this life. Everything comes from Him—our clothes, our meals, our income, our homes, even the breath we just took. When we stop and consider everything in our lives, everything that we see as belonging to us, it should give us pause because it means that our lives are not trivial. The God who made everything gives us everything we need at every moment. And if He does this, it means that our lives in this fallen world are not the end of our stories nor truly even the main point of our existence—God is.

Our possessions here are momentary gifts to be stewarded. It is not our job to accumulate wealth but to use our wealth—to whatever degree it exists—to bless others. The posture of sacrifice and self-giving is, after all, the posture of Christ Himself (Phil. 2:5-11).

**What is one way you can be more generous as a result of trusting God’s providence?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Colossians 1

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Colossians 1:15-17

## NOTES

Under the right lens, you can see the tiniest bits of creation itself that are invisible to the naked eye—radiation, electromagnetic waves, bacteria, etc. Though we so often focus on the things seen, we forget the things that are unseen, both physically and spiritually.

Physically, we can easily forget that creation itself is far bigger than we can imagine—the galaxies and stars we cannot reach and can barely see—and much smaller than we can imagine—subatomic particles and microscopic organisms. God’s creation is vast and intricate, wide and deep. In all of this, we know that God providentially holds it all together. As Abraham Kuyper famously said, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”<sup>2</sup>

Spiritually, the author of Hebrews reminds us that there is a reality only perceived through faith (Heb. 11:1). With the ability to see the vastness and depth of creation with man-made instruments such as microscopes and telescopes, we are tempted to think that our ability to see the physically unseen means we have figured out creation. God, however, cannot be put in a petri dish. We cannot examine Him and control Him; we cannot create a microscope strong enough to see Him with our eyes. Instead, we are given His Spirit that we might know Him and His wisdom (1 Cor. 2:12-16).

God’s providence is both physical and spiritual because His creation spans everything that there is. One day, in the new heaven and new earth, God will reunite and renew the physical and the spiritual, bringing heaven and earth together under His perfect rule (1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21–22).

**How does the vastness and depth of creation remind you of the physical and spiritual power of God’s providence?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**2 Corinthians 4**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

## NOTES

For many, suffering and trials are something to be avoided, a byproduct of our fallen universe at best and the punishment of God at worst. When we think of God's providence, we are faced with a question: If God is good and He is in control of all things, then what do we make of suffering? Does its existence mean that God is really not in control? Or perhaps worse, is God able to stop the suffering but simply doesn't care about our pain?

And what about sin? Why did God allow sin to come into the world in the first place? Why does God allow its continued existence? We don't have all the answers to these questions. But we do know this: Scripture affirms that God does not sin, that He hates sin, and one day He will eradicate sin. Indeed, God hates sin so much that He sent His only Son to die on a cross and rise again to defeat sin and the death it brings. The incarnation of the Son shows that God cares about our suffering and about the trials associated with this fallen world.

Paul tells us in Romans 5:1-5 that suffering ultimately builds up our faith. Hebrews 12:3-11 tells us that God is a good Father who doesn't stand by passively while we suffer but instead uses suffering as a means of discipline to draw us to Him. God's providence in these passages reminds us that our suffering and trials are not mistakes. They are certainly a consequence of sin's effects on the world, but they're not random byproducts of a broken universe. Instead, God allows momentary afflictions to build in us the hope and expectation of future glory, when sin and death are no more (2 Cor. 4:17).

**What suffering or trials are you currently facing, and in what ways can you fight for hope in God's providence?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## POINT 1: The Lord's hand holds together all of creation (Col. 1:15-17).

Jesus Christ is the \_\_\_\_\_ Son of God, \_\_\_\_\_ image of the invisible God. To look at Jesus is to see God Himself.



**How should we read the Bible in light of the fact that Jesus is God?**

Because Jesus is God, the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of all things by His divine power, our salvation is sure and our hope is secure.



**How can we show that Jesus is our foundation in life?**

## POINT 2: The Lord's hand rules over all in righteousness (Ps. 103:15-19).

Because of \_\_\_\_\_, all of humanity faces \_\_\_\_\_. We are fragile, finite, and broken people who deserve eternal judgment.



**What are some ways human beings run from their mortality?**

The solution to our mortality and judgment cannot come from ourselves but must come from Jesus, who \_\_\_\_\_ in heaven, who \_\_\_\_\_ us, and who fulfilled all \_\_\_\_\_ on our behalf.

## POINT 3: The Lord's hand provides what we need (Matt. 6:25-34).

God knows what is \_\_\_\_\_. In wealth or poverty, God is working a plan for your \_\_\_\_\_ and His \_\_\_\_\_.

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"As this all-wise, all-gracious Being created all things, so he sustains all things. He is the Preserver as well as the Creator of everything that exists."<sup>3</sup>

-John Wesley (1703-1791)

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #30: GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His \_\_\_\_\_ for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order but also the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ within human history.

NOTES



**What are some ways you have seen the Lord provide when you were focused on trusting Him?**

### MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus is at the center of creation, all that we do is done for Him and His glory as we live with complete dependence and trust in His faithful provision.

- **HEAD:** How does God's sovereignty shape your understanding of God's providence?
- **HEART:** How will you strive for peace in temptations and trials knowing God is providentially working for your good?
- **HANDS:** What are some ways you will live out God's call to be a good steward and neighbor in light of God's providence?

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Just as he gave existence to that which did not exist, so he gave new creation to that which did exist."<sup>4</sup>

—Gregory of Nazianzus  
(c. 329-390)

# WHAT MAKES THE BIBLE MAKE SENSE

by Aaron Armstrong

The first time I read the Bible—and I mean really read the Bible, not just random snippets that showed up on TV shows and in comic books and novels—was when I was 25. It wasn't a book I had grown up around; it never even occurred to me that I should read it. And I'll be honest, when I did read it the first time, it was because I wanted to make fun of a Christian friend.

God, with His divine sense of irony, had other plans. I walked down the street from my home to a Christian bookstore that happened to be a mere two blocks away. I purchased a Bible with the help of a bewildered employee, then returned home to start reading. Several people, including the woman at the store, encouraged starting with John's Gospel. Because I'm a contrarian by nature, I started with Mark.

As I read, I was fascinated by this Jesus person, this man who claimed to be God, who was so different than the Jesus pop culture mocked so incessantly, which up to that point was the only Jesus I knew. This Jesus was not like that one. He was a man who had power over evil, could heal the sick, and taught with authority. A man of whom His own disciples said, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and

the sea obey him" (Matt. 8:27). He was a man who caused a reaction in everyone He encountered.

## WHAT IS THE BIBLE ABOUT?

And then I became a Christian, and as a new believer, I was amazed by what I was reading. But I was also confused. Part of my confusion actually came from what I was being taught. I was learning good and biblical principles for living. I was exposed to several different verses every week, but I didn't know how to fit it all together. Was the Bible a collection of principles, inspirational sayings, and moral examples, like an instruction manual for life? I couldn't shake the feeling that I was missing something. One day, I realized what that something was while reading about Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees in John 5. (Yes, in John's Gospel.)

The Pharisees were, of course, the "Bible guys" of their day. They loved the Law; they studied it diligently. They pored over every word. But when Jesus began His ministry, at first they were confused about Him—and soon their confusion turned to anger. Who was this man to violate the Law, or at least their approach



to it? Who was this man who was a “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19)? They tried to turn people against Him, to trap Him with questions over biblical interpretation, and more besides. They attacked His character, and even His family. They even tried to kill Him. But Jesus’ assessment of them was earth-shattering:

“You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me” (John 5:39).

### **WHAT—OR WHO—MAKES THE BIBLE MAKE SENSE**

And there it was, the thing that I had been missing. The key to the puzzle that the Bible can seem to be for many of us—even those who grew up with it. Many Christians spend their whole lives approaching the Bible as basically a big book of rules, morality tales, and inspirational sayings. And although there is much to be inspired by, many moral truths, and many wise commands contained within it, if that’s all we see the Bible as, we’re missing its point. We’ll diligently study the book searching for the secret of eternal life and may miss the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

But seeing that all Scripture testifies about Jesus changes everything about how we understand the Bible—and how we live in light of it. We will recognize the Old Testament not as a wholly separate collection of writings but as the foundation and foreshadowing of everything that happens in the New,

the first part of one big story told from Genesis to Revelation. We will see the New Testament for what it is, as good news of great joy for all people—because Jesus came to fulfill the Law, to rescue us through His death and resurrection, and to restore the relationship with our Creator that sin ruined. And we can live faithfully in the world right now, as good news people in a bad news world. People who live knowing how the story God is telling ends, a story that says all the bad we experience right now in this world will come to an end in the world to come, when Jesus returns to make all things new, to put an end to sin and sadness and suffering. When death will die, and God’s people will all rejoice.

### **GOOD NEWS TOO GOOD TO KEEP TO OURSELVES**

This is the understanding we need to fully make sense of the Bible in the way God intended (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). As much as the Bible encourages us, helps us to live wisely, and provides powerful examples of courage and compassion, we need to turn away from our tendencies to reduce it to being about such things. God wants us to see something so much more than that, something so much bigger—that the gospel is at work from beginning to end. That Jesus is at its center. We need His help to see this—and we need His help so that we might help others see it as well. To be people who say with John the Baptist, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). This good news needs to be shared with the whole world. May God help us to do it.

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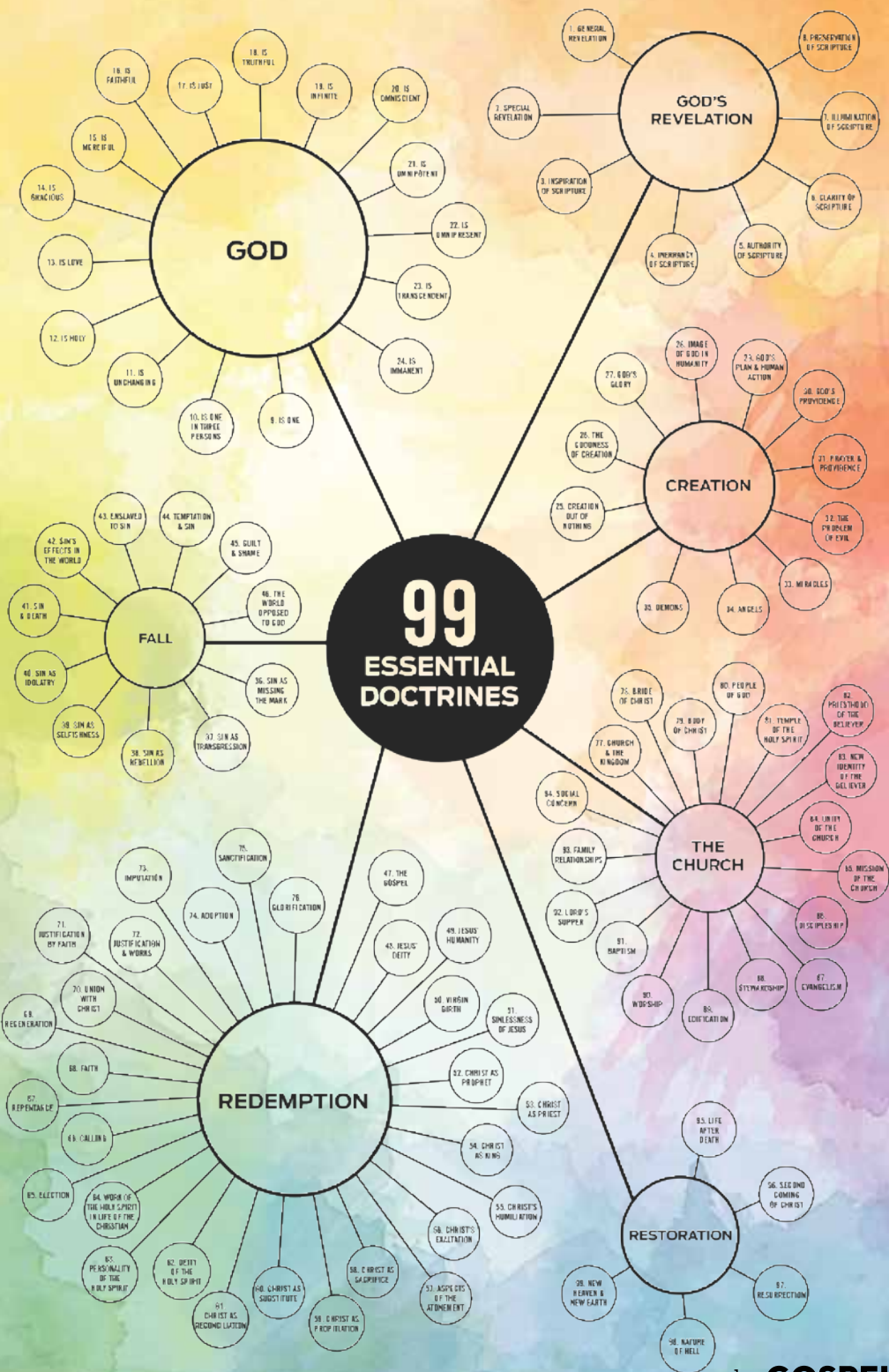
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