

# Good News

Salvation through Christ



CELL GROUP JOURNAL



## WEEK ONE | WHO IS GOD?

Devotion #1 | There is No One Else (Dt. 4:32-40)

Devotion #2 | Three In One (Mt. 28:16-20)

Devotion #3 | Divine Community (1 Jn. 4:7-17)

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# BEFORE YOU BEGIN

## AN INTRODUCTION

### THE AIM OF THIS STUDY

Christ Fellowship has adopted the mission of "multiplying disciples, leaders, and churches from the upstate of South Carolina to the ends of the earth so that Jesus is known and worshipped." Our mission exists because individuals living near to us and far from us do not know and love our Lord and Savior. As we accomplish this mission, we will see people who do not yet know and worship Jesus come to know and worship Him.

Our strategy for accomplishing this mission consists of many parts and includes many activities. Arguably the most fundamental of these activities is the sharing of the gospel. We believe the truth about Jesus and so we speak (2 Cor. 4:13). God has shown Himself to be worthy of our worship; now we the church fulfill our purpose by declaring His excellencies to the nations (1 Pet. 2:9-10). We speak trusting that God will use the truth of His Word to powerfully awaken the hearts of people who do not know Him. We converse with our neighbors and co-workers expecting God to turn those hostile, indifferent, and ignorant of Him into those who know and love Him. How will Jesus be known and worshiped in places and by people who live far from Him? God's people will carry the gospel with their beautiful feet and gracious lips to the people near and far (Is. 52:7).

To fulfill this mission, the believers - more precisely, the members of Christ Fellowship Northwest - must engage those God has placed near them at work, school, home or recreation. Admittedly, the thought of sharing the gospel may frighten us. What do we say? How do we begin? What if we get something wrong? What if we say something offensive and our friend or neighbor pulls away and we lose future opportunity to influence with the truth? What if our co-worker asks questions we cannot answer?

These questions possess legitimacy and they express fears that may come to reality. You may experience rejection. You may face a question you cannot answer. You will most certainly say something wrong. However, the prospect of these outcomes should not mute our mouths. Instead, they should call us to dependence on God and a resolve to grow in our ability to engage the unbelievers with the truth about Jesus. Our aim in this study is to produce a resource, a tool that we can use over and over again to assist us as we strive to faithfully engage the lost with the truth about God made known in Jesus.

We believe that God builds His church through the preaching of His Word, and that He brings it to maturity as men and women speak the truth to one another in love. The CG Journal has been designed to help us hear and speak the truth to one another.

*Every feature of the CG has been designed to help you...*

- Study the text of the upcoming sermon.
- Discuss the text with others.
- Hear and apply the sermon.

## STEP ONE | STUDY THE SCRIPTURES

We have provided **three devotions** for **each week** to help you understand the Scriptures. If you do not have a habit of spending time in God's word and prayer, we recommend you set aside three days in the week to do a devotion and pray.

## STEP TWO | DISCUSS WITH OTHERS

Meeting with others to discuss Scriptures can be a challenge. To help, we have provided a section called "Cell Group Conversations." We recommend you answer the questions in preparation for meeting with a CG. In it, you will find three types of questions:

**Text Specific Questions:** These questions are specific to the week and will help you think through how the truth about God should affect the way you think, feel, and act.

**Reoccurring Questions:** These questions are broad and subjective. They are designed to help facilitate conversation with others.

**Takeaway Questions:** These questions are designed to help you sort through the studying and the conversing so that you might identify specific takeaways. Answering them each week will help you move from discussing God's Word to responding to it in praise, confession, and requests.

## STEP THREE | HEAR THE SERMON

The week ends with hearing the text preached. To help you we have provided space in your journal for taking sermon notes.

# GET TO KNOW YOUR CG JOURNAL JOURNAL FEATURES

# GOSPEL OF JOHN READING PLAN

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# WEEK ONE

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## WHO IS GOD?

### **Devotion #1**

There Is No One Else

### **Devotion #2**

Three In One

### **Devotion #3**

Divine Community

# THERE IS NO ONE ELSE

WEEK ONE

DEVOTION #1

DEUTERONOMY 4:32-40

Every other month or so I stand at the entrance to my garage wondering how all the stuff in it wound up on the floor and perplexed about where I should begin my efforts to restore order. The same overwhelming feeling falls on me when I consider the question, "Who is God?"

Many descriptive words come to mind - loving, just, holy, pure, merciful, faithful, powerful. Along with descriptive words come titles - Creator, Almighty, Redeemer, Alpha and Omega. These titles and adjectives help us understand God, but they fail to reveal His identity.

Just as I might describe my wife to you - brown hair, bluish- green eyes, 5' 6," kind, sweet, servant, mother of four girls, wife, Christian, PTA Treasurer - without revealing her identity, so I might describe God without revealing His identity. To avoid this error we must begin with God; we must make sure we know which God we are talking about.

## "There is no one else..."

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses, the leader of Israel speaks to the people. He reminds them of the LORD'S special relationship (Gen. 12 & 15) to them and the great power He displayed by rescuing them out of Egypt (Ex. 3-14).

## Read Deuteronomy 4:32-40

*Why did God do all he did for Israel? (v. 35 & 39)*

*By what name did Moses identify God? (v. 34, 35, 39, 40)*

Moses did not name God like you might name a pet or a child; instead, God revealed His name to Moses (Ex. 34:5-7). God's name is LORD, and this name communicates two identifying characteristics.

First, He is the powerful Creator (Dt. 4:32). He made all things and all things belong to Him.

Second, He belongs to Israel and Israel belongs to Him. He is their God, and they are His people (Dt. 4:33-34). He is known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - the fathers of Israel. By this name, LORD, God is known as the Creator of all (Is. 45:18) and the Savior of Israel.

With the God of Scripture identified as LORD, we must also note what He says about other gods.

*What does Moses claim about other gods? (v. 35, 39)*

In a culture that views truth as subjective or relative, absolute truth claims such as, "There is only one God and besides Him there is no other!" seem arrogant, narrow-minded, and intolerant of other opinions, religions, and ideas. Nevertheless, Scripture stands up and makes this particular claim over and over again (see Dt. 32:3 9; Js. 2:11; I Sa. 2:2; Is. 44: 6; Mk. 12:29; I Jn. 5:20)

By claiming only one God exists, the Scriptures at the same time reject all others as powerless and lifeless. Whereas the LORD created man, false gods are created by man. The true God hears His people and watches over them, while false gods cannot see nor hear. While God carries His people, false gods must be carried by men.

The Scriptures reveal One True and Living God, and His name is LORD. If this claim about God is true, many implications can be made. One of those can be found in our text from Deut. 4.



*What did Moses tell the people to do since the LORD is the only true God? (Dt. 4:40a).*

*What does Moses say will happen if they obey the one true God? (Dt. 4:40b).*

Moses presents sound logic. If the LORD alone is God and if He alone created the universe and loves them, then they have every reason to submit to Him. The LORD created this world; why look to anyone else for instruction as to how best to live in it? If the LORD loves them, His direction would only serve their best interest. They have no good reason disobey Him unless He is not telling the truth.

The Israelites had to make a decision. They had to either reject the claim God made about Himself or they had to receive it as true. You and I must do the same. Will you receive God's claim about Himself as true? Or, will you reject it?

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## STOP AND THINK

*Do you now find (or have you ever found) the claim, "The LORD is the only God," difficult to believe and accept?*

*What makes this truth claim difficult for you and/or our culture to believe?*

*If you do believe the LORD is the only true God, "How well are you Keeping His commands?"*

*In a few short sentences, describe your efforts to obey God.*

*What do you find most difficult as you struggle to obey Him.*

## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, You are the LORD, the Creator of heaven and earth. You love me and are for me. Besides you there is no other. Thank You for revealing Yourself in Your Word so that I might know the truth.*

*I must confess that I struggle to trust You. I find myself trusting other idols, and my trust of other gods leads me to submit to them rather than to you. Please be patient with me. Show me mercy. Give me faith to trust what You say about Yourself.*

*Forgive my sins. Crush the other idols I have made and served. Thank You for hearing me. I come to You trusting in Jesus and not myself. Amen.*

# THREE IN ONE

WEEK ONE

DEVOTION #2

MATTHEW 28:16-20

As the Scriptures unfold, God unveils something strange. While God reveals Himself as one, He also reveals that He exist as three persons. Yes, there is only one God, His name is LORD, as we saw in the last devotion. And, as we will see today, the Scriptures identify three individual persons as God. They are all distinct from each other; they are each fully God.

As you might imagine, this Scriptural teaching caused much confusion and even hostile division within the early church. Much can be and has been said concerning this truth about God.

For now, we will settle for seeing that this truth is indeed found in the Bible.

## "Father, Son and Holy Spirit"

Between Deuteronomy 4 and Matthew 28 much history has unfolded. We will look at this history in weeks 2-4. What is true in each text is God. He is active in both. He authors both, and in both He teaches us about Himself. In Deuteronomy 4, God said, "I am the only God." And now, in Matthew 28, God teaches us that although one He is three - God is three in one.

## Read Matthew 28:16-20

Jesus spoke those words just before He returned from earth to His Father (see Acts 1:10-11).

Often the church refers to this text as the "Great Commission" for it is here that Jesus sends His disciples on mission into the world.

*What did Jesus tell the disciples to do with new disciples? (Mt. 28:19-20).*

*Into how many names are they to be baptized? (Mt. 28:19)*

*How many persons share that one name and who are they? (Mt. 20:19)*

Amazingly, those three distinct individual persons all identify as the same, God the LORD. We can see this phenomenon all throughout the Scriptures. Let us consider each.

**The Father:** Throughout church history almost no one has questioned the Father's divine nature. This is evident from the first verse of the Bible, where God created the heaven and the earth. It is evident through the Old and New Testaments, where God the Father is clearly viewed as sovereign Lord over all and where Jesus prays to His Father in heaven.

**The Son:** While little controversy has occurred over the deity of the Father, fierce debate over Jesus' nature has occurred. Consider one of the most clear statements about Jesus' nature found in the Scriptures.

## Read John 1:1-5 & 14

*When did the Word exist? (Jn. 1:1)*

*Where was the Word? (Jn. 1:1)*

*Who was the Word? (Jn. 1:1)*

In this text we can clearly see that the Word refers to a person who is at the same time distinct from God while also identifying as God.

*What did the Word do? (Jn. 1:14)*

The Word became a man and came to earth to live among men.

*Who was this man who was the Word and identified as God? (Jn. 1:14-17)*

Jesus' life did not begin in His mother's womb. He has always existed with the Father. John, the apostle, credits creation to Jesus (Jn. 1:23), and acknowledges Him as the source of life (Jn. 1:4). This view of Jesus as God is echoed by the Bible's other authors.

**The Spirit:** Like the Father and the son, the Holy Spirit is a distinct person who is sent by the other two. He has His own unique works of convicting, teaching, equipping, and illuminating. Although distinct from the Father and the Son, He too is identified as God.

In passages such as 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:46, 1 Pet. 1:2 and Jd. 20-21, the Spirit is listed as equal with the Son and Father, and in other text such as Act. 5:3-4 and 1 Cor. 3:16, the Spirit is directly referred to as God.

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## STOP AND THINK

*Is the truth that there is one God in three persons - Father, Son, and Spirit - a new idea for you?*

*Do you find accepting this truth about God difficult? Why or why not?*

*Difficult truths such as this challenge us to submit our thoughts, ideas and views to the Scriptures. Can you think of any other teachings in Scripture that you struggle to accept and/or understand?*

*What might prevent you and/or others from embracing the truths presented in Scripture?*

*What would you need to happen or change so that you might accept what the Scriptures teach especially in the areas that challenge your current ideas, views, and beliefs?*

## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, You are the LORD, my God. Thank You for communicating to me in Your Word.*

*You are far beyond my imagination. I struggle to know and comprehend You. Thank You for both Your Son and Your spirit.*

*Although I do not understand it, the relationship You all share must be amazing. Thank You for teaching me even the truths about Yourself that make my brain hurt.*

*I confess that I struggle to accept what You say is true, especially when I do not understand it. My heart also fails to see value in truths about You that seem irrelevant or unhelpful in improving my present daily life. These thoughts and attitudes are wrong. I should be confident in Your truth for You are trustworthy. And I should value what You have revealed, for what greater joy might I find than knowing You as You really are.*

*Help me. Give me humility so that I stop trusting my own ideas or thoughts over what You have said. Give me faith to accept Your word. Give me a heart that enjoys seeing and knowing You above all else!*

# DIVINE COMMUNITY

WEEK ONE

DEVOTION #3

I JOHN 4:7-17

The Scriptures reveal to us a divine community. This community includes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are one God not three. While the Scriptures do not give us a formula that fully explains the mystery of the Trinity, God's Word does teach us much about the fellowship each member of the Trinity knows and enjoys.

## "God Is Love"

A very small fragment of humanity rejects the truth that God exists. The great majority agrees that a god or many gods live, yet much disagreement exists as men try to define and describe Him.

*Using no more than three sentences, answer the question: "Who is God?"*

*What three adjectives would you say best describe the God of the Bible?*

In I John 4:7-17, God makes clear at least one characteristic that defines the core of who He is. God is love. It is not that He is loving at times or even all of the time. John does not simply show us a God who loves others. Instead, John claims that God Himself is love. Love is central to His nature.

## Read I John 4:7-17

*From where does love come from? (1 Jn. 4:7a)*

*What is true of those who have been born of God? (1 Jn. 4:7b-8)*

Just as my children have my nature, so God's children have His. John is saying, love is so much a part of God's nature that his children have it as well. God's children love; they cannot help it for they have their father's nature.

*How has God "manifested" or revealed His love? (1 Jn. 4: 9-10).*

*What should God's love produce in His children? (1 Jn. 4:10-11)*

God's love for us in Christ produces a love in us for God and for one another. In other words, God's love works in such away that it brings us into participation with Him in the love He knows and enjoys.

*Where does John say that God abides? (1 Jn. 4:12)*

The claim John makes is astounding! He teaches us that God - the Father, Son, and Spirit - is found and experienced in fellowship with those who participate in the loving community of believers. God cannot be seen. You cannot get to know Him by playing 20 Questions with Him while driving down the Blue Ridge Parkway. But, you can know Him; you can see and experience Him as you participate in the love His children share with Him and with each other!

Every once in a while, the Scriptures give us a peak behind the curtain and into view comes a glimpse of this love known by the Trinity. What we see in these backstage moments is glorious and wonderful. While much more could be said, I'll briefly highlight a few aspects of this love we see enjoyed by the Trinity.

**Joy, Delight, and Pleasure.** The loving fellowship known between the three persons of the Trinity is happy and joyful. They delight in one another. They find pleasure in each other.

They, for all eternity, have been finding great delight in each other. So satisfied with each other, they have need of nothing. All they need to be satisfied and pleased is found in their love and fellowship.

Unity and Oneness. This divine fellowship knows no division. They share the same desires, the same mindset, and the same work. The conflicts of interest, passions, values, ideas, and agendas that set men in opposition to each other have no place within the loving fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit.

**Justice and Righteousness.** The members of the Trinity never offend each other. They always act justly toward each other. Each always receives right treatment from the others. The fellowship has never been and never will be fractured by a harsh word, selfish motives, or aggressive action.

Amazingly, when we see the God of the Bible we find the place of all that we desire. The pleasure, the unity, and the justice men spend their days seeking is right now and has forever been known and enjoyed by the Trinity.

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## STOP AND THINK

*How does the loving fellowship known by the Father, Son, and spirit differ from the relationships you have?*

*Men and women are pleasure seekers. In what or in whom do you find joy and pleasure?*

*Has that thing, activity, or person ever left you unpleased or dissatisfied? If so, how or why?*

*Have you ever experienced the pain of division and disunity between you and someone you loved? If so, what divided you?*

*How might we find encouragement in knowing that the community we long for does in fact exist in the Trinity?*

## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, thank You for making Yourself known to men. I am amazed at the loving fellowship You enjoy with the Son and the Spirit. My soul longs to participate in such glory! Your oneness is perfect. Your righteousness is unblemished and Your joy is overflowing. Magnificent You are!*

*I confess, my love is not like yours. My selfish desires set me in opposition to my children, my wife, my fellow church mentors and my neighbors. Sin robs my relationships of much joy. Too often it is not joy but dissatisfaction we know with each other. So far from your glorious love we fall.*

*Please pour your love into our hearts so we may know Your joy. Let us be one as You are one. Unite us in a shared passion for Your glory. Train us in righteousness and justice! Make us a strange people who contrast the world's displeasure with joy, the world's division with unity, and the world's injustice with justice!*



**REOCCURRING  
QUESTIONS**

- 1. Have you given in to anxiety, fear or addiction this week? What does this say about who you're trusting in besides God? What truth or promise of the gospel do you need to hear and believe to trust in God again?
- 2. Have you wasted any time this week?
- 3. How have you been resistant to God this week: in your mission to the lost? In your sacrificial love for community?
- 4. In light of God's love for you, are there any broken relationships in which you need to seek reconciliation?
- 5. How have you battled sexual or intimacy temptation and how are you preparing to deal with it next week?
- 6. In what areas of your life have you been spiritually tested this week? Did you trust God in those moments, or did you respond with complaints?
- 7. Have you isolated yourself from important relationships? What is causing this?
- 8. Were you able to spend time in God's word and prayer this week? What did God teach you? Did you obey it?

**CELL GROUP  
CONVERSATIONS**

**SUMMARIZE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED FROM THE SCRIPTURES THIS WEEK.**

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**WHAT HAS STOOD OUT TO YOU ABOUT GOD? WHY?**

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**DID YOU ENCOUNTER ANYTHING YOU STRUGGLE TO BELIEVE OR ACCEPT AS TRUE? WHY?**

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**WERE YOU CHALLENGED TO THINK, ACT, OR FEEL DIFFERENTLY ABOUT SOMETHING? IF SO, HOW SO?**

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# WEEK TWO

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## WHY ARE WE HERE?

### **Devotion #1**

For His Glory

### **Devotion #2**

In His Image

### **Devotion #3**

Happy Participants

# FOR HIS GLORY

If we imagine God as lonely, bored, and unhappy we might find it easy to understand why God would create. But, when you consider that God is not some lonely, unfulfilled being, answering this why question becomes a little more challenging. Why would God the Father, Son, and Spirit choose to create the world and all of humanity when together they already knew joy, love and satisfaction? Why, when they needed nothing, did they chose to act? To find the answer we need to go to the beginning.

## Read Genesis 1:1-2:3

*What did God see about His creation? (Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25)*

*What did God see about His creation after He made man and woman? (Gen. 1:31)*

*What did God do on day seven? (Gen. 2:13)*

In the creation account of Genesis, we see God not only creating but also enjoying His creation. When He stopped to assess what He made, He found the creation pleasing. It was "good!" God found delight in creation! The LORD rejoices in His works (Ps. 104:31). On the seventh day God even stopped his work to enjoy. He rested. This was not the kind of rest needed because one is tired. God did not get tired. This is the rest of an artist who stops to admire her beautiful painting.

This leads us to ask why? What did God find pleasing in creation? We find a hint in Genesis 1:26-27

*What was unique about the way God made man? (Gen. 1:26-27)*

Pastor John Piper helps us understand the significance of being made in God's image:

"The point of an image is to image. Images are erected to display the original - to point to the original, [to] glorify the original. God made humans in his image so that the world would be filled with reflectors of God - images of God."

God looked and saw man and woman reflecting Him and what He saw pleased Him. He saw His own glory - His beauty on display - and in His estimation it was "very good."

The expression of God's glory is not limited to what is seen in His image bearers. In fact the whole earth is filled with His glory (Is. 6:3). This means that when a person looks at creation, he can see the truth about God (Rom. 1:19-20).

Each night, God's power can be seen in the stars as each one obeys His command and continues along its path (Is. 40:26). His wisdom can be seen in the way the blades of grass reach up to the sky until eaten for nourishment by the cows (Ps. 104:14). All of creation sings the goodness of God together. As each animal, plant, planet, and person do according to their design, they preach and they worship (Ps. 148:3-7). They declare and they demonstrate God's beauty, majesty, goodness, and glory (Ps. 19:1).

*Where do you see God's wisdom displayed in Creation?*

*Where do you see His power?*

*Where have you seen His beauty?*



*What are some other characteristics of God you see demonstrated in His creation?*

When we see that God created the world to display His glory and that the demonstrations of His glory bring Him pleasure, three important implications come into view.

First, God Himself is the highest source of joy and pleasure. Seeing and enjoying God is the greatest activity in which one can participate.

Second, righteousness - the standard of right - is all that accurately displays God's glory and goodness. Righteousness uses creation according to its design while unrighteousness, sin, and evil distort, pervert, and misuse creation (Rom. 1).

Third, God is seen and enjoyed as creation is properly seen and used. God has put around you opportunity after opportunity to see and enjoy Him. One does not find joy in God by denying the good found in creation but by embracing it and enjoying it as God designed.

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## STOP AND THINK

*What are some of the good things in creation you enjoy?*

*Would you say that God is your greatest desire or the greatest source of your joy? Yes / No*

*Why or why not?*

*Everyone has an understanding of right and wrong. What would you say is the standard of right and wrong? Or, how do you determine if something is right or wrong?*

## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, You are majestic! Your power is incomparable. Your wisdom can be denied by no one with eyes to see Your creation. Your glory is lasting pleasure. All who come to You know full joy and great delight. In Your presence there are pleasures forever more.*

*I confess; so often I misuse your good creation in a foolish attempt to find some pleasure, some delight, more satisfying than You! Too many times I am left empty, dissatisfied, and joyless all because I choose lesser things that cannot fulfill the cravings of my heart.*

*Give me a heart that finds pleasure in Your beauty. Teach me to glorify you as I act in the world. Forgive me for misusing Your creation. Teach me to enjoy You by enjoying the beautiful world You have filled with Your glory!*

# IN HIS IMAGE

God created the universe, and the universe displays His awesome glory. In the demonstrations of His glory, the Father, Son, and Spirit share great joy and pleasure. His glory can be seen everywhere in creation, but in men and women His glory shines uniquely. Men and women have a special role in the created world, and to understand why we exist we must continue to look at the beginning when God formed man and woman.

## To Glorify God and Enjoy Him

One of the most influential documents among Protestant Christians since the 17th Century begins with this question and answer:

*Q: What is the chief end of man?*

*A: To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

Those who crafted this document agree with many who have lived before and after them. They acknowledged that man exists to display God's character and to know and enjoy Him.

In Genesis 1-2, we can see this purpose and how we are to live it out.

## Read Genesis 1:26-31

Verses 26-31 of chapter one tell us what happened on the sixth day. God made man in His own image. In chapter 2 verses 4-25, God reveals how He made man.

*Into how many distinct parts does God create humanity, and what are they?*

God created mankind to fill the earth with His image by being like Him in this world. Both male and female possess full humanity while also being distinct and different from each other. As the Father, Son and Spirit exist in loving relationship consisting of equal yet distinct members, so mankind was created to enjoy the same.

*What instructions does God give humanity? (Gen. 1:28)*

The relationship to be known by the first man and woman was not meant to be confined to the two. Like the love that existed between the three persons of the Trinity overflowed and spread outward, so the fellowship of Adam and Eve was meant to grow. Their love, by God's design, leads to the creation of children - additional participants in the joyful love.

*What did God do to them? (Gen. 1:28a)*

*What did God give them? (Gen. 1:29)*

God did not create humanity and set them on a planet far away and separated from Him.

Instead, God created mankind to share intimate fellowship with Him. He blessed them. He prepared creation for them. He fixed up a home - the Garden of Eden - for them to occupy. Everything they have and everything they are came from God.

Just as you might experience the loving friendship of a close friend as he speaks to you and serves you and extends to you good gifts, so mankind was created to know and experience and enjoy God by hearing Him speak and by receiving from Him such glorious gifts found all throughout creation.

*What are men and women suppose to do with creation? (Gen. 1:28b-29)*

To subdue creation means to master it. To use it and control it. When man subdues creation, he uses all God has made for his good. God charged mankind to take all the resources He created and cultivate them for maximum benefit. As they explore and discover the vastness of creation, they will see and know God.

They will behold His wisdom, see His power, and experience His loving goodness. Together male and female will share the joy of loving fellowship with God, each-other, and all their offspring. For this we have been created, to fill the earth with God's glory while enjoying fellowship with Him and others.

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## STOP AND THINK

*Had you ever heard that your purpose in life is to represent God on earth while enjoying His fellowship?  
Y / N*

*List some of the ways you regularly reflect God's character / nature?*

*List some of the ways you most often do not act, feel, or think in a way that represents God's character well?*

*Which statement currently describes your experience?*

- A. I know great joy in God!*
- B. My joy in God is running low.*
- C. It has been a long time since I have experienced joy in God.*
- D. I am not sure if I have even found any joy in God.*

*Do you find any characteristic of God difficult to find pleasing? If so, which one(s)?*

*Have you ever tried to know and enjoy God in the past?  
Y / N*

*If yes, how did you try? What did you do? If no, why not?*

## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, thank You for creating me. Thank You for this wonderful world You have made and gifted to us. Thank You for the many opportunities we have to SEE and experience your wisdom, power, and love. Thank You for community - the ability to share fellowship with you and others. Thank You for assigning us such a high, glorious, and good purpose.*

*I confess, I fail more often than I succeed at reflecting Your character in this world. It is Your nature to share and include others. It is my tendency to shun and exclude. You rejoice in diversity while I fear diversity. While my heart finds pleasure in so many things, I so often am unmoved to joy by You. Even when I hear of Your good love and see Your glorious creation, my heart is unaffected. It fails to delight in You.*

*Forgive me. Teach me Your ways. Train me in godliness. Make me look like You in this world. Give my heart the ability to know and enjoy You. Fill my heart with Your love. Let me know true community with You and those You have put around me. Fill me with Your love so that it may overflow into the lives of others.*  
*Amen.*

# HAPPY PARTICIPANTS

In infinite love and joy, the Father, Son, and Spirit created all things including mankind. God made women and men unique; unlike the cattle and the forest, God made them capable of both displaying His beauty and enjoying it. God made Adam and Eve in such a way they could be enjoyed by God as they bear his image and that they could enjoy Him as His glory is made visible through them and the created world. In short, God created man so that they might be participants in the eternal love and joy of the Trinity.

## Defining the Relationship

Although God invites us to participate in the glory and love of God, men and women must remember that they are not God. They are not equal to God. Like children who participate in, benefit from, and rejoice in the love and joy shared by their mother and father but are not a third part of the marriage, men and women although they participate and benefit they are not part of the Trinity. Instead, they stand in relationship with the Trinity.

In the Creation account of Genesis 2 we see several defining features of the relationship. If mankind will glorify and enjoy, if they will participate in the Trinity's joyful, loving fellowship, these characteristics must define that relationship.

## Read Genesis 2:4-14

*When did God create man? (Gen. 2:5-7)*

*How did God make man? (Gen. 2: 7)*

*Where did God place Adam? (Gen. 2: 8)*

*How were Adam and Eve fed? (Gen. 2: 9)*

Immediately, we see that man depends on God. God is the Creator; man is the creature. God is independent; man is dependent. From God comes man's life, breath, food and possessions. If man participates in this fellowship he must do so as a recipient. He relies upon God. God does not rely upon him.

## Read Genesis 2:15-17

*Why did God put man in the garden? (Gen. 2:15)*

*What instruction did they receive? (Gen. 2:16)*

*What would happen if they disobey? (Gen. 2:17)*

Next we see that man lives under God's authority. Man does not have the freedom to do anything he wishes. From the very beginning God establishes His authority. He claims the right to tell His creatures what to do and the right to hold them responsible if they disobey. Those who live under His authority will continue in His love and life while those who disobey will be expelled from His fellowship in death.

## Read Genesis 2:18-25

*What did God find displeasing? (Gen. 2:18)*

*What was God's solution to fix the issue? (Gen. 2:18, 21-22)*

Finally, we see that **man must and can trust God**. Being dependent on and under the authority of someone can be frightening unless the one in authority can be trusted. Man's trust of another hangs on two pegs which support it.

Let us call the first peg goodwill. Does the one we must trust truly desire our good? Or, is he more interested in his own well being? God proves His good-will toward men as he identifies something not good for them and then moves quickly to fix it.

We will call the second peg wisdom. No matter how well intended one might be, a fool cannot be trusted. I am fully convinced that my eight year old daughter loves me. I know she would never purposefully do me harm. However, my wife and I do not entrust our money to her. Why? Because although she may desire what is best for us, we do not trust she possesses wisdom.

Thankfully God not only desired something good for Adam, but he had the wisdom to give him exactly what he needed. Adam's joyful song of delight (Gen. 2:23) demonstrates just how happy Adam was. His wife was awesome! She was a sign of God's favor toward Him, and she was proof that moving forward, Adam and Eve could trust God to lovingly and wisely lead and care for them.

God made men to participate in His glory and love. But, if man will enjoy the glory for which God created him, he must remember that on God he depends. Under God's authority he lives. In God's goodness and wisdom he must trust.

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## STOP AND THINK

*Has God ever met a need that you had no ability to meet on your own? Y / N*

*If so, briefly describe what and how He provided.*

*Try to list 5 things you depend upon God for every single day.*

*What do you think it means to live under God's authority?*

*Which of God's commands do you disobey most often? Why do you think those commands are so challenging for you?*

*What evidence of God's love and wisdom do you see in your own life?*

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## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, You are good and loving and wise. You are trustworthy! Thank You for all the times You have proven Your love toward me. Thank you most for the cross of Jesus in which I see that Your love was so great You did not even spare His life. On You I depend. Under Your authority I live. This is good for You lovingly and wisely care for me. All Praise belongs to You!*

*I confess that I sometimes struggle to trust You. This is foolish and sinful but true. I like to be my own master. I doubt Your goodness especially when You instruct me against my desires. I doubt Your wisdom when Your commands do not make sense in my mind.*

*Forgive my proud and arrogant rebellion. Convince my heart of Your trustworthiness. I long to dwell in Your presence and to remain in Your love. Teach me to depend on You and no one else. Give me a heart and mind that submit to Your good law. Be merciful and gracious to me.  
Amen.*



**REOCCURRING  
QUESTIONS**

- 1. Have you given in to anxiety, fear or addiction this week? What does this say about who you're trusting in besides God? What truth or promise of the gospel do you need to hear and believe to trust in God again?
- 2. Have you wasted any time this week?
- 3. How have you been resistant to God this week: in your mission to the lost? In your sacrificial love for community?
- 4. In light of God's love for you, are there any broken relationships in which you need to seek reconciliation?
- 5. How have you battled sexual or intimacy temptation and how are you preparing to deal with it next week?
- 6. In what areas of your life have you been spiritually tested this week? Did you trust God in those moments, or did you respond with complaints?
- 7. Have you isolated yourself from important relationships? What is causing this?
- 8. Were you able to spend time in God's word and prayer this week? What did God teach you? Did you obey it?

**CELL GROUP  
CONVERSATIONS**

**SUMMARIZE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED FROM THE SCRIPTURES THIS WEEK.**

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**WHAT HAS STOOD OUT TO YOU ABOUT GOD? WHY?**

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**DID YOU ENCOUNTER ANYTHING YOU STRUGGLE TO BELIEVE OR ACCEPT AS TRUE? WHY?**

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**WERE YOU CHALLENGED TO THINK, ACT, OR FEEL DIFFERENTLY ABOUT SOMETHING? IF SO, HOW SO?**

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# WEEK THREE



## WHAT WENT WRONG

### **Devotion #1**

Sin and Death's Entrance

### **Devotion #2**

Sin's Lasting Effects

### **Devotion #3**

God's Response

# SIN AND DEATH ENTER

Genesis 1-2 paints a magnificent picture of the world. Man and woman walking together with God in the garden of paradise full of joy and love. Humanity has a magnificent beginning.

Unfortunately, the human experience we read about on the first pages of Scripture does not match our reality. Each life has been touched by pain, hardship, suffering and death. We read about dictators, hurricanes, abuse, cancer, viruses, and murder. The love, joy, and unity of Eden seems so far fetched from this world of hostility, sorrow and division.

Why do we live in this kind of world? If Eden did exist, what happened. Thankfully, Scripture again provides the answers to our deepest questions.

## Men and Women Fall

Like an earthquake that devastates a vibrant city leaving its magnificent buildings and streets in a heap of dusty rubble, so the events of Genesis 3 have a devastating and lasting effect on humanity and creation.

## Read Genesis 3:1-7

In one of the last books of the Bible ever written, the apostle Paul identifies exactly what occurred in our text:

*"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned."*  
-Romans 5:12 (CSB):

The difference between our present world and the Garden of Eden is sin and death. They entered in Genesis 3 and they remain today.

An examination of sin's entrance will help us see ourselves and our world much more dearly.

*Which new character enters the scene? (Gen. 3:17)*

*Who do you think the serpent is? (see Rev. 12:9; 20:12)*

*How is the serpent described? (Gen. 3:1)*

The serpent, Satan, enters the garden, but he seeks not to participate in the fellowship of love and joy enjoyed by humanity and God. Instead, he seeks to disrupt and break down the relationship. His work is not haphazard and uncalculated but thought-out and well-designed.

*What did Satan ask Eve? (Gen. 3:2)*

*How did Eve respond? (Gen. 3:3)*

*How does Satan respond to Eve? (Gen. 3:4)*

Satan's crafty plan to disrupt man's fellowship with God begins by attacking God's Word. "You can't trust what God says," Satan asserted. "Things are not as He says they are. He is not who He says He is and the world is not as He defines it." He slithered up next to Eve and attempted to deceive her, to lead her away from the truth and into falsehood.

*What does Satan claim next? (Gen. 3:5)*

After calling God's Word into question, Satan continues his assault by calling into question God's character and love. Do you see Satan's craftiness? He says, "You can't trust God's Word because You can't trust His love. God doesn't love you. He has lied to you about the tree because He doesn't want you to be like Him.



God is keeping you from something good. He does not want what's best for you. He is concerned only about Himself!"

With the trustworthiness of God's Word and character in doubt Eve decided to trust her own judgment.

*What judgments does Eve make about the forbidden tree's fruit? (Gen. 3:6a)*

Rather than trusting her Creator, Eve trusted her own judgment. She saw what she wanted. She followed her desires, and in the end she

disobeyed. She rebelled. She decided that day to exchange the truth about God for a lie. She chose to serve the creation rather than the Creator.

*What did Eve do after eating the fruit? (Gen. 3:7)*

God created man to know and enjoy Him together. But, sadly Eve turned everything upside down. Together, she and Adam forsook the glory of God to seek joy and satisfaction in something else. Through deception, Satan drove a wedge between humanity and their Creator. There in the center of the Garden sin entered and its consequences remain devastating.

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## STOP AND THINK

*Which commands of God often challenge your desires requiring you to trust God's wisdom and love over your own judgment?*

*Consider our culture, which commands of God does our American culture despise and reject?*

*What desires, pleasures, or good things are those in the culture seeking by rejecting the commands you identified in the last question?*

*Why do you think it is so difficult to trust God when He warns, if you disobey you will find ruin and death?*

*Why do you think we are often skeptical of God's love and good will toward us?*

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## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, You are good even when I doubt it! Your commands are just and righteous. You are wise and loving and You will never deceive me for You cannot lie. Thank You for speaking to me. Thank You for directing me. Thank You for all the evidence that I can and should trust You regardless of how I think or feel in the moment.*

*I must confess that like Eve, I wrestle with Satan's lies. The truth is that Your instruction challenges what I see as good and desirable. Faithful obedience is hard and if I am honest, I find myself subtly distrusting. My heart thinks, "Maybe my way is better than Your way." I find my heart wondering, "If God really loves me, why have my attempts to do what is right led to so little pleasure, joy, and satisfaction?"*

*Help me! Deep down I know you are right. I know you are good and that as my Father you instruct me in what is best for me. Protect my heart from being deceived by Satan's lies. Open the eyes of my children, my neighbors, and even my enemies so that together we might walk joyfully in your commands.*

# SIN'S LASTING EFFECTS

Not too long ago, I disturbed the residence of some yellow jackets while blowing leaves along the edge of a wooded area. Suddenly, I felt a sharp sting right on the tip of my nose. Within seconds a similar yet more severe pain occurred on the inside of the pointer finger of my right hand, and as I swiped at the little creature, a third painful sting sent alarm to my brain from my left wrist. My body had been invaded, and poison had entered. The intrusion caused several obvious and unpleasant effects - inflammation, redness, throbbing pain, and blistering.

In a similar way sin intruded the paradise created by God and enjoyed by man. The effects of sin were instant and they remain to this day.

## Guilt, Shame, and Fear

We can see several of sin's effects in the words and actions of Adam and Eve immediately after their rebellion.

## Read Genesis 3:7-13

*What happened to Adam and Eve after they ate the fruit? (Gen. 3:7a)*

*What did they see that they did not know beforehand? (Gen. 3:7b)*

*What did Adam and Eve do to fix their nakedness? (Gen. 3:7c)*

You might remember that Adam and Eve lived together naked and unashamed (Gen. 2:25). Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect unity and love. They fully knew each other. It was unreserved love and fellowship.

However, as soon as sin enters we see the opposite. Both cover themselves. For the first time they experienced the impulse to hide, to retreat, to hold part of themselves back from the other. Sin leaves man ashamed, and shame drives men into isolation and shallow relationships. Adam and Eve had known the joy of complete oneness, but through sin they fell into a broken and distrustful relationship.

*What did Adam and Eve do when they heard the LORD walking in the garden? (Gen. 3:8-10)*

Shame and fear not only pull Adam and Eve apart, it also sent them hiding from their Maker.

God loved them. They had known Him intimately. They Knew His goodness and His glory. They were naked before Him day after day without fear. But, sin destroys this intimacy.

With sin comes guilt, and with guilt comes fear of judgment, rejection, and justice. For the first time, Adam and Eve know sin. They knew the crushing weight of guilt, and in response they fled. Rather than attempting to return to the glory they had known, fear drove them away from God's fellowship.

*How did Adam respond when God asked if he had eaten of the tree? (Gen. 3:12)*

Just a handful of verses earlier Adam and Eve enjoyed the love and joy and oneness every husband and wife has desired and worked for since. Sadly, we see that not only has sin separated them but it has also turned them against each other. Adam, trembling in fear stands ready in a moment to let Eve take the fall. "God," Adam says, "Don't be angry with me. It is her! She is the one. If not for her, everything would still be fine!"

Sin left Adam thinking only about himself. Adam's Shifting blame, excusing his own sin, and

abandoning his bride all appear as pitiful attempts to self-preserve. Sin set men at war with each other. Through sin man fell out of the joyful unity and oneness known within the Trinity and enjoyed by our first parents into rivalry, division, and hostility. As a result, we experience such contention in our own families, among the religious, and between different ethnic groups.

Although he often does not realize it, man desires a return to the garden of Eden in all its glory. But, since the sin of Adam and Eve they know painful, broken, and shallow relationships. Each relationship carries the scars that arise from and contribute to shame, fear, guilt, and selfishness.

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## STOP AND THINK

*The Oxford Dictionary defines shame as "a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior." Can you remember a time from your childhood when you felt shame? Y / N*

*If so, briefly explain what you did and why it led to shame.*

*What currently (or recently) causes you shame?*

*How do you tend to hide your shame?*

*How has shame affected your relationship with your parents? Spouse? Close friends?*

*How might knowing that shame, guilt, and fear drive men and women away from each other into isolation affect the way you go about pursuing joyful, loving relationships with others?*

## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, You are good and loving and glorious. You never lie. You are trustworthy. Thank You for making us in Your image - capable of know love and joyful relationship.*

*I confess like Adam and Eve, I am a sinner. I am guilty. My heart carries a weight of shame and guilt. Fear affects my relationship with You and others. I try to hide all that is wrong with me while putting forward into the public view all that I think is good in me. My relationships suffer under my constant concern for my own-well being. I say I want close friends, but I am unwilling to let others close enough to see and know the parts of me I keep covered and buried.*

*Will you help me? I long to know others and to be known by them. I long for deep, meaningful fellowship, the kind You created me for. Will you do what I cannot and remove the crushing weight of my guilt? Please bring relief from the sin I carry. Let me know the security and the forgiveness You offer through Jesus and His cross. Reconcile me to Yourself and then to those around me. Do all for Your glory!  
Amen!*

# GOD'S RESPONSE

Something terrifying occurs as you wait in your guilt for the one with authority to judge and sentence. While you wait, you realize that your fate rests in another's hand, the hand you have wronged, offended and against which you have rebelled. Your guilt is plain. One question remains, how will the authority respond?

## "The LORD Said..."

Adam and Eve's sin introduced guilt, shame, and fear that drove them away from God and from each other. First they hid themselves from each other and then from God. Like children, our first couple crouched behind a few bushes dreading God's response. Their lives rested in His hand. What would he do? How would He respond? We see His response in the last section of Genesis 3.

## Read Genesis 3:14-24

*What three consequences does God say will happen to the serpent? (Gen 3:14-15)*

God's initial response offers a ray of hope to Adam and Eve who sat nearby waiting for their turn to stand before God. As they awaited judgment, they heard God speak a word of promise and victory.

Satan will pay for his deceiving act. He will first move along on his belly in dust, a clear sign of humiliation and cursedness (see Is. 65:25; Mc. 7:17). Then he will engage in a long and painful struggle in which he will only know defeat. He and his offspring will wage war against the woman and her child, but the woman's child will crush him. The day will come when Satan, the serpent will suffer the final blow in defeat, and it will come from one of Eve's children.

Certainly the hope seen in God's words to Satan stands behind a cloud of mystery. More

questions than answers probably filled Eve's heart and mind, but one thing became clear, God was not done with Adam and Eve. They would have a future. They would have children. And, ultimately they would know victory.

*What two consequences did Eve receive from God? (Gen. 3:16)*

Eve will experience the painful consequences of her sin in her home. First, her role as mother will be a painful one. The pain will begin in the 9 months of carrying and delivering each child, and it will continue as she trains, educates, feeds, clothes, and disciplines. Motherhood will be a struggle and a test of endurance.

She also will know conflict with her husband. She will constantly fight a desire to rise up and rule her husband - to flip the order of creation upside down and usurp the role and responsibility given to him. Her attempts to dominate him will be met by his unloving rule over her.

*What consequences did God give to Adam because of his disobedience? (Gen. 3:17-19)*

God had given Adam dominion over creation, but, because of his sin, God cursed the ground making labor difficult. Like Adam rebelled against His authority, so now creation will rebel against Adam. He will have to sweat and suffer. Eventually creation will win over him, and he will return to dust.

*What did God do after speaking to Adam? (Gen. 3:21)*

Amazingly, God followed his judgments with an act of great love and care. He provided for them clothes to cover their nakedness. In a not so subtle way, God dealt with their shame, guilt, and fear. He did not leave them trembling behind the bushes. Instead he brings them back out into the open and meets their need.

If the promise in verse 15 did not sufficiently convince Adam and Eve that God was not done yet, this act of clothing certainly did. One day God would provide a son from Eve who would bring ultimate victory, and until then God would continue to provide for and care for them.

Adam and Eve's sin led to great consequences. They found themselves broken in a cursed world. Thankfully, God's response possessed both justice and mercy. Yes, He condemned them to die, and yes, He drove them out of the garden. But, He would go with them. His work would continue even outside the garden.

God promised a Son, a Son who would rise up and conquer the serpent and sin and death. This promised son offered hope to Adam and Eve and to all their descendants that one day a return to Eden would come.

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## STOP AND THINK

*What pain or difficulties have you experienced either as a mother raising a child or as a child being raised by a mother?*

*What wounds have you suffered in relationship to the opposite sex?*

*What makes your work challenging and what makes you want to quit in frustration?*

*Despite the difficulty and pain, men and women still choose to work, to get married, and have children. Do you have a desire for these things? Y / N*

*Why or why not?*

## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, You are just and merciful. Like Adam, I am guilty of sinning against You, yet You continue to care for me. Thank You for loving me. Thank You for providing an answer to my guilt, shame, and fear. Thank You for the promise of victory through Your chosen son! In Him is salvation, and in Him I hope!*

*I confess, I often pervert Your created order. I use my authority to mistreat those under me. My marriage knows scars caused by my sinful attempts to rule over my wife to gain my own selfish ends. My relationship with my children suffer under my sometimes impatient and domineering control. Many times due to frustration, unforeseen obstacles, and increasing stress I neglect the work You have assigned me.*

*Help me. I need You to strengthen me today. I am struggling in this world with its pain and struggles. Fill me with hope in Your promise. Give me faith to trust You will do all You say. Let me see today's challenges and yesterday's wounds in light of the fact that victory is Yours. Those things are temporary and passing. Set my hope on the certainty that to Eden we will return!  
Amen.*



REOCCURRING  
QUESTIONS

- 1. Have you given in to anxiety, fear or addiction this week? What does this say about who you're trusting in besides God? What truth or promise of the gospel do you need to hear and believe to trust in God again?
- 2. Have you wasted any time this week?
- 3. How have you been resistant to God this week: in your mission to the lost? In your sacrificial love for community?
- 4. In light of God's love for you, are there any broken relationships in which you need to seek reconciliation?
- 5. How have you battled sexual or intimacy temptation and how are you preparing to deal with it next week?
- 6. In what areas of your life have you been spiritually tested this week? Did you trust God in those moments, or did you respond with complaints?
- 7. Have you isolated yourself from important relationships? What is causing this?
- 8. Were you able to spend time in God's word and prayer this week? What did God teach you? Did you obey it?

CELL GROUP  
CONVERSATIONS

SUMMARIZE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED FROM THE SCRIPTURES THIS WEEK.

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WERE YOU CHALLENGED TO THINK, ACT, OR FEEL DIFFERENTLY ABOUT SOMETHING? IF SO, HOW SO?

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# WEEK FOUR

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## WHAT HOPE DO WE HAVE?

### **Devotion #1**

Our Sins Are Forgiven

### **Devotion #2**

We Are Transformed

### **Devotion #3**

God's Response

# OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN

The Apostle Paul wrote of Jesus in his letter to the Ephesian Church:

*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, . . . (Ephesians 1:7)*

In the face of a world broken by sin and our overwhelming guilt before God because of that sin, the hope of forgiveness is good news.

Imagine, if someone were to call you tomorrow and offer to forgive all of your debts now and forever. Every credit card bill, student loan, car payment, mortgage, the 10 bucks for lunch you bummed off of your friend last week because you forgot your wallet, all of it forgiven. You were on the hook for repaying all of it but now don't have to pay back a dime. It's all been taken away, forgiven.

## Takes Away the Sins of the World

This is what Jesus did to our sin. When Jesus makes his first public appearance in the New Testament, John the Baptist says that he came for this very reason. He came to take away sin.

### Read John 1:29

*What sort of sins do you need to have taken away?*

*What does it mean to be forgiven?*

*All of us have needed to receive forgiveness and give it at different times. Describe a time when you were forgiven by someone you wronged?*

*Describe a time when you had to forgive someone who wronged you? What happened? Did it get resolved?*

In forgiving sinners, Jesus does more than just take away sin, he actually pays the debt for that sin. Jesus picks up our tab.

Maybe you've heard the saying "there is no such thing as a free lunch". Nothing is free, someone always pays. Anyone can offer to cancel your debts, but unless this person actually pays what you owe, you are not really forgiven. It takes someone with considerable resources and incredible generosity to cancel the debt that we owe to God.

Writing hundreds of years before Jesus, the prophet Isaiah wrote that Jesus was able to cover our debt in Isaiah 53:4-5.

### Read Isaiah 53:4-5

*What did Jesus pay for our transgressions and sins? (Is. 53:4-5)*

*What did the servant (Jesus) accomplish through his death? (Is. 53:4-5)*



More than taking the guilt of our sin away and more than paying that debt himself, Jesus also restores the relationship between the debtor and the one to whom the debt is owed.

Borrow ten bucks from your friend for lunch one too many times and pretty soon you will have one less friend to borrow from. Unpaid debts damage relationships. Multiply this damage by an infinite number and you will only begin to scratch the surface of the depth of insult even the smallest of sins is to a Holy God.

But, according to the Apostle Paul, God's relationship was restored to sinners through Jesus' payment.

*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, . . . Colossians 1:19-22*

Adam even once walked with God in the cool of the day according to Genesis 3:8. Can you imagine that? Walking with God, talking with your creator as if you were talking with your friend? Sin broke that relationship, but through Jesus' gift of forgiveness it can be restored. You can know and enjoy God once again.

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## STOP AND THINK

*Would you say that God has forgiven your sins? Y / N*

*What makes you think that God has forgiven your sins?*

*Scripture teaches that forgiveness of sins leads to restored fellowship with God. How has your relationship with God changed since you trusted the good news that God has forgiven you?*

*How might you enjoy a new relationship with God through:*

- *Bible Study & Prayer?*
- *Christian Community?*
- *Serving Others?*

*In what ways does Jesus forgiveness give you hope for your former and future sins?*

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## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, thank you for Jesus, whom you sent to take away my sin and the sins of all who believe. Thank you for washing away my sins so that I am no longer guilty in your sight .*

*I confess that oftentimes I fail to trust this great news that you have forgiven me. I carry around my guilt and shame needlessly for in Christ my sins are paid for. I also must admit that I fail to extend this good news to others. Instead, I judge them in their sin rather than announce the same news I have come to receive.*

*Give me faith to trust that you have cast my sins into the depths of the ocean.*

*Let me know the freedom and joy of one who has been forgiven much. Fill me with love and compassion for those who do not yet know your forgiveness, for those who suffer under the weight of guilt and shame. Give me and the church boldness to share your gospel with those around us.*

*Amen.*

# WE ARE BEING CHANGED

While Jesus offers to immediately forgive our sins by taking them away, paying our debt, and restoring our broken relationship with God, the hope that we have in the gospel is not all so immediate. Forgiven of sin, yes! Completely changed, well that is going to take some time.

## From One Degree of Glory to Another

One of the places in the bible to see this is in the example of the Church at Corinth. Corinth was a place known for immorality and paganism.

Although the apostle Paul preached the gospel there and started a church to whom he would later write the New Testament Letters, 1 and 2 Corinthians, the church at Corinth was a mess. When they were not busy fighting over who was the best preacher or suing one another, many were spending time at the pagan temples and visiting with the temple prostitutes.

When we learn about the church at Corinth's persisting sin we might ask, "Doesn't that mean their sins were forgiven? How can someone be forgiven of sins and continue to live that way?"

This makes Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 astounding.

## Read I Corinthians 1:4-9

*What did Paul claim would be true of the church at Corinth in the "day of the Lord Jesus"? (I Cor. 1:8)*

*Who did Paul say would keep them safe until then? (I Cor. 1:9)*

Were they forgiven? Paul says yes, their sins were paid for. But, Paul also understood that Jesus' forgiveness would not immediately make the Corinthians sinless. You see, part two of the hope we have in the gospel is that not only are we promised the immediate forgiveness of sins, but we are also promised that God will progressively change us into the kind of men and women he created us to be.

No follower of Jesus is perfect, at least not yet. But we are being made perfect.

## Read I Corinthians 3:16-18

Now don't get thrown off by the phrase, "with unveiled face." In the Old Testament, Moses the leader of God's people, would actually go before God, and God would speak to him. In Exodus 34, when Moses returned from speaking with God everyone was terrified at the sight of him. His face was shining. Being near God's presence had changed him, and God's glory was so bright upon Moses' face that Moses had to put on a veil.

Paul wants his readers to understand that through the forgiveness of sins that Jesus offers, all those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus can, like Moses with face uncovered, draw near to God and be changed. This is exactly what God is doing through the power of His Holy Spirit, He is making us shine.

*How does Paul say we are transformed? (I Cor. 3:17-18)*

As the Holy Spirit progressively exposes us to the glory of God in the Son of God, he is changing our lives from one degree of glory to another. He is making us like him once again. Sin distorted our ability to be God's image bearers, but through Jesus, God is making repairs.

God is using every moment of our lives to further his changing work. Your work, your family, your hobbies, your entire life has been redirected by making you like him.

However, while God is the decisive initiator and ultimate source of this progressive change in our lives, he has not left us without responsibility.

Like the Corinthians, we will never be, in this life, what God has planned for us to be in the next life. We are all works in progress. But that does not mean that we are free to live however we please. That's right, we share responsibility in the changing work of God in our lives.

As those who are being restored to the glory of God, our lives must look different than those who are still trapped in their sins. Free from sin's power over us and working with all the might that God's Spirit is working within us, we must fight to conform our lives to that which he says is good and right, and reject that which he says is evil and leads to death.

That's exactly what Paul was calling the Corinthians and every follower of Jesus to do. Through Christ, our sins are forgiven, but we are not perfect. . . at least, not yet.

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## STOP AND THINK

*Once we have been forgiven of our sins, do these passages seem to indicate that we are free to live however and do whatever we please? Why or why not?*

*Based upon your reading of the passages of above, what sinful habits must you trust the Spirit to give you power to overcome?*

*What good practices must you trust the Spirit to develop in you as you seek to look more and more like Jesus?*

## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, thank you for being patient with me. Thank you for the work you have already done to transform me into something much better. Thank you for your Spirit which continues to shape me and mold me. You are faithful and you will not quit until the work you started in me comes to completion.*

*I confess that too often I am reluctant to change. I am often comfortable in my sin.*

*Forgive me for resisting your transforming work in my life. continue to teach me. Place your love within me. Grow me to maturity. training me in righteousness. Give me a mind that thinks like you, a heart that loves like you, and hands and feet that act like you.*

Amen

# WE WILL BE TRANSFORMED

The gospel is all about God's glory, and God will be revealed as most glorious only when the entire creation is fully restored from the effects of sin and when his people have been fully restored to the lofty position of image bearers which they forfeited when the first humans welcomed sin into the world. God will not stop short of the complete eradication of sin and the cosmic reversal of its effects from his universe.

We will be transformed.

## Raised with Christ

With sins forgiven, the process of change through the power of the Holy Spirit is underway. The followers of Jesus, and the universe itself (creation) are waiting for the day when this transformation will be complete.

In fact, Paul writes in a letter to the church at Rome that the entire creation is groaning as it waits for this day.

## Romans 8:19-22

*What signs of the earths "groaning" have you seen lately?*

At the cross, Jesus delivered the death blow to sin and all of its destructive power in our world. All the brokenness that remains in the world is nothing more than the desperate throes of God's defeated enemy awaiting its final destiny. But for now the creation must wait for its freedom, according to Paul. Before the entire universe can be remade forever free from its bondage to sin, God must first transform his people.

The followers of Jesus in the Church at Corinth had questions about this final transformation.

The Corinthians could not understand how a physical body subject to disease, aging, and death could ever be raised from the dead and made to live forever, so Paul wrote to them in 1 Corinthians 15 to answer those questions.

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Here, Paul writes to remind them of the reliability of the gospel story.

*What does Paul say are the main truths of the gospel? (1 Cor. 15:3-8)*

Because Jesus rose from the dead and was seen in His by others in his body, believers can be confident that they too will also be raised after death.

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-34

*Try to list all the consequences Paul says would be true if Jesus was not in fact risen from the dead. (1 Cor. 15:12-19)*

*In what ways are Jesus and his work different from Adam's? (1 Cor. 15:22-23)*

Through Adam came sin and death, but through Christ comes victory over death and resurrection to life.

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-54

Between verses 42-54 Paul contrasts our earthly bodies with our future resurrection bodies.

*Try to identify and list the differences between our current bodies and the bodies believers will have after they are raised from the dead. (1 Cor. 15:42-54)*

Just as Christ was raised so too will all those who trust him for the forgiveness of sins be raised

on the last day. What was once broken by sin and subjected to death will on this day be raised forever free from sin and never to face death again. Then the groaning creation will fall silent as it too is transformed from its brokenness. All things will be made new.

*54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

*55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"*

Clothed in immortality, free of the enemies of sin and death, God and his people will live forever in a world completely transformed by the power of the gospel. Jesus will be their Savior and King, and together we will rule and reign with him forever.

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## STOP AND THINK

*Do you believe that one day you will be raised from the dead? Y / N*

*What makes the truth that you will be raised from the dead hard to believe?*

*On a scale of 0-10, rank how much this belief impacts your daily living. (1 being not at all and 10 being everything I do every day.)*

*What differences would you expect to see in the actions and attitudes of a believer who knows he will live after death verses a person who does not believe?*

## RESPONDING IN PRAYER

*Father, thank you for the gospel - the good news that Jesus has undone what Adam did. Through him came death, but through Jesus comes victory over death! Thank you for the glorious promise that after death I too will rise again to new life. Your power and might are great, and over sin and death you have brought a great victory!*

*Forgive me for often ignoring this truth. I admit I struggle to believe what you say. I lack faith and confidence. So many days I live as if there is no hope beyond the grave*

*Give me faith to trust what you have said. Transform the way I live and feel today by this awesome truth: I will rise from the dead one day just as Christ did!*

*Amen!*



REOCCURRING  
QUESTIONS

- 1. Have you given in to anxiety, fear or addiction this week? What does this say about who you're trusting in besides God? What truth or promise of the gospel do you need to hear and believe to trust in God again?
- 2. Have you wasted any time this week?
- 3. How have you been resistant to God this week: in your mission to the lost? In your sacrificial love for community?
- 4. In light of God's love for you, are there any broken relationships in which you need to seek reconciliation?
- 5. How have you battled sexual or intimacy temptation and how are you preparing to deal with it next week?
- 6. In what areas of your life have you been spiritually tested this week? Did you trust God in those moments, or did you respond with complaints?
- 7. Have you isolated yourself from important relationships? What is causing this?
- 8. Were you able to spend time in God's word and prayer this week? What did God teach you? Did you obey it?

CELL GROUP  
CONVERSATIONS

SUMMARIZE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED FROM THE SCRIPTURES THIS WEEK.

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WHAT HAS STOOD OUT TO YOU ABOUT GOD? WHY?

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DID YOU ENCOUNTER ANYTHING YOU STRUGGLE TO BELIEVE OR ACCEPT AS TRUE? WHY?

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WERE YOU CHALLENGED TO THINK, ACT, OR FEEL DIFFERENTLY ABOUT SOMETHING? IF SO, HOW SO?

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