

Sent: The Purpose of Discipleship

Session 1: Why We Go: The Great Commission

Session 2: How It Was Designed: God's Design

Session 3: Where It Went Wrong: The Brokenness

Session 4: What God Did: The Gospel

Session 5: Who Do We Share With: Our Mission Field

INTRO:

Evangelism.

It's a paradox within the church.

- Most Christians were saved through some form of evangelism, yet most Christians today don't evangelize.
- Evangelism is a Spiritual Gift (Eph 4:11), but it's also a calling on every believer (regardless of gifts).
- Salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44), but the Holy Spirit uses Christians to evangelize.
- Evangelism is vital to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), which most Christians fail to obey.

So why are we setting aside 5 weeks to focus on evangelism? Because there are lost people all around North Texas who desperately need the church to be the church: Christ's Ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20) with the good news of the gospel!

The goal of this study is help keep our Life Groups focused on the most important thing: the urgent calling of going and making disciples. In addition to breaking down core theology, we are including opportunities to practice sharing testimonies as well as sharing the gospel. We will challenge our groups to prioritize praying for the lost. We will encourage sharing (celebrating) stories of gospel presentations.

We don't want to just talk about evangelism, we want to do it. We want to model it. We want to equip and encourage the army of saints so that Christ is glorified wherever our feet may land. That lives and eternal destinies of people created in the image of God would be forever changed.

Thank you for joining us on this journey! We are praying expectantly for what God is going to do in and through our church – all for His glory!

Session 1: Why We Go: The Great Commission

Passage: Matthew 28:16-19 (NIV)

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Key Idea: The Mission of God:

Mark 16:15 (NIV)

¹⁵ He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

As disciples, we are sent out by God to go out into the world. This is the mission he has given us! That we get to share with others the story of how God saved us from our sins and invite them to have their own personal relationship with Jesus Christ as their savior and lord.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is the Great Commission considered the mission of God?
- How does understanding the Great Commission impact the way you think about sharing your faith?

Key Idea: To All People:

John 3:16 (NIV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

One of the best parts about the gospel is that it isn't just for those that "have it all together". Instead, it is for everyone! It doesn't matter how good or bad a person is, God so loved the world that every person is invited to into relationship with him through his son.

Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean that the gospel message is inclusive?
- What are some ways that you can show the inclusive nature of the gospel message in your personal life and interactions with others?

Key Idea: Through The Power of God:

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Our encouragement is that everything God has called us to do for him, he has given us the power to accomplish it through the Holy Spirit. We can serve him in confidence knowing that it is God himself working in and through us!

Discussion Questions:

- How do we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit in fulfilling the Great Commission?
- Can you share a moment when you felt the Holy Spirit’s power helping you share your faith?

Application Questions:

- Do your daily actions, expressions and words naturally invite people to Jesus or push them away? What can you change about yourself today to help shift toward living a lifestyle of invitation?
- Is your heart burdened for or bothered by the lost? (Be honest!) When was the last time you prayed for a greater zeal for evangelism? What percentage of your group’s typical prayer requests relate to the eternal status of lost family, friends, coworkers and neighbors? Spend time in prayer to conclude your group meeting.
- In what ways are you allowing fatigue or the busyness of life to keep you from personal evangelism? How can you be more intentional about taking advantage of the moment and opportunities in the everyday to share the gospel with others?

Commentary

The great commission: The disciples meet Jesus at Galilee.

Matthew 28:16-17

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

a. **The eleven disciples went away into Galilee:** Matthew doesn’t tell us about the Jerusalem appearances of Jesus to His disciples, as John does. Matthew was more interested in showing that the promise of Jesus in [Matthew 26:32](#) was fulfilled.

- **To the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them:** “The meeting place would be some familiar haunt...only imperfectly recorded in the Gospels.” (Bruce)

b. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him: This was not their first meeting with the risen Jesus; but it was an important one. At this meeting, they received their apostolic commission.

c. They worshiped Him; but some doubted: The natural reaction to encountering the risen Jesus is worship, even if some had to overcome uncertainty and hesitation – probably from feeling it was too good to be true, and lingering shame from having forsaken Jesus during His suffering.

- “When they recognized him, it was natural that *they worshipped him*, but the whole experience was so mysterious and overwhelming that *some doubted*...The verb *distazo* does not denote a settled unbelief, but a state of uncertainty and hesitation.” (France)
- “Dunn sees Matthew’s mention of this doubt as ‘a genuine historical echo’ – those who were there would never have forgotten the conflicting emotions and beliefs in that unique experience.” (France)
- The fact that some of the disciples doubted argues against the theory that their seeing Jesus was simply a hallucination born of a desperate desire to see Him.

Matthew 28:18-19:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...

a. All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth: This commission that follows is given in light of the authority of Jesus. This indicates that this is an authoritative command, not a suggestion. It is the same idea as if an officer reminded a private of his rank before he gave the order. Because He has this **authority**, He can send whomever He wills to do whatever He pleases.

- “‘All’ dominates Matthew 28:18-20 and ties these verses together: *all authority, all nations, all things, all the days.*” (Carson)
- “Power in the hands of some people is dangerous, but power in the hands of Christ is blessed. Oh, let him have all power! Let him do what he will with it, for he cannot will anything but that which is right, and just, and true, and good.” (Spurgeon)
- “We believe in this power, and we rest in it.” (Spurgeon)
 - *We do not seek any other power.*
 - *We defy every other power.*
 - *We know our powerlessness will not hinder the progress of His kingdom.*
 - *We give all our power unto Him.*
- “If Jesus Christ were not equal with the Father, could he have claimed this equality of power, without being guilty of impiety and blasphemy? Surely not; and does he not, in the fullest manner, assert his Godhead, and his equality with the Father, by claiming and possessing all the authority in heaven and earth?” (Clarke)

b. **Go therefore:** Because Jesus has this authority, we are **therefore** commanded to **go**. It is His authority that sends us, His authority that guides us, and His authority that empowers us. His work and message would continue to the world through His disciples.

- “These verses thus magnificently conclude the final section...but they also bring the whole Gospel to a dynamic conclusion, which is in fact more a beginning than an end.” (France)
- Jesus said, “**Go**” to some very imperfect disciples. “Who is to go out of that first band of disciples? It is Peter, the rash and the headstrong. It is John, who sometimes wishes to call fire from heaven to destroy men. It is Philip, with whom the Savior has been so long, and yet he has not known him. It is Thomas, who must put his finger into the print of the nails, or he will not believe him. Yet the Master says to them, ‘Go ye; all power is given unto me, therefore go ye. You are as good for my purpose as anybody else would be. There is no power in you, I know, but then all power is in me, therefore go ye.’” (Spurgeon)

c. **Make disciples of all the nations:** The command is to **make disciples**, not merely converts or supporters of a cause. The idea behind the word **disciples** is of scholars, learners, or students.

- **Make disciples** reminds us that disciples are *made*. **Disciples** are not spontaneously created at conversion; they are the product of a process involving other believers. This making of **disciples** is the power of spreading Christianity.

d. **Of all the nations:** In His previous ministry, Jesus deliberately restricted His work to the Jewish people (Matthew 15:24) and previously sent His disciples with the same restriction (Matthew 10:6). Only in rare exceptions did Jesus minister among the Gentiles (Matthew 15:21-28). Now all of that is in the past, and the disciples are commissioned to take the gospel to **all the nations**. There is no place on earth where the gospel of Jesus should not be preached and where disciples should not be made.

- “The aim of Jesus’ disciples, therefore, is to make disciples of all men everywhere, without distinction.” (Carson)
- “*Christ* commands them to go and baptize the nations: but how much time was past before such a journey was taken! And when the time was now come that this work should be begun, *Peter* doth not enter upon it without a previous admonition given him from heaven.” (Lightfoot, cited in Clarke)

e. **Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:** Significantly, when Jesus told them to go to **all the nations**, He did not tell them to *circumcise* those who became disciples. Instead, they were to baptize them, suggesting the break with traditional Judaism.

- “*In the name* is literally ‘*into the name*’, implying entrance into an allegiance.” (France)
- The words and context certainly indicate that it is **disciples** who are baptized, those of age who can be taught and who can observe the things Jesus commanded.
- Those who favor infant baptism answer, albeit unconvincingly: “But it doth not therefore follow, that children of such professors are not to be baptized, for the apostles were commanded to baptize *all nations*; children are a great part of any nation.” (Poole)
- **In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:** “The experience of God in these three Persons is the essential basis of discipleship. At the same time the singular noun *name* (not ‘names’) underlines the unity of the three Persons.” (France)

Mark 16:15 (NIV)

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

a. **Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.** This was a *command*, not a suggestion. “Interest in missions is not an elective in God’s university of grace. It is something in which every disciple is expected to major.” (Ironsides)

- The idea of a faith that should **go into all the world** wasn’t a part of the Jewish thinking in the days of Jesus. It wasn’t part of the pagan thinking either. It was a revolutionary idea in its time.
- This command was not obeyed immediately; for many years, the disciples stayed at Jerusalem, and it was only until the church was persecuted that it began to spread out to the world. But it did spread and continues to.
- “An army chaplain once said to the Duke of Wellington, ‘Do you think that it is of any use our taking the gospel to the hill tribes in India? Will they ever receive it?’ The duke replied, ‘What are your marching orders?’ That was the only answer he gave. Stern disciplinarian as that great soldier was, he only wanted marching orders, and he obeyed; and he meant that every soldier of the cross must obey the marching orders of Christ, his great Commander.” (Spurgeon)

John 3:16 (NIV)

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

a. **For God so loved the world:** John 3:16 has long been celebrated as a powerful, succinct, declaration of the gospel. Of the 31,102 verses in the Bible, it may be the most popular single verse used in evangelism.

- We learn the *object* of God’s love: **For God so loved the world**. God did not wait for the world to turn to Him before He loved the world. He loved and gave His only begotten Son to the world when it was *still* the **world!**
- What Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:7 (*You must be born again*) refuted the popular Jewish idea regarding the *way* to salvation. Now Jesus refuted the popular Jewish idea regarding the *scope* of salvation: **for God so loved the world**.
- The Jews of that day rarely thought that God **loved the world**. Many of them thought that God only loved *Israel*. The universal offer of salvation and life in Jesus was revolutionary.
- “The Jew was ready enough to think of God as loving Israel, but no passage appears to be cited in which any Jewish writer maintains that God loved the world. It is a distinctively Christian idea that God’s love is wide enough to embrace all mankind.” (Morris)
- Morrison suggested that there are three centers of love:

God so loved the world (John 3:16).

Christ also loved the church (Ephesians 5:25).

The Son of God, who loved me (Galatians 2:20).

b. **He gave His only begotten Son:** This describes both the *expression* and the *gift* of God’s love. God’s love didn’t just *feel* for the plight of a fallen world. God *did* something about it, and He **gave** the most precious thing to give: **His only begotten Son**.

- **He gave his only begotten Son:** “These words seem to carry a reference to the offering of Isaac; and Nicodemus in that case would at once be reminded by them of the love *there required*, the *substitution there made*, and the *prophecy there uttered to Abraham*.” (Alford)

c. **Whoever believes in Him:** This describes the *recipient* of God’s love. God loves the world, but the world does not receive or benefit from that love until it **believes in** Jesus, the gift that the Father gave. **Believes in** means much more than intellectual awareness or agreement. It means to *trust in*, to *rely on*, and to *cling to*.

d. **Should not perish:** This describes the *intention* of God’s love. God’s love *actually saves* man from eternal destruction. God looks at fallen humanity, does not want it to **perish**, and so in His love He extends the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.

e. **Everlasting life:** This describes the *duration* of God’s love. The love we receive among people may fade or turn, but God’s love will never change. He will never stop loving His people, even unto the furthest distance of eternity.

- We may say there are Seven Wonders in John 3:16.

<i>God</i>	The Almighty Authority
<i>So loved the world</i>	The Mightiest Motive
<i>That He gave His only begotten Son</i>	The Greatest Gift
<i>That whoever</i>	The Widest Welcome
<i>Believes in Him</i>	The Easiest Escape
<i>Should not perish</i>	The Divine Deliverance
<i>But have everlasting life</i>	The Priceless Possession

- “If there is one sentence more than another which sums up the message of the Fourth Gospel, it is this. The love of God is limitless; it embraces all mankind. No sacrifice was too great to bring its unmeasured intensity home to men and women: the best that God had to give, he gave – his only Son, his well-beloved.” (Bruce)

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

a. **But you shall receive power:** If the national kingdom they wanted would be delayed, the **power** they needed would not. They would soon receive power with the coming of the **Holy Spirit**.

- With their question about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, it is possible that the disciples still saw **power** too much in terms of Caesar's kind of power, and not enough in terms of God's kind of power.

b. **And you shall be witnesses to Me:** The natural result of receiving this promised power would be that they would become **witnesses** of Jesus, all over the earth.

- Notice that this really wasn't a command; it was a simple statement of fact: **When the Holy Spirit has come upon you... you shall be witnesses of Me**. The words **shall be** are in the indicative, not the imperative. Jesus didn't recommend that they become **witnesses**; He said they would **be witnesses**.
- If we want to **be witnesses**, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The best training program for evangelism is of little effectiveness without the filling of the Holy Spirit.
- Isaiah 43:10 has the Lord proclaiming to His people *You are My witnesses*. A cultic group today claims that this is their mandate for being "Jehovah's Witnesses." Unfortunately, they fail to see Isaiah 43:10 in the context of Acts 1:8; we are truly *Yahweh's Witnesses* when we are *Jesus' Witnesses*.

Session 2: How It Was Designed: God's Design

Passage: Genesis 1:1 (NIV)

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Key Idea: Creator of All Things:

Psalm 33:6 (NIV)

⁶By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

Everything that we can see, and everything we cannot see has all been created by God. This should move us to worship when we think about just how vast our God is in his power to create.

Discussion Questions:

- How does knowing that God is the creator of all things shape our understanding of the world around us?
- What are some specific ways this knowledge of God as the creator impacts your daily life and choices?

Key Idea: Forming Mankind:

Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV)

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along

the ground.”²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God has created you in his own image! Remember that this means you are created with a unique worth and value for no other reason that God made you in his image. This also means that every person you will ever meet is also made in his image and has that same dignity and value.

Discussion Questions:

- How does being created in God’s image affect our self-perception and relationships with others?
- Are there any specific changes you can make in your interactions with others to better reflect this understanding of their worth?

Key Idea: Designed for Life:

John 10:10 (NIV)

¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Despite what the world would try to say, our God wants you to have the best life possible, but the best life, or life to the full is by his design and standards and not by our own.

Discussion Questions:

- What does Jesus mean when he says he came to give us life to the full?
- In what areas of your life are you experiencing fullness, and where might you need to rely on Jesus more to experience that?

Application Questions:

- Do you really believe people are in danger without Jesus as their Savior? Who do you know in your circle of influence (family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, etc..) who is without Jesus? Will you commit to praying for them for the next 30 days as you look for an opportunity to share your testimony and do whatever it takes to share the gospel with them?
- In a sermon in 1873, the great preacher Charles Spurgeon proclaimed, “Every Christian here is either a missionary or an imposter!” Discuss what he meant by that and whether our views (and practices) of evangelism align with the Bible.

- Can you effectively share your testimony (spiritual journey) in a way that points someone to Jesus? Break your group up into smaller groups (if larger) and practice doing so now. Key components include:
 - Before Christ: how you were lost and without hope
 - Gospel Moment: how you came to the end of yourself and called upon the name of Jesus.
 - After Christ: what God has done in your life since you were saved.
 Every Christian has this testimony and can use it to share the gospel with someone else. Practice it until you can say it under 3 minutes so that you are able to share in normal daily interactions.

Commentary

How It Was Designed: God's Design

Genesis 1:1 (NIV)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

a. **God created:** This summary statement will be detailed in the following verses, but the Bible simply and straightforwardly declares the world did not create itself or come about by chance. It was created by God who, by definition, is eternal and has always been.

- "It is no accident that *God* is the subject of the first sentence of the Bible, for this word dominates the whole chapter and catches the eye at every point of the page: it is used some thirty-five times in as many verses of the story." (Kidner)
- If you believe Genesis 1:1, you really have no problem believing the rest of the Bible. The God big enough to have **created the heavens and the earth** is big enough to do all the rest the Bible says that He did and does.

b. **God:** This is the ancient Hebrew word *Elohim*. Grammatically it is a plural word used as if it were singular. The verbs and pronouns used with *Elohim* should be in the plural, but when *Elohim* refers to the LORD God the verbs and pronouns are in the singular.

- Adam Clarke quoted Rabbi Simeon ben Joachi, commenting on the word *Elohim*: "Come and see the mystery of the word Elohim; there are *three degrees*, and each degree by itself *alone*, and yet notwithstanding they are all *one*, and *joined together* in *one*, and are not divided from each other." Clarke adds: "He must be strangely prejudiced indeed who cannot see that the doctrine of a Trinity, and of a Trinity in unity, is expressed in the above words."
- Luther on *Elohim*: "But we have clear testimony that Moses aimed to indicate the Trinity or the three persons in the one divine nature" (cited in Leupold).

c. **God created the heavens:** The simple fact of God's creation is even more amazing when we consider the greatness of God's universe.

- A typical galaxy contains billions of individual stars; our galaxy alone (the Milky Way) contains 200 billion stars. Our galaxy is shaped like a giant spiral, rotating in space, with arms reaching

out like a pinwheel, and our sun is one star on one arm of the pinwheel. It would take 250 million years for the pinwheel to make one full rotation. But this is only our galaxy; there are many other galaxies with many other shapes, including spirals, spherical clusters, and flat pancakes. The average distance between one galaxy and another is about 20 million trillion miles. Our closest galaxy is the Andromeda Galaxy, about 12 million trillion miles away.

- For every patch of sky the size of the moon, if you could look very deep, you would see about a million galaxies.
- But God did all this Himself: *Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has stretched out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand up together (Isaiah 48:13).*
- But God is bigger and greater than all His creation: *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? (Isaiah 40:12).*

d. **God created the heavens and the earth:** If **God** created the heavens and the earth, then we must forever put away the idea that anything *happens* by chance. “Chance” merely describes the statistical probability of something happening. *Chance* itself can neither do or perform anything.

- Some intelligent people may fall into this delusion. Jacques Monod, a biochemist, wrote: “Chance *alone* is at the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere. Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution.”
- But assigning such power to *chance* doesn’t make sense. Chance has no power. For example, when a coin is flipped, the chance it will land heads is 50%; however, *chance* does not make it land heads. Whether or not it lands heads or tails is due to the strength with which the coin is flipped, the strength of air currents and air pressure as it flies through the air, where it is caught, and if it is flipped over once it is caught. *Chance* doesn’t *do* anything but describe a probability.
- Many years ago a scientist named Carl Sagan petitioned the U.S. government for a grant to fund the search for intelligent life in outer space. He hoped to find evidence of life by using a super-sensitive instrument to pick up radio signals from distant space. When he received those radio signals, he looked for *order* and *pattern*, which demonstrated the signals were transmitted by intelligent life. In the same way, the order and pattern of the whole universe demonstrate that it was fashioned by intelligent life, not by *chance*. Scientists detect chance in the radio signals constantly (in the form of static with no pattern), but it tells them *nothing*.
- Therefore, when someone says the universe or anything else came about by *chance*, one may say that despite their expertise or skill in other areas, when it comes to this subject they are ignorant, superstitious, or simply repeating a tired theory said and disproved before, yet unthinkingly accepted.

e. **God created:** Inherent in the idea of God is that He is an *intelligent designer*. Only an intelligent designer could create a just-right universe, not chance. Our universe is a just-right universe. According to Hugh Ross in his book *The Fingerprint of God*:

- The universe has a just-right gravitational force.

· *If it were larger*, the stars would be too hot and would burn up too quickly and too unevenly to support life.

· *If it were smaller*, the stars would remain so cool, nuclear fusion would never ignite, and there would be no heat and light.

- The universe has a just-right speed of light.

· *If it were larger*, stars would send out too much light.

· *If it were smaller*, stars would not send out enough light.

- The universe has a just-right average distance between the stars.

· *If it were larger*, the heavy element density would be too thin for rocky planets to form, and there would only be gaseous planets.

· *If it were smaller*, planetary orbits would become destabilized because of the gravitational pull from other stars.

- The universe has a just-right polarity of the water molecule.

· *If it were greater*, the heat of fusion and vaporization would be too great for life to exist.

· *If it were smaller*, the heat of fusion and vaporization would be too small for life's existence, liquid water would become too inferior a solvent for life chemistry to proceed, ice would not float, leading to a runaway freeze-up.

- We could conclude that there is *no chance* that such a universe could create itself, apart from an intelligent designer.

f. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth: This tells us that God used no pre-existing material to create the earth. The ancient Hebrew word *bara* (**created**) is specific. It means *to create out of nothing*, showing that God created the world out of nothing, not out of Himself. God is separate from His creation. Unlike Eastern and pantheistic perceptions of god, the Bible teaches the universe could perish yet He would remain.

- Men cannot *create* in the sense the term is used in [Genesis 1:1](#). We can only *fashion* or *form* things out of existing material. The closest we come to creating is in reproducing ourselves sexually. This is perhaps one reason why Satan wants to pervert and destroy God's plan and standard for sexuality; it is deeply connected to our being made in the image of God.
- Louis Ginzberg relayed a fascinating legend on how the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet all wanted to begin the Bible, but in the end, the letter "*bet*" was allowed, because he said, "O Lord of the world! May it be Thy will to create Thy world through me, seeing that all the dwellers of the world give praise daily unto Thee through me, as it is said, **Blessed** be the Lord forever. Amen, and Amen." For this reason (according to the legend), the Hebrew Book of Genesis begins, "**Bereshit** God created the heaven and the earth."

3. The Bible's clear teaching of God's creation and the uncertainty of modern science.

a. Some scientists often act certain in their knowledge about the origin of the universe, but their continually revolutionary discoveries prove they are, in some way, feeling their way along in the dark. *Honest* scientists, those who resist pride or arrogance, appreciate how little they do know, and hold their present discoveries with a sense of humility.

b. Some scientists may be overly sure when it comes to what can be known of the universe, but we do not have to accept such arrogance. The constantly changing scene of science is illustrated by a sidebar to a science article many years ago in the *Los Angeles Times* titled, "The Big Bang and What Followed It":

- In the beginning, there was light – but also quarks and electrons. The Big Bang spewed out energy that condensed into radiation and particles. The quarks joined into protons and careened wildly about in a hot, dense, glowing goop as opaque as a star.
- Time (300,000 years or so) passed. Space expanded. Matter cooled. The electrons and protons, electrically irresistible to each other, merged into neutral hydrogen, and from this marriage, the first atoms were born. Space between atoms became as transparent as crystal – pretty much the way it looks today.

The rest, as they say, is history. Atoms merged to form dust clouds, which grew into stars and galaxies and clusters. Stars used up their nuclear fuel, collapsed and exploded in recurring cycles, fusing elements in the process.

Occasionally, a stable planet condensed around a second-generation star, where carbon-based life forms grew into, among other things, cosmologists, the better to contemplate it all.

c. In 1913, an astronomer in Arizona discovered that stars appeared to be moving away from the earth at tremendous speeds, up to two million miles an hour. In 1919, another American astronomer named Edwin Hubble used this information to develop a theory of an expanding universe, which is the foundation of the “Big Bang” idea. Early on, other scientists discovered background radiation from all parts of the universe, which they suppose is the leftover “noise” from the first great explosion. But scientists are really not much closer at all to knowing anything about this instant beginning to the universe.

d. In fact, the more they find out, the more they discover how much they *don't* know. There was a time when astrophysicists were faced with another challenge: trying to figure out what “dark matter” is. Dark matter is a term some scientists use to explain an enormous apparent excess of gravity in the universe. Dark matter may make up 99.9% of everything in the universe, but no one knows what it is. Though suggestions are offered, they are only suggestions. David O. Caldwell of the University of California at Santa Barbara said, “When it comes to dark matter, the only thing that we are convinced of at the moment is that it’s there.” But actually, scientists cannot even agree on that! Michael S. Turner, an astrophysics professor at the University of Chicago, said: “It’s very humbling. The origin, composition, energy and mass of the most common matter in the entire universe is unknown.”

e. This uncertainty is shown in a March 6, 1995, front-page article in the *Los Angeles Times* headlined, “Rethinking Cosmic Questions”:

Ever since people first stood up amid the tall grasses and looked about the world in wonder, religion, mythology and science all have struggled to explain how the world came to be. But when it comes to creation stories, few can hold a candle to the tale cooked up by modern cosmologists.

Dialing back the cosmic clock about 15 billion years, they depict a time before time, a place before space existed. Out of nothing and nowhere, all the energy and matter in the universe exploded into existence in an event that came to be called... the Big Bang.

While masterfully spinning ideas out of faith and equations, cosmologists were pitifully short on data. They could not see or measure the phenomena they were trying to explain. “Twenty-five years ago, cosmology was very close to religion,” said physicist Roberto Peccei of UCLA.

Experimental cosmologist Chris Stubbs of the University of Washington, “You’ve got these things that are ridiculously far away and ridiculously faint, and... you’ve got to make sense out of it.”

“At times, I miss the old days when I could just work in my office and not worry that someone would disprove my theory in a few weeks,” said Rocky Kold of the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Illinois.

“Many of us who have worked in this field for decades still worry that the whole house of cards is going to collapse,” said Princeton cosmologist David Wilkinson.

Recent observations, for example, suggest that the universe is younger than its oldest stars – an enigma that has astronomers scrambling for explanations.

The biggest mystery, however, strikes even scientists as so astonishing as to be absurd: 99% of the universe, according to some estimates, is made of totally unfamiliar stuff. Commonly known as dark matter, it is actually mostly transparent; it neither shines nor casts a shadow. Whatever it is, it is not like us... According to some theories, it also is the glue that holds the universe together, and keeps it from expanding forever into endless space.

f. “The study of human origins seems to be a field in which each discovery raises the debate to a more sophisticated level of uncertainty.” (Christopher Stringer of the Natural Museum of London)

4. One may doubt the ability of many modern scientists to answer the question of origins. But that does not automatically give us confidence in the answer found in the Book of Genesis. Some believe that Genesis only records a creation myth, meant only to show the greatness of God in poetic grandeur. Though there are poetic elements to the account, we believe it was still written to record a historical reality. Other Scriptures, in their approach to Genesis 1, demonstrate this.

a. Psalm 136 connects the Genesis account of creation with the rest of Israel’s history in a seamless fabric. The creation account is not put in a category of historical fiction.

b. Jesus quoted Genesis as if it were a purely historical record (Matthew 19:4-6 and 23:35).

c. C.S. Lewis wrote that when he heard a Biblical scholar claim the Genesis creation account was a myth, he didn’t want to know about the man’s credentials as a Biblical scholar. He wanted to know how many myths the man had read. Myths were Lewis’ business as a literary scholar, and he could see the Biblical account of creation was unlike mythical accounts.

d. It is true that Genesis was not written primarily as a scientific document. But if God gave us a truly scientific, detailed account of creation, written in scientific language, there would be no one who could understand it and no end to the length of such an account. Even if it were written in simple, 20th-century scientific language, it would have made no sense to all previous generations and no sense to future generations either.

e. *It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter* (Proverbs 25:2). Scientific inquiry is the glory of man; yet it must all be done with utmost humility, realizing God *conceals* these matters for man to search out.

5. God did all this in the beginning, yet there was much before the beginning.

a. **In the beginning, God:** God Himself was before the beginning: *Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting* (Psalm 93:2). Some are troubled by the questions, “Where did God come from?” and “Who created God?” The answer is found in the definition of God – that God is the uncreated Being, eternal – without beginning or end.

- This is demonstrated in several passages of Scripture. *LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God* (Psalm 90:1-2).
- J. Edwin Orr used a memorable definition of God, which was thoroughly Biblical: *God is the only infinite, eternal, and unchangeable spirit, the perfect being in whom all things begin, and continue, and end.*

b. **In the beginning, God:** God was in three Persons before the beginning, and the Persons shared a relationship of love and fellowship: *“O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was...for You loved Me before the foundation of the world”* (John 17:5, 17:24).

c. **In the beginning, God:** Before the beginning, there was an *eternal purpose* in the heart of God (Ephesians 3:11) to *gather together in one all things in Christ* (Ephesians 1:10). God’s purpose was to “resolve” or “sum up” all things in Jesus as if Jesus Himself were the answer to a great and complex problem God wrote out on the “blackboard” of the universe.

d. **In the beginning, God:** Before the beginning, God had a specific plan to fulfill this eternal purpose, with many different aspects revealed to us:

- The mission of Jesus was foreordained before the foundation of the world: *He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you* (1 Peter 1:20).
- Eternal life was promised before time began: *in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began* (Titus 1:2).
- The mystery of the gospel (the cross) was foreordained before the ages: *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory* (1 Corinthians 2:7).
- The grace given unto us was given before the world began: *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began* (2 Timothy 1:9).
- Believers in Jesus Christ were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world: *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love* (Ephesians 1:4).

e. **In the beginning, God:** At some time before the beginning, God created the angels, because they witnessed the creation of the heavens and the earth (Job 38:7).

Session 3: Where It Went Wrong: The Brokenness

Passage: 1 John 1:8-10 (NIV)

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from

all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Key Idea: Believing Lies:

Colossians 2:8 (NIV)

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

The enemy is continually putting lies before us, in an attempt to deceive us to fall into sin and be disobedient from the plans and design God has for us. It is important for all Christians to remember that we should keep our focus on Christ!

Discussion Questions:

- What are some lies that you have believed or have seen others believe, leading to negative consequences in your life or their lives?
- How can you guard yourself against believing these lies in the future?

Key Idea: Temptation of the Eyes:

Genesis 3:6 (NIV)

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

One of the many dangers of sin is that to the human eye it can often look beneficial and even life-giving. As disciples of Jesus we must always be aware of the dangers of sin, even when it looks good or fun.

Discussion Questions:

- How can the temptation of the eyes lead you astray in your walk with Christ?
- What steps can you take to remain cautious and discerning about what may appear right but is ultimately sinful?

Key Idea: Consequences of Actions:

James 1:14-15 (NIV)

¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Every action we ever make, whether good or bad has consequences. Our sin results in consequences that lead to hurting someone, either someone else or even ourselves. Meaning the cost of sin always outweighs the temporary pleasures it tries to offer.

Discussion Questions:

- Why are consequences an important aspect to consider when discussing the brokenness caused by sin?
- How have you experienced or witnessed the consequences of sin in your own life or in the lives of others around you?

Application Questions:

- Has it ever occurred to you that God may want to use your trials to spread His gospel? What are you facing right now that might be a doorway for sharing your faith? Do you feel any resentment toward God for the suffering you have experienced in your life? Read 2 Cor 1:3-4 and consider how God has comforted you – and opened doors for you to do the same for others?
- Let's get straight to the point: If scripture commands us to share the gospel and we knowingly neglect to do so, there is a disconnect. ("If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." – James 4:17) What is the biggest obstacle for you to sharing the gospel? And what are you going to do about it? How can we, as a group, help each other to navigate these obstacles and act in obedience?
- We often find encouragement (and insight) from others' experience. Ask the group to share details about the last time they shared the gospel with someone. How long ago was it? What was that person's response? What did they learn from that experience?

Commentary

The presence of sin, the confession of sin and the cleansing from sin

1 John 1:8-10 (NIV)

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

a. **If we say we have no sin:** John has introduced the ideas of walking in the light and being cleansed from sin. But he did not for a moment believe that a Christian can become sinlessly perfect.

- To *think* this of ourselves is to **deceive ourselves**, and to *say* this of ourselves is to lie – **the truth is not in us**.

- “Our deceitful heart reveals an almost Satanic shrewdness in self-deception... If you say you have no sin you have achieved a fearful success, you have put out your own eyes, and perverted your own reason!” (Spurgeon)
- There are few people today who think they are sinlessly perfect, yet not many really think of themselves as *sinner*s. Many will say “I make mistakes” or “I’m not perfect” or “I’m only human,” but usually they say such things to *excuse* or *defend*. This is different from knowing and admitting “I am a sinner.”
- To say that **we have no sin** puts us in a dangerous place because God’s grace and mercy is extended to *sinner*s, not to “those who make mistakes” or “I’m only human” or “no one is perfect” people, but *sinner*s. We need to realize the victory and forgiveness that comes from saying, “I am a sinner – even a great sinner – but I have a Savior who cleanses me from all sin.”

b. If we confess our sins: Though sin is present, it need not remain a hindrance to our relationship with God – we may find complete cleansing (**from all unrighteousness**) as we confess our sins.

- To **confess** means, “to say the same as.” When we confess our sin, we are willing to say (and believe) the same thing about our sin that God says about it. Jesus’ story about the religious man and the sinner who prayed before God illustrated this; the Pharisee bragged about how righteous he was, while the sinner just said *God be merciful to me a sinner* ([Luke 18:10-14](#)). The one who confessed his sin was the one who agreed with God about how bad he was.
- **Confess** translates a verb in the present tense. The meaning is that we should *keep on confessing* our sin – instead of referring to a “once-for-all” confession of sin at our conversion.
- You don’t have to go to a confessional to confess your sin. When you are baptized, you are confessing your sin by saying you needed to be cleansed and reborn. When you receive communion, you confess your sin by saying you need the work of Jesus on the cross to take your sin away. But of course, we need to confess our sin in the most straightforward way: by admitting to God that what we have done is *sin*, and by asking for His divine forgiveness, based on what Jesus has done on the cross for us.
- Our sins are not forgiven *because* we confess. If this were the case – if forgiveness for a sin could only come where there was confession – then we would all be damned because it would be impossible for us to confess every sin we ever commit. We are forgiven because our punishment was put upon Jesus, we are cleansed by His blood.
- However, confession is still vital to maintain *relationship* with God, and this is the context John speaks from. As God convicts us of sin that is hindering our fellowship with Him, we must confess it and receive forgiveness and cleansing for our relationship with God to continue without hindrance.
- Confession must be *personal*. To say, “God, if we have made any mistakes, forgive us” isn’t confession, because it isn’t *convinced* (saying “if we made”), it isn’t *personal* (saying “if we made”), it isn’t *specific* (saying “if we made *any*”), and it isn’t *honest* (saying “mistakes”).

c. He is faithful and just to forgive us: Because of Jesus’ work, the righteousness of God is our *friend* – ensuring that we will be forgiven because Jesus paid the penalty of our sin. God is being **faithful and just** to forgive us in light of Jesus.

- “The text means just this – Treat God truthfully, and he will treat you truthfully. Make no pretensions before God, but lay bare your soul, let him see it as it is, and then he will be faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.” (Spurgeon)

- The promise of 1 John 1:9 shouldn't lead us *into* sin, saying "Hey, I'll go ahead and sin because God will forgive me." It should lead us *out of* sin, knowing that God could only be **faithful and just to forgive us our sins** because the wrath we deserved was poured out on the sin. Since each sin carries with it its own measure of wrath, so there is a sense in which each sin we commit added to the agony of Jesus on the cross.
- There is no *more sure* evidence that a person is out of fellowship with God than for someone to contemplate or commit sin with the idea, "I can just ask for forgiveness later." Since God is light and in Him is no darkness at all, we can be assured that the person who commits sin with this idea is not in fellowship with God.

d. **If we say that we have not sinned:** If we deny the presence of sin, we are self-deceived and are denying God's Word. Yet, though sin is always present, so is its remedy – so sin need never be a hindrance to our relationship with God.

- The idea that **His word is not in us** is related to the idea that Jesus is *the Word of life* (1 John 1:1); if we refuse to see sin in us, we show that Jesus is not in us.
- "No man was ever kept out of God's kingdom for his confessed badness; many are for their supposed goodness." (Trapp)

Key Idea: Believing Lies:

Colossians 2:8 (NIV)

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

A warning: Don't be cheated by philosophies and traditions.

a. **Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy:** The false teaching among the Colossians was marked by an emphasis on **philosophy and empty deceit**. Most of all, it was **according to the tradition of men**. It had the stamp of *man* on it, not *God*.

- Peake says the best sense of the phrase **cheat you** is actually, "lead you away as prey." It also had the ideas of robbing and plundering. "Their goods were the salvation they had received from Christ; and both the Gentile and Jewish teachers endeavored to deprive them of these, by perverting their minds, and leading them off from the truths of Christianity." (Clarke)
- This **philosophy** that threatened the Colossian Christians was a strange eclectic mix of early Gnosticism, Greek philosophy, local mystery religions, and Jewish mysticism. The philosophy threatening the Colossian Christians was so dangerous because it was not obviously sinful and licentious. It was high-sounding and seemed highly intelligent.
- Vincent on the word **philosophy**: "It had originally a good meaning, *the love of wisdom*, but is used by Paul in the sense of *vain speculation*, and with special reference to its being the name by which the false teachers at Colossae designated not only their speculative system, but also their practical system, so that it covered their ascetic practices no less than mysticism."
- There is significant debate among commentators as to the exact nature of the Colossian heresy. Some see it as predominately an expression of early Gnosticism with some Jewish mystical elements added; others see it as primarily Jewish mysticism with a few aspects of early Gnosticism. Whatever the exact origin or composition of this heresy, it seems clear that it had both elements.
- The connection to early Gnosticism is clear from the way Paul brings forth his points.

- Gnosticism taught that God (as a Perfect Spirit) could not come into direct contact with the material world. Paul took care to point out that Jesus is God, and He came *in the body of His flesh* (Colossians 1:19-22).
 - Gnosticism taught that since God could not have direct contact with the material world, that God Himself did not create the world, but He worked through lesser spirits or angels. Paul took care to show that Jesus was the creator of the world (Colossians 1:15-16).
 - Gnosticism (and some forms of Jewish mysticism) taught that God did not deal directly with man and the material world, but that He dealt with the world through a series of mediators. Paul took care to show that Jesus did the work of reconciliation Himself (Colossians 1:19-20).
 - Gnosticism (and some forms of Jewish mysticism) greatly esteemed these supposed mediators, and considered them angelic beings of a sort. Paul was careful to warn the Colossians that angels should not be worshipped (Colossians 2:18).
- The connection to Jewish mysticism is clear from the way Paul brings forth a few more points.
- Jewish influence on Christianity emphasized dietary laws. Paul took care to say that Christians were not under Jewish dietary laws (Colossians 2:16).
 - Jewish influence on Christianity emphasized the observance of particular days as an obligation. Paul took care to say that Christians were not under these obligations (Colossians 2:16).

b. **According to the tradition of men:** The Colossian heresy promoted itself as *traditional*. It could trace some or many of its ideas back to traditions among the Jews or the Greek philosophers or both. Paul here warned that **the tradition of men** has no equal authority to the word of God.

c. **According to the basic principles of the world:** The ancient Greek word translated **basic principles** is *stoicheia*. It is a word that can mean several different things based on their context, and Paul may have used such a broad word to cover a variety of meanings.

- “The noun *stoicheia* means primarily things placed side by side in a row; it is used of the letters of the alphabet, the ABCs, and then, since learning one’s ABCs is the first lesson in a literary education, it comes to mean ‘rudiments,’ ‘first principles’ (cf. Hebrews 5:12, as the ‘rudiments’ of the gospel).” (Bruce) Because of this association with fundamental elements, the word came to also refer to basic elements such as earth, water, air, and fire.
- Many ancient mystery religions thought of the world as a dangerous place, threatened by spirits or spiritual forces they called *elements* or *elemental forces* (such as Paul uses the word in Colossians 2:8 and Colossians 2:20). They thought one was protected from these dangerous spiritual forces by either worshipping them or by finding protection under a greater deity or spiritual power that was superior to these *elements*.
- Yet, one might say that Paul’s meaning here certainly *includes* an answer to early Gnostic ideas, but the meaning also goes beyond those specific ideas. “It has been frequently taken in this sense as the ABC of religious knowledge... the expression must apply to something both [Jews and pagans] had in common.” (Peake)
- Common to both Jews and pagans was the basic idea of *cause and effect* and in a sense it rules nature and the minds of men. We live under the idea that we get what we deserve; when we are good, we deserve to receive good; when we are bad, we deserve to receive bad. Paul warned the Colossians to not subject themselves to this grace-eliminating kind of thinking, and to consider themselves dead to it.

Adam and Eve both disobey God in their own way.

Genesis 3:6 (NIV)

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

a. **So when the woman saw:** Eve surrendered to this temptation in exactly the way John describes in 1 John 2:16. First, she gave in to the lust of the flesh (**saw that it was good for food**), then she gave in to the lust of the eyes (**pleasant to the eyes**), then she gave in to the pride of life (**desirable to make one wise**).

- Jesus was tempted in the same three-fold way: an appeal to the physical appetites, an appeal to covetous and emotional desires, and an appeal to pride (Matthew 4:1-11).

b. **The woman saw that the tree was good for food:** Eve's perceptions were partially true and partially false. The tree was *not* really **good for food**, though Eve was deceived into thinking it was so. The fruit probably was **pleasant to the eyes**, though that shouldn't mean much. And it was only true in Eve's *mind* that the tree was **desirable to make one wise**.

- We can see the precise truth of Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:14, that Eve was *deceived* when she sinned. In her mind, she thought she was doing something good for herself.

c. **She took of its fruit and ate:** Satan could tempt Eve, but she didn't have to take it. The taking was all her doing. Satan couldn't cram the fruit down her throat. Eve was responsible. She couldn't rightly say, "the devil made me do it."

- As with every temptation, God had made for Eve a *way of escape* (1 Corinthians 10:13). She could have simply run from Satan and the tree, but Eve didn't take God's way of escape.

d. **She also gave to her husband with her:** Not only did Eve sin, but also she became the agent of temptation for Adam. But when Adam ate, he was not deceived as Eve was. Adam sinned with his eyes wide open, in open rebellion against God.

- Therefore, it is Adam and not Eve who bears the responsibility for the fall of the human race and for the introduction of death into the created order (Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:22). Eve was tricked into sinning; Adam knew exactly what he was doing (1 Timothy 2:14).
- Many have speculated that Adam sinned because he didn't want Eve to be alone in the fall, and he ate of the fruit out of a romantic impulse. This may well be true, but it makes Adam's sin not one bit less rebellious. Rebellion against God is not "better" when motivated by a romantic impulse.
- "Take and eat" will one day become verbs of salvation, but only after Jesus had lived in the world of Adam's curse and surrendered to death.

Consequences of Actions: How temptation comes and works.

James 1:14-15 (NIV)

but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

a. **Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed:** God doesn't tempt us. Instead, temptation comes when we are **drawn away** by our own fleshly **desires** and **enticed** – with the world and the devil providing the enticement.

- **Drawn away:** "It is either a metaphor taken from a fish enticed by a bait, and drawn after it, or rather from a harlot drawing a young man out of the right way and alluring him with the bait of pleasure to commit folly with her." (Poole)
- Satan certainly tempts us, but the only reason temptation has a hook in us is because of our own fallen nature, which corrupts our God-given **desires**. We often give Satan too much credit for his tempting powers and fail to recognize that we are **drawn away by our own desires**. Some people practically beg Satan to tempt them.
- Some who like to emphasize the sovereignty of God say that God is responsible for all things. Yet God is never responsible for man's sin. In his commentary on this text, John Calvin himself wrote, "When Scripture ascribes blindness or hardness of heart to God, it does not assign to him the beginning of the blindness, nor does it make him the author of sin, so as to ascribe to him the blame." Calvin also wrote, "Scripture asserts that the reprobate are delivered up to depraved lusts; but is it because the Lord depraves or corrupts their hearts? By no means; for their hearts are subjected to depraved lusts, because they are already corrupt and vicious."

b. **When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin:** Springing forth from corrupt **desire** is **sin**. Springing forth from **sin** is **death**. This progression to death is an inevitable result that Satan always tries to hide from us, but we should never be deceived about.

- "James represents men's *lust* as a *harlot*, which entices their understanding and will into its impure embraces, and from that conjunction *conceives* sin. Sin, being *brought forth*, immediately acts, and is nourished by frequent repetition, until at length it gains such strength that in its turn it *begets* death. This is the true *genealogy* of sin and death." (Clarke)

Session 4: What God Did: The Gospel

Passage: Mark 10:45 (NIV)

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Key Idea: What Jesus is Worthy of:

Revelation 4:11 (NIV)

¹¹ "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

As we see in this passage, our God is the one that is worthy of all of our praise. This means that for us as Christians, everything we do in our lives should testify to the world that we believe Jesus is ultimate in our life.

Discussion Questions:

- How can we recognize Jesus' worth and prioritize him in our daily lives?
- What are some practical ways you can reflect Jesus' worth in your life in your interactions with others?

Key Idea: The Humility of Jesus:

Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus models the ultimate humility for us by coming to earth and living his earthly life. This should challenge us to consider how we too can live lives marked by Christian humility.

Discussion Questions:

- In what ways can we model Jesus' humility and serve others around us?
- Can you think of a time recently where you could have imitated Jesus' humility? How could you have served?

Key Idea: Jesus's Mission:

Luke 19:10 (NIV)

¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Jesus' mission is to find and rescue the lost. And the best part? He invites us to be a part of that mission! That as Christians we get to play a part in seeing God save those in our communities.

Discussion Questions:

- How can we participate in Jesus' mission of seeking and saving the lost?
- Who are some people in your life that you feel are lost? How can you actively share the gospel with them?

Application Questions:

- Sometimes we may find it easier to offer kindness or mercy to others without telling them about God's love. But unless those folks hear the Good News, the grave reality is that we are just making people more comfortable on their way to hell. (Note: This does not mean that we should never serve someone unless we can share the gospel. But it does challenge our priorities in light of eternity.) In what ways can you be intentional about assuring that we are prioritizing not only their physical needs, but also their spiritual needs as well?
- Do you consider yourself to be a disciple of Jesus? What does that look like in your everyday life? To be a disciple means that you are actively helping others discover what it means to know and follow God. How are you living that out? (And if not, what can you do to start this week?)
- If someone were you ask you today, "how does a person become saved", what would you say? Do you feel equipped to answer confidently? There are a number of great tools available (Evangelism Explosion, 4 Spiritual Laws, Way of the Master, Wordless Book, Gospel Bracelet, Romans Road, etc...), but one method we like to use is called 3 Circles. (Simple enough to draw on the back of a napkin.) Take time to walk your group through the 3 Circles training – and then invite them to take turns leading one another through it. (Here is a link to the North American Mission Board website where there are links to videos as well as the App for your phone with the presentation: <https://www.namb.net/evangelism/3circles/>)

Commentary

Session 4: What God Did: The Gospel

Mark 10:45 (NIV)

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

a. **Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve:** Real ministry is done for the benefit of those ministered to, not for the benefit of the minister. Many people are in the ministry for what they can receive (either materially or emotionally) from their people instead of for what they can give.

b. **And to give His life a ransom for many:** This is one of the great claims Jesus made about Himself and His ministry. He is the one who stands in the place of guilty sinners and offers Himself as a substitute for them.

- “The ransom metaphor sums up the purpose for which Jesus gave his life and defines the complete expression of his service. The prevailing notion behind the metaphor is that of deliverance by purchase, whether a prisoner of war, a slave, or a forfeited life is the object to be delivered. Because the idea of equivalence, or substitution, was proper to the concept of a ransom, it became an integral element in the vocabulary of redemption in the OT. It speaks of a liberation which connotes a servitude or an imprisonment from which man cannot free himself.” (Lane)

Key Idea: What Jesus is Worthy of

Revelation 4:11 (NIV)

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

a. If God was worthy of the **glory and honor and power**, then *He* should get the crown.

- There is also an allusion to a practice in the Roman Empire. The Emperor of Rome ruled over many lesser kings, and these kings were at times commanded to come before the Emperor and lay their crowns down before him in homage. Then he would give them back, as a demonstration that their crowns, their right to rule, their victory, came from him. “This is an allusion to the custom of prostrations in the east, and to the homage of petty kings acknowledging the supremacy of the emperor.” (Clarke)
- The **crowns** mentioned in Revelation 4:10 are the *stephanos crowns*, the crowns of *victory*, not royalty. These are the crowns of achievement that a winning athlete would receive at the ancient Olympian Games. The **twenty-four elders** – representing all the redeemed of God – threw every achievement reward they had back to God, because they knew and proclaimed that He was **worthy... to receive glory and honor and power**.
- “Our text says they *all* cast their crowns before the throne. There are no divided opinions in heaven, no sects and parties, no schisms there. They are all in perfect harmony and sweet accord. What one does, all do. They cast their crowns, without exception, before the throne. Let us begin to practice that unanimity here. As fellow Christians, let us get rid of everything that would divide us from each other, or separate us from our Lord. I do not read that there was a single elder who envied his brother’s crown, and said, ‘Ah, I wish I were such an one as he is, and had his crown.’ I do not read that one of them began to find fault with his brother’s crown, and said, ‘Ah, his jewels may be bright, but mine have a peculiar tint in them, and are of greater excellence.’ I do not read ought of dissension; they were all unanimous in casting their crowns at Jesus’ feet. They were all unanimous in glorifying God.” (Spurgeon)

b. **For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created:** The twenty-four elders worshipped God because of His creative power and glory. The fact that God is Creator gives Him all right and every claim over everything – even as a potter has all rights and claims over the clay (Romans 9:21).

- God’s right over us as Creator is a fact that can be accepted and enjoyed, or rejected, leading to frustration. There is tremendous value in our recognizing our “creatureliness” before God.
- “God’s power put forth in the creation and administration of the world is twice here mentioned; as that which can never be sufficiently admired and adored.” (Trapp)

- We confess a fondness for the King James Version translation of **Revelation 4:11**: *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.* The wonderful phrase *and for thy pleasure they are and were created* reminds us that we each exist to give glory and pleasure to God. Until we do that, we don't fulfill our created purpose.

c. Because they represent all the people of God, the worship, the crown, the robes, the heart of these twenty-four elders belongs to us also. "There is a throne in heaven that no one can occupy but you, and there is a crown in heaven that no other head can wear but yours, and there is a part in the eternal song that no voice can ever compass but yours, and there is a glory to God that would be wanting if you did not come to render it, and there is a part of infinite majesty and glory that would never be reflected unless you should be there to reflect it!" (Spurgeon)

- But it also means that we should plan ahead for that great day. "If you and I should walk into some great cathedral where they were singing, and ask to be allowed to sing in the choir, they would ask whether we had ever learnt the tune, and they would not let us join unless we had. Nor can we expect that untrained voices should be admitted into the choirs above. Now, dear brothers and sisters, have you learnt to cast your crowns at the Savior's feet already?" (Spurgeon)

Key Idea: The Humility of Jesus

Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

a. **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus:** Paul will, in wonderful detail, describe for us the **mind** of Jesus in the following verses. But here, before he describes the mind of Jesus, he tells us what we must *do* with the information.

- "Paul does not give all that is in the mind of Christ in these verses. He selects those qualities of our Lord which fit the needs of the Philippians at that moment... This lack of unity among the Philippian saints became the occasion for perhaps the greatest Christological passage in the New Testament that sounds the depths of the incarnation." (Wuest)

b. **Let this mind be in you:** It is all too easy for us to read the following description of Jesus and admire it from a distance. God wants us to be awed by it, but also to see it as something that we must enter into and imitate. **Let this mind** means that it is something that we have *choice* about.

- Remember also that this **mind** is something granted to us by God. 1 Corinthians 2:16 says that *we have the mind of Christ*. But **let this mind** shows us that it is also something we must *choose* to walk in. You have to **let** it be so.

a. **In the form of God:** This describes Jesus' pre-incarnate existence. We must remind ourselves that Jesus did not begin His existence in the manger at Bethlehem, but is eternal God.

b. **Being:** This is from the ancient Greek verb *huparchein*, which "describes that which a man is in his very essence and which cannot be changed. It describes that part of a man which, in any circumstances, remains the same." (Barclay)

- "Paul, by the use of the Greek word translated 'being,' informs his Greek readers that our Lord's possession of the divine essence did not cease to be a fact when He came to earth to assume human form... *This word alone is enough to refute the claim of Modernism that our Lord emptied Himself of His Deity when He became Man.*" (Wuest)

c. **Form:** This translates the ancient Greek word *morphe*. It "always signifies a form which truly and fully expresses the being which underlies it... the words mean 'the being on an equality with God.'" (Kennedy)

- "*Morphe* is the essential form which never alters; *schema* is the outward form which changes from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance." (Barclay)
- "'God' has a form, and 'Jesus Christ' exists in this form of God." (Lenski)
- Wuest explains that the ancient Greek word translated **form** is very difficult to translate. When we use the word **form**, we think of the *shape* of something; but the ancient Greek word had none of that idea. It is more the idea of a *mode* or an *essence*; it is the essential nature of God, without implying a physical shape or image. "Thus the Greek word for 'form' refers to that outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature."

a. **Did not consider it robbery:** The ancient Greek in this phrase has the idea of something being grasped or clung to. Jesus did not cling to the prerogatives or privileges of deity.

- Wuest defines the ancient Greek word translated **robbery** as, "A treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards."

b. **To be equal with God:** It wasn't that Jesus was trying to *achieve* equality with the Father. He *had it*, and chose not to cling to it. Jesus' divine nature was not something He had to seek for or acquire, but it was His already.

- Lightfoot wrote that it was not "a prize which must not slip from His grasp, a treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards." Jesus was willing to let go of some of the prerogatives of deity to become a man.

a. **But made Himself of no reputation:** The more common (and well-known) translation of this is that *He emptied Himself*. From the ancient Greek word *emptied* (*kenosis*) came the idea that Jesus' incarnation was essentially a self-emptying.

- We must carefully think about what Jesus *emptied* Himself of. Paul will tell us plainly in the following verses, but we must take care that we do not think that Jesus emptied Himself of His deity in any way.
- Some develop the *kenotic theory* of the incarnation to the point where they insist that Jesus divested Himself of many of the attributes of deity – such as omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and even suffered the elimination of His own divine self-consciousness. Yet Jesus did not (and *could* not) become "less God" in the incarnation. No deity was *subtracted* (though Jesus did renounce some of the privileges of deity); rather humanity was *added* to His nature.
- "During his humiliation, as God and equal with the Father, was no encroachment on the Divine prerogative; for, as he had an *equality of nature*, he had an *equality of rights*." (Clarke)

- “His condescension was free, and unconstrained with the consent of his Father... the Son of the Highest can, at his own pleasure, show or eclipse his own glorious brightness, abate or let out his fullness, exalt or abase himself in respect of us.” (Poole)
- “Even as a king, by laying aside the tokens of his royalty, and putting on the habit of a merchant, when all the while he ceaseth not to be a king, or the highest in his own dominions.” (Poole)

b. Taking the form of a bondservant: This describes *how* Jesus emptied Himself. Though he took **the form of a bondservant**, Jesus did not empty Himself of His deity, or of any of His attributes, or of His equality with God. He emptied Himself *into* the form of a **bondservant**, not merely the form of a man.

- **Taking** (the ancient Greek word *labon*) does not imply an *exchange*, but an *addition*.

c. Coming in the likeness of men: This further describes how Jesus emptied Himself. We can think of someone who is a servant, but not in the **likeness of men**. Angels are servants, but not in the **likeness of men**. In fairy tales, Aladdin’s genie was a servant, but not in the **likeness of men**.

- The word for **likeness** here *may* refer to merely the outward form of something. While Jesus did have the outward form of humanity, the outward form reflected His true humanity, which was added to His deity.
- “It was a likeness, but a real likeness, no mere phantom humanity as the Docetic Gnostics held.” (Robertson)

a. He humbled Himself and became obedient: Jesus **humbled Himself** when He **became obedient**. This was something that Jesus could only experience by coming down from the throne of heaven and becoming a man. When God sits enthroned in heaven’s glory, there is no one He obeys. Jesus had to leave heaven’s glory and be **found in appearance as a man** in order to become **obedient**.

- One key to Jesus’ obedience on earth was the endurance of suffering. This again was something He could only learn by experience after the incarnation. As it is written: *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered* (Hebrews 5:8).
- Indeed, **He humbled Himself**.

· He was humble in that he took the form of a man, and not a more glorious creature like an angel.

· He was humble in that He was born into an obscure, oppressed place.

· He was humble in that He was born into poverty among a despised people.

· He was humble in that He was born as a child instead of appearing as a man.

· He was humble in submitting to the obedience appropriate to a child in a household.

· He was humble in learning and practicing a trade – and a humble trade of a builder.

· He was humble in the long wait until He launched out into public ministry.

· He was humble in the companions and disciples He chose.

· He was humble in the audience He appealed to and the way He taught.

· He was humble in the temptations He allowed and endured.

· He was humble in the weakness, hunger, thirst, and tiredness He endured.

- He was humble in His total obedience to His Heavenly Father.
- He was humble in His submission to the Holy Spirit.
- He was humble in choosing and submitting to the death of the cross.
- He was humble in the agony of His death.
- He was humble in the shame, mocking, and public humiliation of His death.
- He was humble in enduring the spiritual agony of His sacrifice on the cross.
 - We can imagine that it was possible for the Son of God to become man and pay for the sins of the world without this great humiliation. He might have added the humanity of a 33-year old man to his deity. He might have appeared before man only in His transfigured glory, and taught men what they needed to hear from Him. He might have suffered for the sins of man in a hidden place of the earth far from the eyes of man, or on the dark side of the moon for that matter. Yet He did not; **He humbled Himself**, and did it for the surpassing greatness of our salvation and His work for us.

b. To the point of death, even the death of the cross: This states the extent of Jesus' humility and obedience.

- Crucifixion was such a shameful death that it was not permitted for Roman citizens (such as the people of Philippi). A victim of crucifixion was considered by the Jews to be particularly cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:23 and Galatians 3:13).
- Robertson called the **death of the cross** "The bottom rung in the ladder from the Throne of God. Jesus came all the way down to the most despised death of all, a condemned criminal on the accursed cross."
- **Even the death of the cross** shows that there is no limit to what God will do to demonstrate His love and saving power to man; this was and forever will be the ultimate. "What must sin have been in the sight of God, when it required such abasement in Jesus Christ to make an atonement for it, and *undo* its influence and malignity!" (Clarke)
- "The lower he stoops to save us, the higher we ought to lift him in our adoring reverence. Blessed be his name, he stoops, and stoops, and stoops, and, when he reaches our level, and becomes man, he still stoops, and stoops, and stoops lower and deeper yet." (Spurgeon)

c. Even the death of the cross: All of this was a great display of the power of Jesus. Remember that because of Paul's past experience among the Philippians, they were tempted to think of God's *power* as being expressed only in exaltation and deliverance and not in terms of glorifying God through humble service and endurance.

- In this, Paul reminded the Philippians that his current place of humble circumstances (his Roman imprisonment) could still show forth the glory and power of God, even as Jesus did in His humility.

a. Therefore God has also highly exalted Him: This is the general heading for the material in the next three verses. These words describe how God has exalted Jesus. Indeed, **highly exalted** could also be translated "super exalted."

- "The Greek elegancy imports super exalted, or exalted with all exaltation." (Poole)

- “Now, just pause over this thought – that Christ did not crown himself, but that his Father crowned him; that he did not elevate himself to the throne of majesty, but that his Father lifted him there, and placed him on his throne.” (Spurgeon)

b. Given Him the name which is above every name: This goes beyond giving Jesus the Divine name Yahweh. When we consider the Hebrew concept of **the name**, it also implies that God declares that Jesus has a *character* and *person* above all.

- This verse, with its clear statement of Jesus’ deity, is powerful ammunition against those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ. There is no higher name than Yahweh, and Jesus has that **name**.

a. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow: Not only is Jesus exalted by the Father, but the whole world is brought into submission to the Son.

- “Paul does not imply by this a universal salvation, but means that every personal being will ultimately confess Christ’s lordship, either with joyful faith or with resentment and despair.” (Kent)

b. Those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth: This conveys the absolute totality of all creation recognizing the superiority of Jesus Christ.

- In this, Paul draws on the idea of Isaiah 45:23: *I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.* Notice that in Isaiah, it is to Yahweh that all knees bow and tongues confess. In Philippians it is to Jesus, showing that Jesus *is* Yahweh.
- **Those under the earth:** “Either the dead, who are hid in the earth, and shall be raised by the power of Christ... or, devils, and wicked souls.” (Poole)

c. Every knee should bow... every tongue should confess: The combination of **tongues confessing** and **knees bowing** gives evidence that the idea is a complete submission to Jesus, both in word and in action, and one that is required of all.

- The totality of this recognition of Jesus’ deity and exaltation has caused many to envision this happening in a formal way after the final judgment, when every creature in heaven and hell is required to bow their knees and make the confession **that Jesus Christ is Lord**.

d. That Jesus Christ is Lord: From this we can say that there is a sense in which Jesus *returned* to heaven with more than He had than when He *left* heaven. Not only did He return with His humanity still added to his deity (although a resurrected humanity), He also returned with the recognition planted among men of who He was and the worship He deserved – something unknown until the Incarnation and the full revelation of His person and work.

- “He has always (in Paul’s view) shared in the Divine nature. But it is only as the result of His Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection and Exaltation that He *appears to men* as on an equality with God, that He is *worshipped by them* in the way in which Jehovah is worshipped.” (Kennedy)

- “He might have used the miraculous powers inherent in His Divine nature in such a way as to compel men, without further ado, to worship Him as God. Instead of that He was willing to attain this high dignity by the path of humiliation, suffering and death.” (Kennedy)
- All this must be seen in reference to the humiliation described in Philippians 2:6-8; our tendency is to long for the exaltation, but to forsake the humiliation.

e. **Jesus Christ is Lord:** The confession of Jesus Christ as **Lord** reminds us to consider the great significance of this word *kurios*, especially as it was understood by the early church, who used the LXX as their Bible – where *kurios* was consistently used to translate the tetragrammaton, standing for the name *Yahweh*.

- We also should not miss the significance that at a later time in the Roman Empire, all residents of the Empire were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the Emperor, declaring that *Caesar is Lord*, and burning a pinch of incense to an image of the emperor. Though the Roman state saw this only as a display of political allegiance, Christians rightly interpreted it as idolatry – and refused to participate, often paying with their lives.
- Paul has no doubt who is really Lord – not the Caesar whom he will stand trial before; *Caesar* may be a high name, but it is not the name above all names, the name which belongs to Jesus Christ!

f. **Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father:** Remember that Paul did not give this description of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-11 simply for the theological education of the Philippians.

- He gave it to equip them to endure the hardship they were experiencing.
- He gave it help them to understand Paul’s hardships.
- He gave it to help them to practice real Christian unity in the midst of hard times.
 - This picture of Jesus has helped them to understand how to assess the ministry of Paul, which seemed weak at the present time.
 - This picture helped them to understand the context of God’s revelation of power – how God delights to show His power through humble actions.
 - This picture has equipped them to act in a way towards each other that will promote unity in the body of Christ.
 - This picture has shown them how to follow Jesus’ pattern of patient, humble obedience – something Paul will call them to continue in the following verses.

Key Idea: Jesus’s Mission:

Luke 19:10 (NIV)

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost

a. **The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost:** Jesus explained why He sought and extended friendship to a notorious sinner like Zacchaeus. Jesus came precisely to save people like Zacchaeus.

- Zacchaeus *really* believed on Jesus. A true **son of Abraham** was not only descended from Abraham genetically, but also had the *faith* in God Abraham had.

- Even though Zacchaeus sought Jesus, it turns out that *he* was the one who **was lost**, and *Jesus sought him (has come to seek)*. Zacchaeus was lost to his parents; lost to the religious, lost to his community, lost to whatever friends he might have had – yet in a sense, not lost to God. “As the story of his conversion unfolds, his seeking Jesus (Luke 19:3) turned out to be the result of Jesus’ first seeking him (Luke 19:10).” (Pate)
 - The entire account with Zacchaeus gives us a remarkable who, what, where, when, why, and how of receiving Jesus.
- *Who* Jesus wants to receive Him: those lost.
 - *What* Jesus wants with those who receive Him: relationship.
 - *Where* Jesus wants to go: down to Him.
 - *When* Jesus wants you to receive Him: immediately, quickly.
 - *Why* Jesus wants you to receive Him: to be with Him, to connect with Him in life.
 - *How* Jesus wants you to receive Him: joyfully.

Session 5: Who Do We Share With: Our Mission Field

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (NIV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Key Idea: What God has Done for Us:

Ezekiel 11:19-20 (NIV)

¹⁹ I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. ²⁰ Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

God doesn’t make bad people good, instead he does something even greater by making dead people come alive through the power of the gospel. And he has done this for each of us who call ourselves a follower of Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions:

- How does the transformation we experience as new creations in Christ affect our motivation to share the gospel with others?

- In what ways has your life changed since becoming a follower of Jesus? How can you use that to inspire others?

Key Idea: What God has Entrusted Us With:

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

God has saved us, for the opportunity to serve him. In fact, he has already created situations for us to glorify him in what we say and do. As Christians then, we should constantly be praying for God to show us the good works he has in store for us.

Discussion Questions:

- Considering Ephesians 2:10, what are some unique opportunities or relationships God has placed in your life to share the gospel?
- How can you make the most of these opportunities? Are there relationships in your life you need to be more intentional about sharing the gospel?

Key Idea: Our New Identity and Purpose:

2 Timothy 1:9 (NIV)

⁹He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

As Christians we have been saved and now have a new identity in Christ, to live a life that is holy and set apart from the rest of the world. This changes every part of our lives, from how we talk to

Discussion Questions:

- Based on 2 Timothy 1:9 and our new identity in Christ, how should our purpose of making disciples affect the way we see ourselves?
- How can you remind yourself of your new identity and purpose daily? What are some practical ways this can impact your actions and choices?

Application Questions:

- Each one of us naturally proclaims what we are passionate about. (i.e. coffee, work outs, sports teams, etc...) What steps do you need to take personally to become so passionate about God's greatness that you can't help but share the gospel?
- Have you come to terms with the fact that you are the instrument of God to announce His offer of grace to the people you will encounter this week? What will you do to make the most of those opportunities this week?
- Get real:
 - Simply embrace the fact that some will be offended when you share the gospel. After all, Christ, who is perfect, shared the gospel – and they crucified Him. (John 15:18-21)
 - Is there some sin in your life from which you need to repent that makes you feel like a hypocrite when telling others about this “abundant life” (John 10:10) that you're not living?
 - Here's great news: from God's perspective, you succeed every single time that you share the gospel because:
 - You are being a faithful ambassador (2 Cor 5:20) and your obedience pleases God (John 14:21)
 - You share God's Word which never returns empty without accomplishing what God set out for it to do (Isaiah 55:11)
 - The Holy Spirit of God will use the word of God to convince people of their sin and God's justice and judgment (John 16:8) – whether they admit it or not.

Ask every person to commit to pray for the opportunity to share the gospel with at least 1 person over the next week. Be sure to set aside time next week to share and celebrate the results.

Commentary

Session 5: Who Do We Share With: Our Mission Field

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (NIV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

a. **If anyone:** This is a promise for **anyone. Anyone!** It doesn't matter what class, what race, what nationality, what language, or what level of intelligence. **Anyone** can be a new creation in Jesus Christ.

b. **Is in Christ:** This is a promise for **anyone who is in Christ.** This is not a promise for those who are in themselves, or in the religion of men, or in someone or something else. This is for those **in Christ.**

c. **He is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.** Paul here teaches the great principle of *regeneration*. Jesus Christ changes those who come to Him by faith and who are **in Christ.** The saved are not "*just forgiven.*" They are changed into a **new creation.**

- It is unfair for us to expect those who are not **in Christ** to live as if they were a **new creation.** However, it is *not* unfair to expect a changed life from people who say they are Christians. "I know no language, I believe there is none, that can express a greater or more thorough and more radical renewal, than that which is expressed in the term, 'a new creature.'" (Spurgeon)
- However, being a **new creation** doesn't mean that we are perfect. It means that we *are* changed and that we are *being* changed.

d. **He is a new creation:** Who makes us a **new creation?** This is something God alone can do in us. This isn't just "turning over a new leaf" or "getting your act together." Yet the life of a **new creation** is not something God does *for us* but *in us.* So, we are told to *put off... the old man* and to *put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness* (Ephesians 4:22-24).

- Being a **new creation** is a gift from God received by faith. "God is surely the author of the second creation as he was of the first." (Harris) "A phrase which argueth the greatest change imaginable, and such a one as can be wrought in the soul by no other power than the power of God." (Poole)
- The work of a **new creation** is even greater than God's work of creating the world. "My brethren, it was more difficult, if such terms are ever applicable to Omnipotence, it was more difficult to create a Christian than to create a world. What was there to begin with when God made the world? There was nothing; but nothing could not stand in God's way – it was at least passive. But, my brethren, in our hearts, while there was nothing that could help God, there was much that could and did oppose him. Our stubborn wills, our deep prejudices, our ingrained love of iniquity, all these, great God, opposed thee, and aimed at thwarting thy designs... Yes, great God, it was great to make a world, but greater to create a new creature in Jesus Christ." (Spurgeon)
- Living as a **new creation** is something God works in us, using our will and our choices. So, we must both *receive the gift* of being a **new creation** and be challenged to *live the life* of a **new creation.** All this is God's work in us that we must submit to. This reminds us that at its root, Christianity is all about what *God did for us,* not what we can or should *do for God.* "Beloved, if you have no more religion than you have worked out in yourself, and no more grace than you have found in your nature, you have none at all. A supernatural work of the Holy Ghost must be wrought in every one of us, if we would see the face of God with acceptance." (Spurgeon)

e. **All things have become new** is the language of God's perfect, recreated work (Revelation 21:5). God wants to do a **new** thing in our life.

- “The man is not only *mended*, but he is *new made*... there is a *new creation*, which God himself owns as his workmanship, and which he can look on and pronounce *very good*.” (Clarke)

Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

a. **All things are of God:** Paul soars high here and wants the Corinthian Christians to know that he is writing of things that **are of God**, not of man. This work of *a new creation* and our eternal destiny are works **of God**, not something we have to earn and achieve.

b. **God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ:** God initiated this ministry of reconciliation, even though He is the innocent party in the estranged relationship. He **reconciled us to Himself**; we did not reconcile ourselves to Him.

- Importantly, God did this **through Jesus Christ**. God did not **reconcile us to Himself** by neglecting His holy justice, or “giving in” to sinful, rebellious humanity. He did it by an amazing, righteous, sacrifice of love. God demands not one bit less justice and righteousness from man under Jesus, but the demand has been satisfied **through Jesus Christ**.

c. **And has given us the ministry of reconciliation:** Having **reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ**, now God expects us to take up the **ministry of reconciliation** and has therefore **committed to us the word of reconciliation**.

- Reconciliation comes by **the word of reconciliation**. God uses the preached word to reconcile men and women to Himself.

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d. **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself:** Through all the terrors of the cross, God the Father worked in and with God the Son, **reconciling the world to Himself**. The Father and the Son worked *together* on the cross.

- **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself** is all the more amazing when understood in light of what happened on the cross. At some point before Jesus died, before the veil was torn in two, before Jesus cried out “*it is finished*,” an awesome spiritual transaction took place. The Father set upon the Son all the guilt and wrath our sin deserved, and Jesus bore it in Himself perfectly, totally satisfying the justice of God for us.
- As horrible as the physical suffering of Jesus was, this spiritual suffering – the act of being judged for sin in our place – was what Jesus really dreaded about the cross. This was the *cup* – the cup of God’s righteous wrath – that He trembled at drinking (Luke 22:39-46, Psalm 75:8, Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15). On the cross Jesus became, as it were, an enemy of God who was judged and forced to drink the cup of the Father’s fury so that we would not have to drink that cup.
- Yet, at the same time, Paul makes it clear that **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**. They worked together. Though Jesus was being *treated* as if He were an enemy of God, He was not. Even as Jesus was punished as if He were a sinner, He performed the most holy service unto God the Father ever offered. This is why Isaiah can say, *Yet it pleased the LORD to*

bruise Him (Isaiah 53:10). In and of itself, the suffering of the Son did not please the Father, but as it accomplished the work of **reconciling the world to Himself**, it completely pleased God the Father.

- Robertson rightly comments: “We may not dare to probe too far into this mystery of Christ’s suffering on the Cross, but this fact throws some light on the tragic cry of Jesus just before he died: ‘My God, My God, why didst thou forsake me?’” In that cry (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34), Jesus expresses both His partnership with God the Father (*My God*) and the agonizing feeling of receiving the wrath of God that we deserved.

e. **Not imputing their trespasses to them:** Why? Was it because God went soft and gave mankind a “Get Out of Hell Free” card? Not at all. Instead, it is because our trespasses *were* imputed to Jesus. The justice our sin demanded is satisfied, not excused.

- If God sets aside His wrath or His justice to save sinners, then the cross, instead of being a demonstration of love, is an exhibition of unspeakable cruelty and injustice, and of one man’s misguided attempt at do-goodism. If sin could just be *excused*, then it never needed to be *satisfied*.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.

a. **Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ:** Paul sees that he serves in a foreign land as the representative of a King. The King has a message, and Paul is delivering that message **as though God were pleading through us**.

- There is so much to the idea of being **ambassadors!** An ambassador does not speak to please his audience, but the King who sent him. An ambassador does not speak on his own authority; his own opinions or demands mean little. He simply says what he has been commissioned to say. But an ambassador is more than a messenger; he is also a representative, and the honor and reputation of his country are in his hands.

b. **Ambassadors:** This is a glorious title for Paul and the other apostles. However, it is not more glorious or more stunning than the thought of God, out of love, **pleading** to man. Why should God plead for us?

c. **We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God:** As an ambassador Paul makes a simple, strong, direct plea: **be reconciled to God**.

- This makes it clear that the work of reconciliation mentioned previously in the chapter does not work apart from our will and our choice. Who are the ones **reconciled to God**? Those who have responded to Jesus’ plea, made through His ambassadors.
- This makes it clear that it is *we* who must be **reconciled to God**, not He to us. *We* are the party in the wrong.
- Who is Paul imploring? The **you** of **we implore you** was added by the translators. Paul may have said, “*We implore the whole world on Christ’s behalf,*” or he may have said, “*We implore you Corinthian Christians on Christ’s behalf.*” The thought is valid either way, and both ideas may be in mind.

d. **Be reconciled:** We are not commanded to do the work of reconciliation between man and God. He has done the work; it is merely ours to embrace and receive. “It is not so much reconcile yourselves as ‘be reconciled.’ Yield yourselves to him who round you now the bands of a man would cast, drawing you

with cords of love because he was given for you... Submit yourselves. Yield to the grasp of those hands which were nailed to the cross for you." (Spurgeon)

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

a. **Him who knew no sin:** The idea that any man could be sinless was foreign to Jewish thinking (Ecclesiastes 8:5). Despite that, no one challenged Jesus when He claimed to be sinless (John 8:46).

b. **He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us:** Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul carefully chooses his words. He does not say Jesus was made *to be a sinner*. Jesus never became a *sinner*, but He did become **sin for us**. Even His becoming sin was a righteous act of love, not an act of sin.

- Jesus was not a sinner, even on the cross. On the cross, the Father treated Him as if He were a sinner, yet all the while, sin was "outside" of Jesus not "inside" Him and it was not a part of His nature (as it is with us).
- "Christ was not guilty, and could not be made guilty; but he was treated as if he were guilty, because he willed to stand in the place of the guilty. Yea, he was not only treated as a sinner, but he was treated as if he had been sin itself in the abstract. This is an amazing utterance. The sinless one was made to be sin." (Spurgeon)
- "I do not say that our substitute endured a hell, that were unwarrantable. I will not say that he endured either the exact punishment for sin, or an equivalent for it; but I do say that what he endured rendered to the justice of God a vindication of his law more clear and more effectual than would have been rendered to it by the damnation of sinners for whom he died." (Spurgeon)
- "We obviously stand at the brink of a great mystery and our understanding of it can only be minimal." (Kruse)

c. **He made Him:** We note that well. This was the work of God Himself! The Father and the Son (and the Spirit as well) were in perfect cooperation in the work on the cross. This means that the work of atonement on the cross was *the work of God*. "If God did it, it is well done. I am not careful to defend an act of God: let the man who dares accuse his Maker think what he is at. If God himself provided the sacrifice, be you sure that he has accepted it." (Spurgeon)

d. **That we might become the righteousness of God in Him:** Jesus *took* our sin, but *gave* us His **righteousness**. It is a tremendous exchange, all prompted by the love of God for us!

- "Not only does the believer receive from God a right standing before him on the basis of faith in Jesus (Phil 3:9), but here Paul says that 'in Christ' the believer in some sense actually shares the righteousness that characterizes God himself." (Harris)
- **The righteousness of God:** "What a grand expression! He makes us righteous through the righteousness of Jesus; nay, not only makes us righteous, but *righteousness*; nay, that is not all, he makes us the righteousness *of God*; that is higher than the righteousness of Adam in the garden, it is more divinely perfect than angelic perfection." (Spurgeon)
- "The righteousness which Adam had in the garden was perfect, but it was the righteousness of man: ours is the righteousness of God." (Spurgeon)
- This is the whole truth of justification stated simply: Our sins were on Jesus, and His righteousness is on us. And, "As Christ was not made sin by any sin inherent in him, so neither are we made righteous by any righteousness inherent in us, but by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us." (Poole)

