

# Rooted: Digging Deeper in Christ

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## Introduction

We live in a world marked by instability. From shifting cultural values to personal struggles with identity, anxiety, relationships, purpose, and more—every one of us has asked at some point:

- *“Where can I find solid ground?”*
- *“What will truly satisfy my soul?”*
- *“How do I navigate this season of life with wisdom and hope?”*

This Rooted series is built on a foundational conviction: **Everything we need is found in Christ**. Being *rooted in the Lord* is not a cliché—it is the deep, unshakable truth that anchors us when life feels uncertain.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 says:

*“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”*

That’s the vision of this series: to help you and your small group dig deep into biblical truth so that you can stand strong and bear fruit in every season.

Over the next 8 weeks, we’ll explore what it means to be:

- **Rooted in Identity** – Knowing who you are in Christ
- **Rooted in the Word** – Building your life on Scripture
- **Rooted in Rest** – Trusting God with your pace and peace
- **Rooted in Covenant** – Cultivating Christlike relationships
- **Rooted in Community** – Experiencing transformation together
- **Rooted in Calling** – Living with purpose, not just for a paycheck
- **Rooted in Simplicity** – Embracing contentment over consumption
- **Rooted in Mission** – Fulfilling God’s purpose for your life

Each session will help you reflect on the truth of God’s Word, share life with others in community, and take practical steps to grow deeper in your walk with Jesus.

This is more than a study—it’s an invitation to live differently. To stop drifting. To grow roots that will hold you through every storm. Because no matter what life brings...

**If you are rooted in Christ, you will stand.**

## Week 1: Rooted in Identity – Who Does God Say You Are?

**Scripture References:** Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Romans 8:14-17

**Focus:** Understanding identity in Christ brings stability and security to every area of life. This week explores key scriptures that reveal who we are according to God's Word.

**Opening Prayer:** *"Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing us together. We pray that as we open Your Word, You will speak truth into our hearts and remind us of our identity in You. Help us listen, share honestly, and grow together. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

**Icebreaker:** "When you hear the word 'identity,' what comes to mind?"

### **Read: Ephesians 1:3-14**

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup> he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

*<sup>11</sup> In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*

**Summary:** This passage reminds us that we were handpicked by God, adopted into His family, redeemed by His Son, and sealed with His Spirit. We don't earn our identity; we receive it by grace. Paul wants us to know how blessed we are because our identity is secure in Christ.

God doesn't just tolerate us—He chose us. Before the foundation of the world, He saw us and wanted us to be part of His family. That's not performance-based approval; it's predestined love. He adopted us, redeemed us through the blood of Jesus, and sealed us with His Holy Spirit. That means your worth isn't tied to what you do, but to Whose you are. Our spiritual blessings are already secured in the heavenly realms. We are rich in grace.

**Modern Illustration:**

Think of how many people define themselves by career, achievements, or their social media presence. But Scripture tells us we are God's children, loved and chosen. Social media identity curation leads to performance; God calls us to authenticity.

**Relevant Statistic:**

91% of Gen Z feel pressure to define identity through achievement (Barna, 2023).

**Discussion Questions:**

- Where do you currently find your sense of identity or purpose?
- When you hear the words in Ephesians 1:3–14, what truths stand out most to you? Why?
- Upon reflection, how have outside influences shaped your self-perception?
- What does it mean that you are "sealed with the Holy Spirit"?

**READ: 2 Corinthians 5:17**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. This isn't just moral improvement—it's a brand-new identity. The old has gone; the new has come. Remember: our past doesn't get the final say. In Christ, your identity is not your failure. You are not what happened to you. You are who God says you are.

**Modern Illustration:**

Imagine someone being released from prison but still wearing chains. Christ broke the chains. We're free. Why live like we're still in bondage?

**Discussion Questions:**

- What does being a "new creation" mean for your daily life?
- Are there lies from your past identity that you still believe?
- How do we remind ourselves of who we are in Christ when we fail or fall?

**READ:**

- **1 Peter 2:9-10:** *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him*

*who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

- **Romans 8:14-17:** *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. <sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Peter says you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's special possession. Paul says that we were adopted in Christ Jesus. That's not symbolic talk—it's your new status! As a priesthood, we carry the presence of God to others. As royalty, we represent the Kingdom. And as God's possession, we are deeply valued and secure.

#### **Modern Illustration:**

Think of a passport. It identifies where you belong. Your spiritual identity declares your citizenship in God's Kingdom—and no one can revoke it.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- What does it mean to you to be part of a "royal priesthood"?
- How does being God's possession change your view of yourself?
- What does it mean that Christians are adopted into God's family?
- What role does identity play in how we treat others?

#### **Potential Additional Discussion Questions:**

- How should we understand the words "chose" and "predestined" in these verses?
- How does understanding your identity in Christ provide stability?
- Why do we sometimes struggle to live from our identity instead of trying to earn it?
- What lies about your identity have you believed, and how can Scripture correct them?
- In what practical ways can you remind yourself of who you are in Christ this week?
- How does your identity in Christ impact your relationships?
- What would change in your life if you fully believed God's definition of you?
- How does the Holy Spirit function as a "seal" and "down payment" of our inheritance?
- How can our group encourage one another to live rooted in identity?

### **Ephesians 1:3-14 Commentary**

1:3 Paul writes verses 3–12 as one long sentence in Greek (in English we'd call it a run-on sentence), and it's all about what believers possess because of the Cross of Christ. He begins in verse 3 with worship: Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To bless the name of God is to speak well of Him, to praise Him. *Worship* is the celebration of who God is, what He has done, and what we trust Him to do. God is not interested in spectators. He invites you to praise Him.

Why? Because, in Christ, He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens—or we could translate it “heavenly places” (see 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). What are heavenly places? This is a reference to the spiritual realm where God and Satan battle for our allegiance. We live in the physical realm with our problems, needs, struggles, and sins. But whatever happens in the physical realm originates in the spiritual realm. Conflict in our homes is a spiritual problem. Although conflict is visible fruit, its root is spiritual in nature. Thus, we need a spiritual solution to our circumstances. That's why we must live with a spiritual worldview.

Paul says God has already done everything He is ever going to do for believers. He's blessed them with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And, as Paul will soon say, believers are “seated” there with Jesus (2:6). Think of this like a video teleconference in which you're in two places at once—seated physically in one place but operating in another. Believers are present in two places at the same time: we're physically located on earth but operate from heavenly places. God wants our position there to dictate our activity on earth. Only by operating from a spiritual perspective will you have access to God's Kingdom power and provisions to deal victoriously with life in the physical realm.

1:4 Spiritual blessings are accessible because God chose us, drafted us, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless. *Sinning* is failing to give God glory, attempting to make God revolve around us when we're supposed to be revolving around Him. It's approaching things wrongly, like those who once thought the earth was the center of the solar system. But God created us for Himself, for *His* happiness. He's chosen us “to be holy and blameless” so that the Church will bring *Him* pleasure. When we pursue His pleasure, we position ourselves to experience the blessings of God, which have already been preordained for us.

1:5–6 We can do this because He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ (1:5). Paul thus introduces us to the mysterious doctrine of election. God has predestined to save a people who will be trophies of His grace. Those who believe the Gospel are chosen “in Him” (1:4). Paul uses the phrase “in Him,” “in Christ,” or “in the Beloved One” throughout the passage (1:3–4, 6–7, 9–10, 12–13). So, God's election isn't abstract; it's centered in the person and work of Jesus.

The focus of the book of Ephesians is on the corporate church, not on individual Christian salvation (see 1:22–23; 2:14, 16, 22; 3:10, 21; 4:16; 5:32). Therefore, the choosing and election to which Paul refers is not for individuals to eternal life but regards God's choice to establish a group of people (that is, the body of Christ) in the Beloved One

(1:5–6) whose purpose is to live godly lives and reflect His holy character in a sinful world. This election defines the corporate identity believers share because of their relationship to Christ (as in the case with Israel; see Romans 9:3–5). This is like family members sharing the medical insurance benefits of the head of the household.

Those no longer “in Adam” but “in Christ” are predestined to be adopted by God. To be adopted in the ancient world meant receiving the same rights, privileges, and inheritance due to a natural-born adult son. In Christ, God adopts sons and daughters for Himself for a specific purpose. Once you’re adopted because of your faith in Christ, you are defined by your new Father. God gives all of His children access to every spiritual blessing—according to His good pleasure and to the praise of His glorious grace (1:5–6). God predetermined to bring a group of people into His family, drafting them into His Son for the goal of receiving spiritual benefits and manifesting His heavenly rule in their lives and bringing Him glory. Election is for service and spiritual benefit, not for individual, personal salvation.

1:7–8 For this to happen, God redeemed us from sin (1:7). In the ancient world, slaves could be redeemed, and a price could be paid for their freedom. Redemption from sin comes through the price paid by Jesus Christ through His blood (1:7). Why blood? Because the judgment for sin is death (Romans 6:23) and shedding blood means taking life (see Deuteronomy 12:23). The sinless Son of God had to die to pay for our sins so we might have forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7)—God’s grace richly poured out on us (1:8).

1:9–12 But God doesn’t save people just so they can go to Heaven when they die. He saves them so they transfer kingdoms—leaving the kingdom of darkness for the Kingdom of Christ, their new King. Through God’s “wisdom and understanding,” He has planned to bring everything together in Christ (1:8–10), to bring all history under His rule. God’s kingdom goal in history is that, in Christ, things in Heaven and things on earth are unified (1:10) so that we might be aligned under God’s Kingdom reign, living transformed lives for His pleasure. God works out everything in agreement with His purpose and will (1:11) to advance this Christ-centered philosophy of history. Nothing is left to chance. All is for the praise of His glory and the exaltation of His Son (1:12).

1:13–14 Whoever hears and believes the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (1:13). Official documents were sealed in antiquity, implying protection and ownership. When you believe in Christ as your Savior, God puts you inside an envelope called Christ. You are “in Christ.” But God also guarantees delivery. He registers the letter and seals it with the Holy Spirit—indicating that He is its owner and the only One qualified to open it.

Paul also says the Holy Spirit is God’s pledge to us—the down payment of our inheritance (1:14), the guarantee that God will do for us everything He promised for His children. Like an engagement ring, the Holy Spirit is like a down payment on an eternal commitment. The Spirit is a heavenly first installment given in anticipation of eternal life, a life that is eternally secure. He’s a foretaste of what’s ahead.

## **2 Corinthians 5:17 Commentary**

5:17 If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. If you are a Christian, you have been born again of imperishable seed and share in the divine nature (see John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Peter 1:4). God has brought about a spiritual transformation inside of you, and your identity is tied to your new birth. You are no longer who you once were the old has passed away. Therefore, you are called to live in accordance with your new identity.

## **1 Peter 2:9-10 Commentary**

2:9–10 Peter describes Christians in several ways. They are a royal priesthood (also “a holy priesthood” in 2:5). Through Jesus Christ, we have access to God and need no other human priest to represent us or intercede for us.

Believers are a chosen race (2:9). As the last Adam (see Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:45–49), Jesus is the head of a new race of people. The first Adam brought sin and death, but the last Adam brought spiritual life. This new race includes believers from every ethnic group. All physical or cultural distinctions are subservient to this greater category: we are children of God.

The people of God are a holy nation—not a perfect people, but a people set apart with a passion to live corporately to please God. We are a people for His possession—we’re not special because of who we are, but because of the One to Whom we belong (2:9).

Along with this new identity, God’s people are to live a new lifestyle. You are to proclaim the praises of the One Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. In other words, you are to serve as an advertising agency tasked with sharing the message of His love. We were formerly not His people. Now we are and have received mercy (2:10). Therefore, as we live in this world—both as individuals and when we gather corporately—people ought to be able to see what our marvelous God is like.

## **Romans 8:14-17 Commentary**

8:14–15 If we walk according to the Spirit as God desires, we prove ourselves to be God’s sons (8:14). Not only are we sons (and daughters), but we are *adopted* children (8:15). If a person was adopted in Paul’s time, that individual immediately received all the rights of an adult heir. The chief right that Paul mentions here is intimacy with God. We therefore can pray, Abba, Father (8:15). *Abba* is a term of intimacy meaning “Papa” or “Daddy.” We can say it with complete assurance that God is listening.

8:16–17 Being adopted as God’s children (8:16) may come with extreme benefits, but it also carries with it intense responsibility. Yes, we are already heirs of God, but we can only become coheirs with Christ if we suffer with Him (8:17). If we do suffer, we will be glorified with Him (8:17). If we shrink back in the day of trial, we’ll lose something valuable. We cannot lose our salvation, but we can certainly lose some of the reward God intends to give us.



**Closing Challenge:** Encourage everyone to read Ephesians 1 each day this week. Ask them to underline or highlight every phrase that reminds them of who they are in Christ.

**Closing Prayer:** "Lord, thank You for reminding us of who we are in You. Help us live out of that identity this week. Give us confidence, peace, and purpose. Amen."

## Week 2: Rooted in the Word – Anchoring Your Mind in Scripture

**Scripture References:** Psalm 1:1–3; Joshua 1:7–9; John 15:5–7; Hebrews 4:12

**Focus:** Being rooted in Scripture means more than reading it occasionally—it means delighting in God’s Word and letting it shape our minds, choices, and emotions. This session helps participants discover the strength and fruit that comes from a consistent relationship with the Word.

**Opening Prayer:** Lord, open our hearts and minds. Help us understand how Your Word is a source of strength and clarity. Let this time be fruitful and uplifting. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Icebreaker:** What’s your favorite Bible verse and why?

**Read: Psalm 1:1-3**

*<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one  
who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,  
<sup>2</sup> but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.  
<sup>3</sup> That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither—  
whatever they do prospers.*

**Summary:** When we delight in God’s Word, we become like a strong tree planted by a river. Scripture nourishes our minds and keeps us stable even when life is chaotic. It’s not just about reading—it’s about meditating and living by it.

The psalm contrasts two kinds of people—those rooted in God’s Word and those swayed by worldly influence. Like a tree by streams of water, those who meditate on Scripture are spiritually nourished, stable, and fruitful. Meditating on Scripture means absorbing it deeply, thinking it over, applying it, and letting it shape our worldview.

### **Modern Illustration:**

Think of a healthy tree that survives drought because of deep roots. God’s Word gives us depth and nourishment, so we’re not easily shaken by life’s storms.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What does it mean to "delight" in God's Word?
- How do you think meditating on Scripture differs from simply reading it?
- What keeps you from consistent time in the Bible?
- What spiritual fruit can grow from being rooted in Scripture?

**Relevant Statistic:** 65% of churchgoers read the Bible less than weekly (Lifeway, 2022).

**Read: Joshua 1:7-9:**

*"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. <sup>8</sup> Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. <sup>9</sup> Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."*

God tells Joshua that success and courage are tied to obedience to His Word. Repeatedly meditating on the Book of the Law ensures that we will not only know what is right but do it. This passage emphasizes that obedience brings God's presence and favor.

**Modern Illustration:**

GPS systems guide drivers only when they're turned on and followed. Scripture works the same way—it directs us clearly, but we must be tuned in and obedient.

**Discussion Questions:**

- How does God's Word provide strength and courage for daily life?
- When have you experienced clarity through a Bible passage?
- Why is obedience necessary to truly benefit from Scripture?

**Read:**

- **John 15:5-7:** *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."*
- **Hebrews 4:12:** *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

Jesus describes the vital connection between Himself and His followers—like branches to a vine. Abiding in Him means staying connected through His Word. The Word is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12), shaping our hearts, revealing truth, and cutting through confusion.

**Modern Illustration:**

Think of your phone—if it's not plugged in, it eventually dies. Abiding in Christ through His Word keeps our spiritual battery charged.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What does it look like practically to "abide" in Jesus?
- How does the Word expose and heal areas of your heart?
- What habits could help you stay more deeply connected to God's Word?

**Potential Additional Discussion Questions:**

- How would you describe your knowledge of scripture? (Expert, Proficient, Novice, ...) Are you where you want to be? Why/why not?
  - How do you interact with Scripture during the week?
  - What is the best time of day for you to meditate on God's Word? (And why does that work better for you than other times of the day?)
  - Try to flesh out the simile: how is a blessed person similar to a tree by a stream?
  - And how is a wicked person similar to chaff?
  - What does it mean to be rooted in God's Word?
  - How does Scripture impact your thoughts and emotions?
  - Do you truly delight in reading God's Word?
    - What barriers keep you from reading the Bible?
  - How does Psalm 1 help shape our habits?
  - How is meditating on Scripture different from reading?
  - When has Scripture brought clarity in your life?
1. How can you grow in consistency this week?
    - What verse would you like to memorize?
    - How can we help each other stay in the Word?

**Psalm 1:1-3 Commentary**

1:1 This tells how to become happy. The word translated "happy" in the CSB can also be rendered "blessed." To be blessed by God is to be happy.

Everyone wants to be blessed, but we should define what that means. For many people, being blessed refers to stuff acquired. Yet, one can have an abundance of stuff and be miserable. So, put simply, *blessing* is the God-given capacity to experience, enjoy, and extend the goodness and favor of God in your life—whatever form God's goodness and favor takes. Paul confesses, "I know both how to make do with little, and I know how

to make do with a lot. In all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:12–13). In other words, he had learned to enjoy God’s heavenly goodness regardless of his earthly circumstances.

Interestingly, the psalmist explains what the blessed / happy person does *not* do. First, he does not walk in the advice of the wicked. The biblical metaphor of “walking” refers to how one lives. The fastest way to miss your blessing is to take counsel from those who have no regard for God’s view on life. Second, he does not stand in the pathway with sinners. The blessed person does not hang out with people who will influence him toward sin and away from God. Third, he does not sit in the company of mockers. Mockers make light of serious things, sitting in judgment of everyone and everything. Yet, they fail to allow their critical gaze to turn back to themselves. Notice the progression: walking, standing, sitting. The one who is regularly influenced by people with little regard for God finds himself more and more at home with human viewpoints and misses God’s blessings.

1:2 What does the blessed person do? He delights in the *LORD*’s instruction. To delight in something is to find your joy and pleasure in it. The blessed man or woman finds this in God’s Word, meditating on it day and night. To this, someone may object, “I have a job and a family. I don’t have time to read the Bible day and night!” But the psalmist doesn’t say the blessed person *reads* God’s instruction day and night; he says he *meditates* on it.

To meditate on something is to recall, ponder, and interact with it in the mind. When we meditate on God’s Word, we mentally chew on it until it becomes a part of us. This, in fact, is why consuming God’s Word is often spoken of in terms of eating: “Your words were found, and I ate them. Your words became a delight to me and the joy of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16; see Psalm 119:103; Ezekial 3:1–3; Revelation 10:9–10).

When we meditate on the Word of God, we think about how it connects to life. We ask ourselves, “How does the Word speak to the circumstances I am currently facing?” The gap between hearing the Word and being blessed is closed with meditation. Considering life from the divine viewpoint and acting in accordance with it brings the tangible experience of blessing.

1:3 The blessed person is like a tree planted beside flowing streams. Such trees are not easily swayed; they hold their ground. The “flowing streams” in view are irrigation channels, so regardless of how barren the weather, such a tree is positioned to drink from a continuous source of life.

That the tree bears its fruit in its season indicates that the blessed person is productive, maximizing his potential. Importantly, fruit reveals something about the quality of the tree that bears it. If you’re not bearing worthwhile fruit, then it’s because there’s nothing worthwhile inside of you. Moreover, trees don’t eat their own fruit; the fruit exists for the benefit of others. Thus, you know that you’re blessed when you are being a blessing.

That the leaf does not wither doesn’t mean that a blessed person never has negative experiences. Rather, the negative things don’t cause him to wither and die. You know you’re blessed when you bounce back from life’s trials more quickly than you once did.

### **Joshua 1:7-9 Commentary**

1:7–9 Next God said, “Observe carefully the whole instruction my servant Moses commanded you ... so that you will have success wherever you go”. (1:7). Success for Israel, then, involved obtaining their inheritance. To do this, they had to stay tightly tethered to God’s Word.

Ultimately, success for a Christian is not rising to popularity, power, prosperity, or position. Success is fulfilling your God-given purpose in life. To do that, you (like Israel) must meditate on Scripture and carefully observe everything written in it (1:7–8). To meditate on something is to roll it repeatedly in your mind in much the same way that a cow chews its cud. When you do, the Word of God is driven deeply into your soul so that your actions can be driven by God’s perspective rather than your feelings or cultural opinion.

### **John 15:3-7 Commentary**

15:3–5 The disciples were clean through the washing of Christ’s Word (15:3; see Ephesians 5:26). This is how we stay clean too; nevertheless, we must remain in Jesus. A branch that’s disconnected from the vine is useless. We can’t produce fruit unless we remain in Jesus (15:4). The idea of “remaining” or “abiding” in Christ has to do with intimacy and relationship. Jesus Christ is our source, the only One Who can provide the spiritual sustenance and vitality we need to be useful believers. Thus, we need to hang out with Him. You can’t avoid Jesus all week and then show up on Sunday morning expecting growth. We only produce much fruit when we remain in Him (15:5).

15:6 If someone chooses not to remain in Jesus, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. Such branches are gathered and burned. This is not a description of hell and cannot refer to loss of salvation since believers are eternally secure. We’ve already seen that everyone who comes to Jesus will never be cast out. If you could lose eternal life, then it wasn’t eternal to begin with (see commentary on 6:36–40). So instead, the burning is a reference to the consequences of a loss of both fellowship with God and rewards from Him. If you disconnect from the vine for too long, don’t be surprised to find yourself experiencing divine discipline, getting burned, and seeing your spiritual life withering. Such a believer is useless to himself, God, and others. So, if you find such things happening to you, repent! “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

15:7 To have Jesus’s words remain (or “abide”) in you requires more than merely reading or listening to them. You must internalize them. Another way to describe this is *meditating* on God’s Word, rolling it around in your mind to grasp what it means and how to apply it to your specific circumstances. We must chew and swallow Scripture, so to speak, so that it becomes part of us. When you do this, you can ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you. In other words, prayers get answered when we maintain intimate fellowship with God through His Word. That’s because you’ll find your will aligning with His.

### **Hebrews 4:12-13 Commentary**

4:12–13 Like the Israelites, you will regularly find that your circumstances tempt you to disobey God. Focus on circumstances too long, and His Word will fail to influence your life.

The author reminds his audience that the Word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword. And indeed, Scripture isn't composed of dead words on a page; it's alive. It cuts deep and can separate the spiritual from the earthly. The Word can judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (4:12). It lays us naked and exposed before God.

Have you ever had an experience with God's Word that made you feel "exposed"? Have you ever heard it preached and felt like it was directed right at you? Have you ever felt your soul sliced open by the Word? Remember, we have no private lives. We don't even get to have private thoughts. Everything is laid bare before the One to Whom we must give an account (4:13).

**Closing Challenge:** Commit to reading Psalm 1 every day this week and journaling one insight per day.

**Closing Prayer:** "God, thank You for the gift of Your Word. Help us to treasure it, meditate on it, and apply it to our lives. Give us discipline and desire to grow. Amen."

## Week 3: Rooted in Rest – Trusting God with Your Body and Soul

**Scripture References:** Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 11:28-30; Mark 6:31; Psalm 23:1–3

**Focus:** Biblical rest is not laziness—it's a holy rhythm. God invites us to find rest for our bodies, minds, and souls by trusting His provision, practicing Sabbath, and releasing our burdens.

**Opening Prayer:** "Father, thank You for calling us into rest. Quiet our minds and hearts as we learn about the importance of trusting You with every part of our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen."

**Icebreaker:** "What does rest look like for you? Do you find it easy or hard to slow down?"

### **Read: Exodus 20:8-11**

*"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

**Summary:** Rest is both a command and a gift. In Exodus, Sabbath is modeled after God's own rest. Jesus invites the weary to take His yoke and find rest for their souls. Resting is an act of trust in God's provision and timing.

The Sabbath was rooted in creation. God, who never tires, rested to model a rhythm of restoration. The Sabbath isn't about checking out but checking in with God. It's a weekly act of trust that God can run the world without us.

### **Modern Illustration:**

Think of a phone constantly used but never recharged. Without regular Sabbath, we spiritually drain until we crash.

**Relevant Statistic:** 55% of Americans don't use their vacation time (Glassdoor, 2022).

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What stands out to you in the Sabbath command?
- Why do you think God commands rest instead of just recommending it?
- What are signs you may be spiritually or emotionally drained?



**Read:**

- **Matthew 11:28-30:** *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*
- **Mark 6:31:** *Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."*

Jesus calls the weary to Himself—not to more work, but to rest. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. In Mark 6, even the disciples needed time away to rest. Real rest comes not just from stopping, but from being with Jesus.

**Modern Illustration:**

In Japan, the word *karōshi* means "death by overwork." In contrast, Sabbath is God's way of protecting our health and hearts for renewal.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What "yokes" or burdens are you carrying that feel heavy?
- How have you experienced soul-level rest in the past?
- What would it look like to intentionally create time for rest with Jesus this week?

**Read: Psalm 23:1-3**

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.*

The Good Shepherd leads us beside still waters—not rushing waves. He restores our soul. This isn't just about physical rest but emotional and spiritual healing. Following God's lead means embracing rhythms that restore rather than deplete.

**Modern Illustration:**

Think of a stressed-out person sitting at a lake with no phone, just stillness. That's a picture of the peace God wants to offer regularly.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What does "He restores my soul" mean to you?
- What areas of your life feel overextended?
- How can you build regular rest into your weekly rhythm?
- How can we encourage each other to protect time for God-centered rest?

**Exercise:** Challenge group members to pick up their Bibles and hold them out in one hand, with their arm parallel to the floor. See who can maintain that posture for the longest amount of time. What seems light and manageable initially can become burdensome - and even catastrophic - if the attempt is sustained without rest.

**Potential Additional Discussion Questions:**

- Start by trying to define “rest”. Is there a difference between physical rest and Godly rest? Does rest always mean going home and lying on the couch?
- How would you describe your current rest rhythms?
- What makes rest hard for you?
- What does Sabbath look like for you now?
- How is rest a spiritual act of trust?
- Is there such a thing as too much rest? Explain.
- What do you learn about God from His rest command?
- What might change if you prioritized rest more?
- What fills you up spiritually and physically?
- How can rest restore both your desire and ability to serve?
- What boundary would help you protect rest?
- How can we support one another in this?

**Exodus 20:8-11 Commentary**

20:8–11 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (20:8; see 31:12–17). The Sabbath day concept is predicated on what God did at creation. He made the world in six days; then He rested on the seventh (20:11). Clearly, the all-powerful God didn’t “rest” because He was tired. Rather, He rested so that He could enjoy what He had done: “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good indeed” (Genesis 1:31). Likewise, after six days of work, we are also called to rest and enjoy the fruit of our labor. This is a valuable means of helping ourselves to avoid becoming so busy and preoccupied that we forget what God has done too.

God also made the Sabbath so that His people would be reminded of His sovereignty. The seventh day is a Sabbath to the *LORD* (20:10). He is in charge; we live under His rule. He is the One who brought order out of chaos (Genesis 1:1–2).

The author of Hebrews, writing to Christians, reminds us that “a Sabbath rest remains for God’s people” (Hebrews 4:9). But the early Christians did not gather for worship on the Jewish Sabbath—Saturday, the official seventh day of the week. They gathered for worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, because it was on that day that Jesus was raised from the dead. He is “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8), and He promises rest for His weary people (see Matthew 11:28). Though we in the New Testament era are not tied down to keeping a specific Sabbath day (see Colossians 2:16), there remains a principle of Sabbath rest for the people of God. We willingly “enter” that rest by faith, trusting God and living obediently in accordance with our faith (see Hebrews 3:18–4:3, 11).

### **Matthew 11:28-30 Commentary**

11:28 Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened. If life is weighing you down—if the burden you’re carrying is too much to bear—come to Jesus. Why? Because only He can give you rest. In view here is the invitation to salvation. To rest is to put your burdens in God’s hands and enjoy His provision of forgiveness and eternal life.

11:29 Take up my yoke and learn from Me. Once you’ve come to Jesus, He invites you to hook up to Him as a disciple. A yoke is a wooden bar harnessed to the necks of a pair of oxen to bring them under submission and enable them to do the work that the farmer has for them. To train younger oxen, farmers would yoke them to older, experienced oxen. It provided growth and development.

Hooking to Jesus’s “yoke” enables you to learn how to live. Therein you will find rest. When you come to Jesus, He *gives* you rest in terms of your salvation. When you accept the yoke of discipleship, you *find* rest and experience it in your daily life.

11:30 My yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Following Jesus won’t make every problem in your life disappear. Jesus didn’t say you would no longer have burdens if you hitched to Him. He said their weight would decrease. A suitcase packed full may be too heavy to carry. But, if the case has wheels, your burden will become lighter though your circumstances haven’t changed. God can put wheels on your burdens so that you can deal with them more easily.

### **Mark 6:30-31 Commentary**

6:30–31 After their mission to proclaim the Kingdom in word and deed (see 6:7–13), the apostles returned to Jesus and reported to Him everything that had happened (6:30). Jesus commanded them to go away with Him to rest and eat (6:31). Sometimes, the most spiritual thing you can do is get some sleep. We need the reminder that we are created beings; we’re not God. The fact that we need rest is a reminder that we are dependent on the One Who “does not slumber or sleep” (Psalm 121:4).

### **Psalms 23:1-3 Commentary**

23:1 The *LORD* is my shepherd. David was familiar with tending sheep. After all, he used to do the job (see 1 Samuel 16:11–12; 17:15, 34–37). He knew firsthand what it was for a shepherd to protect and provide for sheep, so he describes his relationship to God in those terms. What David had been for his sheep, God had been to him. Notice that the Lord wasn’t a mere generic shepherd to David; He was David’s personal shepherd. He calls Him “my shepherd.” As a result, David confidently confesses, I have what I need. Because God had covered all of David’s needs, he recognized that he lacked nothing.

Some Christians have trusted God to save them for eternity, but they don’t have much confidence that He can provide for them in history. David’s beautiful, poetic testimony can help instill in us the confidence that He can. Having declared the Lord to be His

shepherd, David proceeds in the remainder of the psalm to explain how God met all his needs.

23:2–3 God met David's *spiritual* needs. Just as a shepherd gives sheep rest in green pastures and refreshes them with quiet waters (23:2), so God had done spiritually to David. The cares and struggles of this world can leave us exhausted. Such times are opportunities to learn about our dependence on the Lord. He provides spiritual refreshment and restoration. He renews our life (23:3).

God met David's *directional* needs. He leads me along the right paths (23:3). Sheep are prone to wander and become lost; they need guidance. Many cars today have navigational systems. If you deviate from the best route to reach your destination, the system will warn you to return to the right road. Through His Word and His Spirit, God leads us along the right paths in life—and reroutes us when we foolishly become wayward. Why? For His name's sake (23:3)—that is, so that others can hear us say, "My God has brought me here."

**Closing Challenge:** Choose one day this week to unplug for 3–4 hours and spend it resting, reading, or enjoying time with God.

**Closing Prayer:** "Lord, thank You for offering us rest. Help us to lay down our burdens and find refreshment in You. Teach us to slow down and enjoy Your presence. Amen."

## WEEK 4: Rooted in Covenant – Rooted in Love: Building Christlike Relationships

**Scriptures:** John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7; Colossians 3:12–14; Ephesians 4:1–3

**Focus:** God cares deeply about how we relate to others. This session focuses on cultivating biblical traits that lead to strong, lasting relationships rooted in Christ.

**Opening Prayer:** "Gracious God, thank You for the gift of relationships. Teach us today how to love like You—whether in marriage, family, friendship, or community. Grow our character and deepen our commitment to one another as we study Your Word. In Jesus' name, Amen."

**Icebreaker:** "What's one trait that makes someone a joy to be around?"

**Read: John 13:34-35**

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

**Teaching Summary:** Christlike relationships are clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness – and most of all, love. Whether you are married or single, your character is the foundation of your relationships. The love described in these verses isn't romantic—it's transformational. It reflects the love Christ shows us: selfless, enduring, and redemptive.

Jesus commands His followers to love one another 'as He has loved us'. This is the identifying trait of a disciple—not theological brilliance or church attendance, but sacrificial love. The credibility of the Church is tied to how we love.

**Illustration:**

Like a sports jersey identifies a team, love is the visible uniform of the Christian.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What does it mean to love someone "as Christ has loved us"?
- How have you seen this kind of love transform relationships?
- Why do you think Jesus made this the identifying trait of discipleship?
- Is the way you love others the most defining trait in your life? If not, why not?

**Read: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

Paul's description of love is action-oriented—patient, kind, not boastful, not resentful. Biblical love is a decision, not just a feeling. It is other-centered and often sacrificial, especially in conflict or stress. This kind of love can only be produced through the Spirit of Christ living in us.

**Modern Illustration:**

Think of a garden—love grows through daily nurturing, not occasional grand gestures.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Which part of this passage do you find hardest to live out?
- How does this passage challenge the world's definition of love?
- How can we cultivate this kind of love in all our relationships?
- What does patient Christlike love look like in conflict?

**Read:**

- **Colossians 3:12–14:** *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*
- **Ephesians 4:1–3:** *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Paul urges believers to clothe themselves in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Unity isn't automatic—it's something we "make every effort" to maintain. Love is the "belt" that holds all other virtues together. Forgiveness is a command—not a feeling—because the Lord forgave us. These verses remind us that forgiveness is a decision to release the offense and entrust justice to God.

Paul's encouragement in Ephesians 4:1–3 reminds us that love, unity, and peace are possible when we are led by the Spirit. We're called to walk in humility and to be patient with each other's imperfections.

**Modern Illustrations:**

- Think of a toolkit—love is the handle that connects all the tools needed to build healthy relationships.
- Holding onto bitterness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to suffer.

**Discussion Questions:**

- How has forgiveness impacted a relationship in your life?
- What's the difference between forgiving and excusing someone?
- Why do you think "love binds them all together in perfect unity"?
- What would it look like to "make every effort" to keep unity in your relationships?
- How do humility and patience shape a community of love?

**Potential Additional Discussion Questions:**

- What quality from Colossians 3:12–14 do you most desire to grow in?
- How can we show compassion and kindness in everyday interactions?
- Why is forgiveness essential in all relationships—not just romantic ones?
- Which trait from 1 Corinthians 13 do you find most challenging? Why?
- How does humility affect how we handle conflict and disappointment?
- What does Ephesians 4:2–3 teach us about preserving unity?
- How can patience and gentleness be cultivated in your life?
- What does it look like to love sacrificially?
- What does it look like to show "love is patient" when someone close to you repeatedly disappoints you?
  - Can you share a time you had to choose patience instead of reacting?
- How do you practice forgiveness when the person who hurt you doesn't acknowledge the offense?
  - What boundaries or heart shifts help you live in peace?
- What is a practical way you can "clothe yourself in humility" during an argument or disagreement?
  - How do you catch yourself when pride begins to rise?

- Think about someone who is hard to love in your life right now. What would it look like to love them like Jesus this week?
  - What steps would you need to take?
- How do you repair relational trust once it's been broken, whether in marriage or friendship?
  - What does rebuilding look like beyond words?
- What routines or habits can couples or close friends develop to regularly check in and build each other up spiritually and emotionally?
  - What's worked for you or what have you seen modeled well?
- When your needs or expectations go unmet in a relationship, how do you keep from growing resentful?
  - What does healthy communication look like in that moment?
- What are some warning signs that pride, comparison, or selfishness are creeping into a relationship?
  - How can we lovingly confront or confess those tendencies?
- How can single people and married couples partner together in community to model healthy relationships and support each other?
  - What role can the Church play in fostering this unity?
- What's one character trait from this study that you want to actively grow in over the next 30 days, and what's your plan to do that?
  - How can the group help hold you accountable?

### **John 13:34-35 Commentary**

13:33–34 In a little while, Jesus would be gone and ascend to God the Father (13:33; see Acts 1:9). In light of this impending departure, He gave them a new command: Love one another (13:34). It was new because it related to what was about to happen within the family of God.

Biblical love is the decision to compassionately, responsibly, and righteously pursue the well-being of another person. It's not the same as *liking* someone. To like someone or something is to express a feeling. By contrast, loving someone may or may not have feelings connected to it. Love is a decision to seek another's best, regardless of your feelings.

13:35 Through loving one another, Jesus told them, everyone will know that you are My disciples. Notice that He didn't say everyone would recognize His disciples by how much of the Bible they knew. Knowing the Bible is essential, but knowledge means nothing



without love (see 1 Corinthians 13:1–3). A loveless Christian undermines the Gospel. Why? Because, as John says elsewhere, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). How can people come to know the God Who perfectly expresses love—both within the Trinity and to humanity—if His representatives don’t demonstrate love?

### **Colossians 3:12-14 Commentary**

3:12–14 What are some of the clothes of “the new self” that we need to wear (3:9–10)? Paul tells the Colossians what to put on: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (3:12). These are the counterparts to the dirty clothes of “the old self” (3:8–9). And over all of this, we are to put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity (3:14). If the qualities in 3:12 comprise the Christian’s new wardrobe, love is the overcoat.

One way we manifest the characteristics of the new self is by forgiving one another (3:13). Some believers harbor unforgiveness, and it results in perpetual anger and bitterness. Why? Because, as far as they’re concerned, offenses committed against them linger like unpaid bills, and they demand payment. However, they forget that our vertical relationship with God is linked with our horizontal relationships with one another.

Forgiveness does *not* mean approving a sin or excusing evil. Rather, forgiveness means releasing people from obligations incurred by their wrongs against you. This may come in the form of unilateral forgiveness—that is, forgiving someone who has not asked for forgiveness. Or it may come in the form of transactional forgiveness, which involves the confession of the offender, repentance, and reconciliation.

What makes forgiveness possible is recognizing that the Lord has forgiven you (3:13). There is an inseparable link between forgiving and recognizing that you’ve been forgiven. To refuse to forgive, in fact, is to burn a bridge over which you must cross (see Matthew 6:14–15). If you refuse to forgive, you have blocked God’s operation in your life (see Matthew 18:21–35). But when you forgive, you no longer “grieve” the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and you imitate the One Who has forgiven you.

### **1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Commentary**

13:4–7 What does love look like? Paul explains what love does and what it does not do. Biblical love is the decision (not merely a feeling) to compassionately (out of concern for someone else), righteously (based on God’s standards), and sacrificially (giving to meet a need) seek the well-being of another. Notice each of the characteristics of love: it is

patient ... kind ... not [envious] ... not arrogant ... not irritable. These things are only possible when we put others before ourselves (13:4–5). Love does not affirm someone in their sin or their false beliefs because love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth (13:6). Love does not quit; it endures through thick and thin (13:7).

### **Ephesians 4:1-3 Commentary**

4:1–2 Paul begins the second half of his letter with the word, therefore. In light of the gracious riches they have in Christ and the glorious reality of this new community called the Church, there are now accompanying responsibilities.

He urges them to walk worthy of [their] calling (4:1). They must conduct themselves in a way that reflects their new status. There must be humility and gentleness—a willingness to submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ—among them. They must have patience, bearing with one another in love (4:2), showing tolerance for others and seeking their well-being.

4:3 By living this way, they will be able to keep the unity of the Spirit. Again, unity is not sameness. We Christians maintain our God-created uniqueness but share a common vision and goal. A football team includes players with different roles, but teammates work together for the same purpose.

Notice Paul commands them to “keep” this unity, not to “establish” it. This is God’s program. The Church didn’t create the unity. God calls us to preserve what He’s already created (see 2:11–22). This unity is tied to our Christian character (4:2) and is based on the work of the Holy Spirit. If your point of reference isn’t the Spirit of God, you’ll be operating from a merely human point of view. But when you relate to people based on God’s point of view, the Spirit can override human differences and hold us together through the bond of peace. Peace—harmony where once there was conflict—will act like a belt to hold us together.

**Closing Challenge:** This week, choose one relationship you want to strengthen. Identify a way to apply one of the traits we discussed—whether it's an encouraging word, an act of service, or a step of forgiveness.

**Closing Prayer:** "Lord, thank You for being the perfect example of love. Grow these traits in us. Help us love sacrificially, forgive quickly, and pursue peace in every relationship. Strengthen the marriages, friendships, and families in this group. In Jesus' name, Amen."

## Week 5: Rooted in Community – Experience Christ’s Transformative Power

**Scripture References:** Acts 2:42–47; James 5:13–16; Romans 12:3–13; Galatians 5:13–15

**Focus:** Christian community is not just desirable, it’s essential. This week emphasizes how transformative biblical community is. True Christian community goes beyond social interaction—it invites Christ to form us through shared life, service, and spiritual unity.

**Opening Prayer:** "God, thank You for creating us for relationship. Teach us how to love and serve one another well by strengthening the bonds in this group. In Jesus’ name, Amen."

**Icebreaker:** What’s one of the most meaningful experiences you’ve had in a Christian community?"

**Recent Statistic:** Close friendships triple life satisfaction (Harvard, 2023).

**Read:** Acts 2:42–47

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

**Summary:** This passage gives us a snapshot of the consistent rhythms of the early Church—devoted to teaching, fellowship, meals, and prayer. The result? Unity, awe, generosity, and growth. This section highlights that vibrant community happens when believers prioritize God and one another.

The early Church wasn’t just a gathering—it was a family. They were devoted to teaching, prayer, meals, generosity, and worship. This is the blueprint for the New Testament community that moves in power and meets real needs.

**Illustration:**

- Community is like a campfire—one log alone won’t burn for long, but many together produce enduring warmth and light.
- Social media creates the illusion of connection but often leaves people lonelier. Real biblical community is incarnational and transformational.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What stood out to you from the early Church's example?
- How is their model different from modern Western Christianity?
- How does your group reflect the values seen in this passage?
- What's one rhythm from Acts 2:42–47 that you could pursue more intentionally?

**Read: James 5:13-16**

*Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

James ties healing not only to physical prayer but also to spiritual accountability. Confessing sins and praying for one another brings spiritual renewal. A safe, grace-filled community is essential for true transformation.

**Illustration:**

A wound heals faster when cleaned and cared for. Confession exposes what's hidden and allows God's grace to restore.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why is confession such a hard practice in today's culture?
- What's the connection between prayer, confession, and healing?
- How can we build trust in our group to foster this kind of openness?

**Read: Romans 12:3-13**

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. <sup>4</sup> For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; <sup>7</sup> if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. <sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above*

*yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

Paul urges humility, selfless love, diligence in service, and hospitality. Spiritual gifts must be activated in community. Every believer has been given gifts to be used in the body of Christ—not for personal gain, but for mutual edification. This passage teaches that unity in diversity is a mark of a healthy church.

**Illustration:**

Think of the Church like a symphony—different instruments, same song. When each plays its part, the result is beautiful harmony.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What are some of the spiritual gifts mentioned in this passage?
- What role might you play in the Church's "symphony"?
- How do spiritual gifts help strengthen community?
- What does "practicing hospitality" look like in real terms today?

**Read: Galatians 5:13-15:**

*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. <sup>14</sup> For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

Paul contrasts life in the Spirit with selfish ambition. Freedom in Christ isn't for indulgence but for loving service. Community breaks down when we "bite and devour," acting in pride rather than Spirit-led humility.

**Illustration:**

Think of a team working in unity versus players fighting each other—one wins, the other collapses. The Church should always reflect grace, not rivalry.

**Discussion Question:**

- Paul contrasts the temptation to indulge the flesh versus serving one another. How can we guard against our natural selfishness?
- What would it look like if we lived out 'loving others like we love ourselves'?
- How can we recognize and address "biting and devouring" in ourselves before it damages others?

**Potential Additional Discussion Questions:**

- How open are you with others?
- What makes it hard to be vulnerable?

- How can confession bring healing?
- What inspires you about Acts 2 community?
- What relationships in your life need more depth?
- When has spiritual community helped you?
- Biblical community is a persistent theme throughout the New Testament. What are some of the potential dangers/pitfalls of not doing life with other Christians?
- What does burden-carrying look like?
- Where do you need spiritual support now?
- What can our group do to better live this out starting today?
- How can you reach out to someone else?

### **Group Exercise**

There are more than 50 “One Another” commands that can only be lived out within the context of biblical community. What are some of those commands?

- |                                     |                      |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| • Love One Another – 15 times       | • Spur to love       |
| • Encourage – 5 times               | • Be kind            |
| • Greet – 4 times                   | • Honor              |
| • Be humble – 3 times               | • Live in harmony    |
| • Forgive – 2 times                 | • Confess            |
| • Have the mind of Christ – 2 times | • Pray               |
| • Live in peace – 2 times           | • Accept             |
| • Bear in love – 2 times            | • Instruct           |
| • Have compassion – 2 times         | • Offer hospitality  |
| • Be like minded                    | • Have equal concern |
| • Be patient                        | • Serve              |
| • Be devoted                        | • Build up           |
| • Be gentle                         | • Spur to good deeds |
| • Admonish                          | • Etc...             |

### **Acts 2:42-47 Commentary**

2:42–47 So what did the fledgling Church do? Luke says the early Church was known for four activities that should be foundational for every kingdom-minded local church. First, there was devotion to the apostles’ teaching (2:42). The Church was learning divine truth from God’s Word (only the Old Testament was written at this point, but in the years to come the apostles would be inspired by the Holy Spirit to write what would become the New Testament). You cannot grow beyond what you know. The teaching of the apostles was to give believers God’s perspective on every matter so that they could learn, obey, and experience spiritual growth and make kingdom impact.

Second, they devoted themselves to fellowship (2:42)—mutually sharing the life of Christ within the family of God. We are not to live as Lone Ranger Christians but to engage

in the life of faith together. We are called to “love one another” (John 15:12), to “carry one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2), to forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32), to “encourage one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11), and the list goes on. A disconnected Christian is a disobedient and unfruitful Christian. Each of us is an integral part of the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:12–26; Hebrews 10:23–25).

Third, the Church regularly prioritized worship, reflected in the breaking of bread (i.e., Communion or the Lord’s Supper) and prayer (2:42). Worship is the recognition and celebration of Who God is, what He has done, and what we are trusting Him to do. The Church is called to make a big deal about God because this is what He deserves.

Fourth, the Church was clearly engaged in outreach because every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (2:47). Everyone was involved in evangelism. They weren’t merely letting the apostles take care of it. All the believers were living out their faith publicly (2:44–47). Such public love, devotion, joy, ministry, and testimony convinced unbelievers to trust in Jesus Christ.

As a result of these activities, everyone in the Church was filled with awe and experiencing wonders and signs ... performed through the apostles (2:43). The Holy Spirit will cause amazing things to happen when the Church is unified in its devotion to God and to its members in fulfillment of God’s kingdom program.

### **James 5:13-18 Commentary**

5:13 If you want to gauge your spiritual life, look at the thermostat setting on your prayer life. Your knee-jerk reaction to suffering should be to pray. Likewise, if life is smooth and you are cheerful, you should sing praises (5:13). These responses acknowledge that affliction and blessing both come from the Lord, Who works through them to accomplish His purposes.

5:14 In these verses, James addresses one who is sick. The Greek word from which this is translated can mean “weak.” Thus, it can refer to any kind of weakness not just physical, but emotional and spiritual as well. Those beaten down and struggling to pray, then, can seek help from the elders—the male spiritual leadership of the Church. The oil would have been used for soothing or grooming the body (5:14; see Matthew 6:17; Luke 10:34).

5:15 We must be careful here. The verse does not say that *every* physical sickness will be healed. That would suggest we would never die. The application is wider. The elders were to express the love of Jesus tangibly through prayer, encouragement, and refreshment. The idea is that the Church should have practical ministry in place to aid members who are weak. The prayer offered in faith will provide divine encouragement in the mist of problems (5:15).

5:16–18 Suffering and sickness do not necessarily result from sin. Job, for instance, was afflicted though he didn’t sin (Job 1). Moreover, Jesus made it clear that a person can be stricken with an illness or condition that has no connection to wrongdoing (John 9:1–3). On the other hand, a sinful lifestyle *can* result in weakness and suffering. Therefore, if

needed, **confess your sins to** a trusted, spiritually mature believer (5:16). If you deal with your sin, you will see God work in your life.

God will do extraordinary things with an ordinary person who is righteous (walks with Him by faith) and makes an energized prayer (5:16). Elijah not only prayed earnestly but persistently (see 1 Kings 18:42–44), and God worked miraculously in response (5:17–18). Elijah was a human being like us (5:17), yet he knew he had a God Who is sovereign and expects His people to pray to Him. Do you? When righteous believers pray passionately, biblically, and persistently, they like Elijah can look with expectation for divine reversals in their earthly circumstances.

### **Romans 12:3-13 Commentary**

12:3 If we understand the grace given to us, our worship will overflow in service to others. Whatever abilities, skills, or resources we have, they are the grace of God. They are gifts. Paul says nobody should think of himself more highly than he should, because everything we have is a gift. You don't brag about a birthday present as if you made it and paid for it. Don't brag about the God-given gifts you have, either. On the flip side, don't disparage yourself as if God has given you nothing. God has distributed a measure of faith to each one, including you. Don't think too highly of yourself, but don't think too low either.

12:4 Paul compares the local Church to a human body, in which all the parts do not have the same function, but every part *does* function for the good of the whole. If I cut my finger off and put it in a jar, it's still technically a part of my body, but it's worthless. I'll say my point bluntly: any Christian who is not a functioning, serving member of a local church is living outside the will of God.

12:5 There are no Lone Rangers in the Christian life, because though we ... are many, God has put us together as one body in Christ. We are members of that body, not for ourselves, but for one another. Because you're a part of the body, you matter. But because you're only one part, it's not all about you.

12:6a We serve one another because of the grace given to us. The more you understand grace, the easier it is to serve others. Imagine a boy leaving his mother a note, saying, "For mowing the lawn, one dollar. For washing the dishes, one dollar. For making the bed, one dollar. You owe me, Mother, three dollars." That's works-based service in a nutshell. Now, imagine a mother leaving her own note: "For being in labor with you for sixteen hours, no charge. For staying up with you all night when you were sick, no charge. For buying you clothing and food, no charge." That's grace-based service.

12:6b–8 In the body of Christ, like the human body, each member has different gifts (12:6). Paul lists seven gifts here: prophecy (12:6), service, teaching (12:7), exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy (12:8). We know from other lists of spiritual gifts that these are just a handful of the ways God's people exercise their gifts. We also know that every Christian has at least one. If you aren't sure what yours is, start ministering, because God only hits a moving target.



12:9 Contrary to what our culture says, love is not primarily a feeling. Love is an action that meets the needs of someone else, even at personal expense. Thus, Paul says our love for one another must be without hypocrisy. The Greek word for “hypocrite” was used of an actor who wore a mask. Some of the best actors and actresses I know come to church with their masks on. They fake it when people ask them, “How are you doing?” They fake it because they’re worried that people won’t love them unless they wear a mask. Paul exhorts all of us to be the kind of community where it’s safe for people to take their masks off.

12:10 We can **love one another deeply** once we recognize that we don’t have to like someone to love them well. Love is associated with emotion, but it starts with a decision to compassionately and righteously seek the well-being of others. That decision is founded in the truth that fellow believers are our **brothers and sisters**. We are a family. God even says that we can gauge our love for the Father based on our love for our brothers and sisters (see 1 John 4:20). Just like the small gauge on a boiler indicates how full the vessel is, our love for one another indicates how full our hearts are with the love of Jesus.

12:11–12 Behind the Greek word translated fervent is the idea of boiling water. If you’re fervent in the Spirit, you’re boiling for the Kingdom of God; you’re fired up to serve the Lord (12:11). Have you ever noticed how kids, who otherwise might seem tired, get a sudden burst of energy if you offer to play some game they love? They boil over with enthusiasm because they love it.

12:13 One way we can serve God and love one another is to share with the saints in their needs and to pursue hospitality. God gave you a job, which brings you money, which pays for your house. Grace got you the house. Grace got you your car. And grace wants you to use them to help the saints. If all the doors in your life stay closed, you don’t understand hospitality—or grace.

### **Galatians 5:13-15 Commentary**

5:13 Though the Judaizers were trying to keep the Galatians in bondage, Paul tells his brothers and sisters in the faith that they were called to be free. Of course, “freedom” can be a slippery word. Many people think it means having the freedom to do whatever you want. But biblical freedom is liberty from illegitimate bondage so that you can enjoy the responsibilities of a new relationship with God and fulfill your divinely ordained purpose. Thus, the Galatians (and we) are not to use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. Fulfilling the desires of the flesh, after all, is what got us into our messes in the first place! To be a slave of sin is to be chained to your own selfish desires. Christ came to free us from this.

Spiritual freedom is not the absence of boundaries. Suppose a football player catches the ball and wants to play the game without restrictions. He proceeds to run out of bounds and into the stands to avoid being tackled. Eventually, he re-enters the stadium and crosses into the end zone from the opposite direction. He’s no longer playing football

but creating chaos. Football can only be football, in fact, when played within the boundaries of sidelines.

What, then, does Christian freedom look like? Serve one another through love. Remember: biblical love is the decision to compassionately, righteously, and sacrificially seek the well-being of another. Just as Jesus loved us, we are to love one another. For by such love everyone will know that we are His disciples (see John 13:34–35). In this way, we make Christ look good. We also foster our vertical fellowship with God when we show love in our horizontal relationship with fellow believers: “the one who remains in love remains in God” (1 John 4:16). And let’s not forget that the supreme act of *service* was rendered by Jesus Christ (see Mark 10:45); this was also the supreme act of *love* (see John 3:16). Therefore, since the Son of God served *us* through love, why would His disciples expect to do anything less?

5:14–15 Paul tells these Christians who were being tempted to submit to the law that the whole law is fulfilled in what Jesus identified as the second great commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself (5:14; see Matthew 22:35–40, quoting Leviticus 19:18). But if instead of neighbor love they chose self-love—if they chose to bite and devour one another—they were not to be surprised to find themselves consumed by one another (5:15).

When crabs are cooked, they’re placed in a pot of water. As the water temperature within the pot starts to rise, the crabs attempt to climb out, only to discover that their fellow crabs pull them back in as they likewise attempt to escape. When church members assume an “every-man-for-himself” mindset rather than a “serve-through-love” mindset, they will claw and grab one another until all are roasted in the pot.

**Closing Challenge:** This week, reach out to someone in the group and check in. Ask how you can pray for them.

**Closing Prayer:** “Lord, help us become the kind of community that brings healing and hope. Give us courage to love deeply and serve one another well. Amen.”

## Week 6: Rooted in Calling – Living for More Than a Paycheck

**Scripture References:** Jeremiah 29:4–7; Genesis 1:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12; Colossians 1:10

**Focus:** God created each of us with purpose. This session helps participants discover the connection between their identity in Christ and the calling to serve, influence, and make a kingdom impact—wherever they are.

**Opening Prayer:** "God, thank You for giving us purpose in every area of life. Show us what it means to live with calling, even in the ordinary. Amen."

**Icebreaker:** "What did you want to be when you were a kid—and why?"

### **Read: Jeremiah 29:4-7**

*This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup> Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

**Summary:** A calling isn't limited to ministry roles. Every Christian is called to live fruitfully wherever God has placed them. Whether it's your job, your home, or your school—God has purpose for you there.

God tells the exiles in Babylon to build lives of purpose right where they are—not to withdraw or wait. We're called to be ambassadors of God's kingdom wherever we've been placed—even in hard or unexpected places.

### **Illustration:**

Bloom where you're planted. Like missionaries in a foreign land, believers represent God by doing good and seeking peace where they are.

**Recent Statistic:** 70% of workers desire meaningful work (McKinsey, 2022).

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why would God tell His people to "settle in" during exile?
- What might "seeking the welfare of the city" look like for you?
- How can your work or neighborhood be a platform for your calling?

**Read: Genesis 1:28**

*God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

From the beginning, God created humans with purpose—to be fruitful, fill the earth, and steward creation. This includes not just having children but multiplying goodness, creativity, and flourishing through our work.

**Illustration:**

Think of a gardener—called to cultivate and bring life. Whether we're planting ideas, businesses, families, or ministries, we reflect the Creator.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What does "being fruitful" look like beyond having children?
- How can you bring life and order to the spaces God has given you
- How does this change the way you view your daily work?

**Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12**

*and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, <sup>12</sup> so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

Paul exhorts the Church to live quietly, mind their business, and work diligently. This kind of lifestyle earns respect and reflects Christ. Ordinary faithfulness in work and relationships is one of the most powerful testimonies.

**Illustration:**

In a noisy world of platform and influence, God often moves through steady, faithful presence.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why do you think Paul values a "quiet life"?
- What's the connection between work and Christian witness?
- How can we honor God with the jobs or responsibilities we currently have?

**Read: Colossians 1:10**

*so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,*

Paul's prayer is for believers to live lives fully pleasing to God—bearing fruit, growing in knowledge, and walking in a manner worthy of their calling. Every Christian has a divine assignment, and calling is not just for pastors or missionaries.

**Illustration:**

Think of a name badge or jersey—you represent Christ in every environment. Our calling is to make Him known wherever we go.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What differentiates a Christian from a non-Christian in the workplace?
- What would it look like to “walk worthy” of the Lord in your current season of life?

**Potential Additional Discussion Questions:**

- What do you enjoy most about work? And what do you struggle with most at work?
- How would seeing everything you do as a mission change your perspective? (Attitude, approach, motivation, focus, etc.)
- How does Jeremiah 29 apply today?
- How does God use ordinary work?
- Do you think God the Father was less pleased with Jesus during His 30 years of preparation (growing up doing carpentry work) than His three years of public ministry? Explain.
- How are your gifts used in your work?
- What does a faithful worker look like?
- Who in your workplace needs Jesus?
- What might God be doing through your work?
- What support would help you live your calling?
- How can we pray for each other's work?

**Colossians 1:9-10 Commentary**

1:9–10 When God wanted to explain what knowing Him would produce in the lives of Christians, He used the word *fruit*. Fruit has three characteristics: it is visible; it reflects the nature of the tree it grows on; and it exists for someone else's benefit. God is concerned that what we produce is in keeping with Who He is—that the products of our lives are consistent with our biblically grounded experience with Him. Sometimes, though, when we look over our lives, we'll see rotten fruit. That should concern us, too.

Paul never stopped praying for the spiritual growth of the Church in Colossae (1:9). He connects bearing good fruit with the knowledge of God (1:10). This is experiential knowledge, not just informational. When Adam *knew* Eve, she conceived; that intimacy produced fruit. Paul asks the Lord that the Colossians would have the wisdom to make

biblically based decisions that come from knowing God's will (1:9). Then he prays that the walk of their Christian life (how they live) would result in every good work (1:10). The product of all of this is *fruitfulness*, having a useful Christian life that positively affects the lives of others. Based on our experience with Him, God produces something in our life that is beautiful, enjoyable, and useful.

Most of us want to bear good fruit. The problem is that though many Christians hear about God and carry His Book around, they're not really getting to know Him, not really experiencing Him. To bear fruit, which is contributing to the development of Christ-like character in the discipleship of others, we need to be grafted into "the true vine" (Christ), to be lifted up out of the dirt, to set aside our diversions, and to "remain" in Christ (John 15:1–8). You don't just visit God for two hours on Sunday; you talk to Him all the time, threading the discussion through all your activities. While you're walking or while you're driving, "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do" (1 Corinthians 10:31), stay plugged in. You don't need a *microwave* experience with God; you need a *crockpot* experience with Him. Simmer in His presence and impact the lives of others with the impact the Lord has on you.

### **Jeremiah 29:4-7 Commentary**

29:4 The first thing the exiles needed to learn was that the Babylonians were not to blame for their captivity. In the grand scheme of things, *God* had deported them to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was merely the instrument God used to punish them for their sins. God's message through Jeremiah here was essentially this: "You're in this mess because I sent you there. And I sent you there because you forgot Me." It was their failure to be God's distinct people who worshiped Him alone that caused God to judge them.

29:5–6 God's agenda for the exiles covered everything from their employment to building their families. Hananiah had led the people to believe they would return home soon (28:11), as if they didn't need to do anything. But God told them, build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. Find wives for yourselves and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons and give your daughters to men in marriage so that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, do not decrease.

As it was with the Babylonian exiles, so it is with Christians today. We need to prepare to do life because we might be here for a while. God wanted His people to establish a kingdom presence in exile. Building houses and planting gardens suggests ownership, a key element of a kingdom economic strategy. And ownership always requires some sort of investment. God told the exiles that while they were waiting for a better *tomorrow*, they were to be industrious *today*.

The exiles of Judah needed to understand that the Babylonians were not their problem; God was. And if God is your problem, then God is your only solution. It doesn't matter whom we elect or what programs we start if we lose our spiritual perspective. We must see that God put us here for a reason. Earth is not merely a place to wait for a ride to Heaven. It's where we live out God's Kingdom agenda in history.

29:7–9 Pursue the well-being of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the *LORD* on its behalf, for when it thrives, you will thrive implies that God didn't want the Jews to build walls around their homes and create a Jewish subculture within Babylon to shield themselves from the pagans. One reason the wheels are coming off our culture morally, is that for too many years, Christians have secluded themselves within their churches. We have abandoned the culture to Satan. But God's message is to pursue the good of the culture in which we live—not necessarily the so-called good that the culture wants but the good it needs. We are to pursue the social and spiritual wellbeing of the community where we live, work, and raise families, which will result in improved lives for us.

### **Genesis 1:226-30 Commentary**

1:26–30 The end of day six breaks the pattern. Until this point, God had simply spoken and the created world sprang into being. But here God demonstrated His creative genius with His crowning achievement: Let Us make man in Our image, visibly mirroring God's spiritual nature, according to Our likeness, visibly mirroring God's functional actions (1:26). "Let Us" is a hint at the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit agreed together to make the first human family, and that family was supposed to reflect truths about God. Like the Trinity, humanity has unity in diversity. God ... created him [that is, humans] in the image of God (1:27), so every human reflects the unity of God. But He also created them male and female (1:27), so our differences reflect the diversity of the Trinity too, since we were designed to mirror the Creator. This also lays the groundwork for upholding the importance of heterosexual marriage as the foundation of the family in fulfilling God's kingdom agenda in history.

God created man with a threefold purpose in history: to represent God's person and image, to rule on God's behalf, and to reproduce God's presence throughout the earth. These purposes are accomplished when His people maintain fellowship with Him and submit to His will, as He governs the world in which He has placed us.

The more we image-bearers reproduce and fill the earth, the more His image goes out. Just as God handed over responsibility to the sun, so that it would shine *for God*, God handed over responsibility to us, so that we would govern and rule and steward His world *for Him*. This is God's world, but He's put it in our hands and said, "Let them rule."

Notably, God's promise of blessing followed man's fulfillment of this dominion mandate. Thus, failure to do so robs mankind of the experience of God's favor. We must also note that while man was given the authority to rule over creation, that didn't include ruling over other people.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 Commentary**

4:11 Evidently, some of the Thessalonians had gotten so excited about Jesus's return that they had quit their jobs. But Paul reminds them to work with [their] own hands, because their laziness had become a liability to their friends and neighbors. Waiting expectantly for Jesus's return does not mean that we stop working and sit around doing nothing, wasting time until the rapture. It means we work *differently*, looking to Jesus (and not our work) for our hope.

**Closing Challenge:** Write down one way you can serve others through your work this week and do it with joy.

**Closing Prayer:** "Jesus, thank You for giving us purpose beyond a paycheck. Help us to work as unto You and bring light to the places You've sent us. Amen."



## Week 7: Rooted in Simplicity – Choosing Contentment Over Consumption

Scripture References: Luke 12:22–34; Hebrews 13:5–6; Proverbs 30:8–9; Philippians 4:11–13

**Focus:** In a world chasing more, Jesus invites us to a life of contentment. This session challenges participants to trust God as provider and embrace simplicity and gratitude.

**Opening Prayer:** "Lord, teach us the beauty of contentment. Free us from comparison, worry, and materialism. Help us find our sufficiency in You. Amen."

**Icebreaker:** "What's one possession you could easily give up? What possession would be hard to let go of, even though it demands a lot of you?"

### **Read: Luke 12:22–34**

*Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! <sup>25</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? <sup>26</sup> Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"*

*<sup>27</sup> "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. <sup>30</sup> For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.*

*<sup>32</sup> "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

**Teaching Summary:** Contentment is found not in having more, but in needing less. Trust in God replaces anxiety and our desires will shift. When we seek His Kingdom first, everything else falls into place.

Jesus tells His disciples not to worry about food or clothing, because the Father knows their needs. Anxiety often stems from misplaced priorities. When we seek God's Kingdom first, He takes care of the rest.

**Illustrations:**

- Birds don't store up in barns, yet they're fed. Worry doesn't add to your life—it subtracts peace.
- The Minimalist movement shows a hunger for peace through less clutter. God offers something deeper: contentment in Him. The reality is that the more we have, the more we must take care of (time, attention, resources, etc...) which naturally limits your availability to Kingdom priorities.

**Recent Statistic:** Americans average 300,000 items in homes (LA Times).

**Discussion Questions:**

- What do you tend to worry about most when it comes to “having enough”?
- How does this passage challenge our view of what is essential?
- What does it look like to “seek first the Kingdom” in practical terms?

**Read: Hebrews 13:5-6**

*Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” <sup>6</sup> So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”*

The writer of Hebrews links contentment to God's promise: “I will never leave you.” True security is not in wealth but in the presence of God.

**Illustration:**

Imagine two people in a storm—one in a secure shelter, the other in a mansion with no foundation. Contentment isn't about how much you have, but what (or Who) you trust.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why is God's presence the foundation for our contentment?
- How do we fight the cultural pressure to always want more?
- What's one way to build habits of gratitude?

**Read: Proverbs 30:8-9**

*Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. <sup>9</sup> Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal and so dishonor the name of my God.*

Agur prays for neither riches nor poverty—just daily provision. This prayer shows a desire to remain dependent on God. Both extremes can pull us away from the Lord.

**Illustration:**

A thermostat keeps a home from overheating or freezing. Simplicity in life works the same way—it helps maintain spiritual balance.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why is this prayer a rare one in our culture today?
- What temptations come with both too much and too little?
- How do we practice dependence without falling into complacency?

**Read: Philippians 4:11-13**

*I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

Paul says he's learned to be content in every situation. The secret? Christ's strength. Contentment is cultivated, not automatic. It grows as we trust Christ more deeply.

**Illustration:**

Like a tree that can thrive in drought or rain, contentment isn't tied to circumstances, but to roots that go deep.

**Discussion Question:**

- How does contentment challenge today's culture?
- How does comparison fuel materialism?
- What does it look like to learn contentment in your current season?

**Potential Additional Discussion Questions:**

- What does it mean to live simply and trust God?
- How does our relationship with God impact our contentment?
- What causes you the most financial anxiety?
- Do your finances reflect or determine your values? Explain
- How can we avoid the trap of comparison?
- What does Proverbs 30:8–9 teach about balance?
- When have you experienced being content with less?
- How can generosity help grow contentment?
- What's one area where God might be asking you to simplify?
- How can we encourage each other in this area?

- What does it mean to seek the Kingdom first?
- Does simple/frugal living mean we should live as cheap as possible? Explain.
  - No. Frugal spending decreases debt and moves us toward financial margin. Frugality with our time means learning to say no to some things so we can say yes to others. Until we can create margin, generosity will be impossible.

### **Luke 12:22-34 Commentary**

12:22–26 Jesus explained to His disciples that it's foolish to be anxious about food and clothing because life consists of more than these things (12:22–23). The disciples were more valuable than unclean birds that God feeds and cares for. How much more will He take care of His own children who trust Him? (12:24). Worrying is foolish because it cannot bring about change to your situation. Think of it as a rocking chair: it will get you moving, but it can't take you anywhere. You can't add a single second to your lifespan by worrying (12:25). If you can't accomplish something so minuscule, why worry about the big stuff (12:26)?

12:27–32 Like the birds of the air (12:24), wildflowers don't worry. Yet God cares for this simple aspect of His creation. And He is much more inclined to care for you (12:27–28). Another reason that worrying is foolish is because the Gentiles are anxious about the things of life. It's one thing for unbelievers to worry, but believers who trust in a heavenly Father should not be filled with anxiety (12:29–30). Instead, Christ's disciples have access to the spiritual realm when they prioritize the Kingdom of God (12:31), with its promises and provisions, because the Kingdom is the divine rule. As defenseless as His children are in the world, it would be the Father's joy to give them (the little flock) Kingdom covering (12:32).

12:33–34 The disciples were to divest themselves of anything that would prohibit the pursuit of the Kingdom and its priorities (12:33). They were to pursue spiritual treasures above physical ones. When we value Heaven more than earth, we build and protect true wealth that's unlike treasure accumulated here that is subject to decay and theft (12:33). The heart follows treasures and not vice versa. Wherever you want your heart to be, put your treasure there; your heart will follow it (12:34).

### **Hebrews 13:5-6 Commentary**

13:4–6 The next two subjects the author touches on are marriage and money. Most of the friction and frustration that people experience in life have to do with one or both issues. Therefore, believers should set themselves apart from the world through their marital unions and attitudes toward finances. For example, Christians are to respect and celebrate the institution of marriage between one man and one woman because it is God's creation order (see Matt 19:4–6). One way this is accomplished is through honoring

the marriage bed—that is, through maintaining godly sexual morality and fidelity in marriage (13:4).

Furthermore, believers should seek to be free from the love of money (see 1 Timothy 6:10). It's not that money itself is bad or that earning is bad. Rather, the *love* of money leads to character corruption like greed, covetousness, and discontentment. Managing money is a theological issue. To be satisfied with what you have (13:5), you must trust in the Lord's promise that He will never leave you or abandon you. When you believe that, you can declare boldly, The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? (13:6). A Christian who fears the Lord and not people is free and unstoppable.

### **Proverbs 30:7-9 Commentary**

30:7–9 Here's a Kingdom-minded attitude that will spare you a lifetime of worry: Give me neither poverty nor wealth; feed me with the food I need. Otherwise, I might have too much and deny you, saying, "Who is the *LORD*?" or I might have nothing and steal, profaning the name of my God (30:8–9). Neither poverty nor wealth offer safety from sin. We need to keep material things in their proper perspective and ask God to meet our needs so we can keep our focus where it ought to be.

### **Philippians 4:11-13 Commentary**

4:11–12 Paul had learned to be content in whatever circumstances he found himself (4:11). Whether he had much or little, he had learned the secret of being content (4:12). *Contentment* means being satisfied and at rest with where God has you, despite what's happening around you. It's not natural or automatic; it must be learned. God teaches us contentment through the ups and downs of changing circumstances. He wants us to learn to depend on Him and His divine enablement no matter what happens to us or around us. As we grow in our understanding and experience of His providence, we will also grow in our level of contentment.

4:13–14 Paul confesses, I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me (4:13). The secret of Paul's contentment, then, is the infusion of strength he gets when he can't go any further. Many times, it seems that God doesn't come through for us until we can't take one more step. Then He provides at just the right time—as He did for Paul through the generosity of the Philippians (4:14). The lesson of contentment is most effectively learned during times of suffering need.

**Closing Challenge:** Choose one area this week to simplify—your schedule, spending, or space—and pray over that decision.

**Closing Prayer:** "God, thank You that we lack nothing in You. Help us to release what we cling to and embrace the joy of contentment. Amen."



## Week 8: Rooted in Mission – Fulfilling God’s Purpose for Your Life

**Scripture References:** 1 Peter 3:13–17; Matthew 9:36–38; Romans 1:16; Colossians 4:2–6

**Focus:** Christ has called us to more than just belief—He’s called us to represent Him in the world. This session helps participants understand and embrace their role as ambassadors of the Gospel in everyday life.

**Opening Prayer:** "Lord, stir in us a heart for the lost. Give us courage, wisdom, and love as we consider how to live on mission for You. Amen."

**Icebreaker:** "Outside of church, when was the last time you had a spiritual conversation with someone? What made it meaningful or difficult?"

### **Read: 1 Peter 3:13–17**

*Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threat; do not be frightened." <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

**Teaching Summary:** This passage reminds us that evangelism isn’t about having all the answers—it’s about having a heart that’s available. Peter tells us to be ready to explain our hope with gentleness and respect.

Peter encourages believers to be prepared to give a defense for their hope—with gentleness and respect—even when facing opposition. Our bold witness comes not from arrogance, but from confidence in Christ.

### **Illustration:**

Think of yourself as a lighthouse—shining not because the night is dark, but because you’re anchored in something solid.

### **Recent Statistics:**

- 60% of unchurched people would talk about faith if asked respectfully. (Barna, 2023)
- Only 52% of “practicing Christians” (people attend church at least monthly and say that faith is very important to them) strongly agree that they have a personal responsibility to share the Gospel. (Barna, 2023)

- 82% of unchurched individuals would “likely” attend church if invited by a friend. (Lifeway, 2023)

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- What fears hold you back from sharing your faith?
- What does it mean to give an answer “with gentleness and respect”?
- How can we prepare ourselves to be ready in everyday conversations?

#### **Read: Matthew 9:36-38**

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

Jesus sees the crowds and is moved with compassion. He challenges His disciples to pray for laborers in the harvest. Evangelism starts with seeing people the way God sees them.

#### **Illustration:**

Imagine a massive harvest field ready to be gathered—but not enough hands. The opportunity is great; the call is urgent.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- Who in your life is “harassed and helpless” like the sheep Jesus saw?
- What does it look like to be an answer to the prayer for laborers?
- How can we cultivate compassion instead of judgment?

#### **Read: Romans 1:16**

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

Paul declares unashamed confidence in the Gospel’s power to save. Evangelism isn’t about cleverness—it’s about bold trust in God’s power to transform hearts.

#### **Illustration:**

Sharing the Gospel is like offering a life preserver to someone drowning. You don’t need eloquence—just urgency and love.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why might Christians be tempted to hide or soften their faith?
- How can we reclaim boldness in a culture that often resists truth?

#### **Read: Colossians 4:2-6**



*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. <sup>3</sup> And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. <sup>5</sup> Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Paul urges believers to be watchful, thankful, and wise—making the most of every opportunity to speak with grace and clarity. Mission-mindedness requires both prayer and presence.

**Illustration:**

Think of your daily routine; each interaction is a potential divine appointment.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What opportunities for Gospel conversations exist in your life right now?
- How can you pray intentionally for open doors and bold speech?

**Potential Additional Discussion Questions:**

- What holds you back from sharing your faith?
  - Take time to discuss each concern considering the promises and commands in scripture.
- Who has God placed in your life who needs Him?
- What does it mean to share the Gospel with love and respect?
- How does your daily life reflect Jesus?
- What role does prayer play in evangelism?
- What can you do to start spiritual conversations naturally?
- How do you prepare your heart to be a witness?
- What does Romans 1:16 teach about boldness?
- How does living on mission impact your priorities?
- How can we support each other in this mission?
- Have you had any spiritual conversations lately? If so, how did it go?
- How can the Holy Spirit help you share more boldly?

**1 Peter 3:13-17 Commentary**

3:13–16 Peter lays down a principle for his readers: in general, if you are devoted to what is good, no one will harm you (3:13). But even if you suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. God has you covered either way, so do not fear (3:14). Whatever response you receive from the world, be ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you (3:15). Christians must be a strong witness for Jesus with their lives so that they have opportunity to be a strong witness for Jesus with their words. God is not looking for spectators but “players” who live for their King with

righteousness and then give testimony about Him with gentleness and reverence (3:16). It's key that our message is one filled with the offer of hope. However, our hope must be communicated with the proper tone—not one of anger or resentment (Colossians 4:5–6).

3:17–22 In this fallen world, all people suffer. But it is better to suffer for doing good—if God wills it—than for doing evil (3:17; see 2:19–20). Again, Peter reminds them (see 2:21–25) that Christ is their supreme example of godly suffering. He suffered for sins—your sins and mine—to bring [us] to God (3:18). He visited the devil and his followers in the spiritual realm and proclaimed His victory over them (3:19). Then He was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him (3:22). And if you know Christ, you were raised with Him (see Ephesians 2:6). Your present suffering doesn't compare to the victory you have, and will have, through Christ.

Jesus spiritually spoke through Noah offering salvation to humanity as he built the ark, but only Noah and his family responded (3:20). The ark provided salvation and deliverance from judgment. Similarly, the believers to whom Peter was writing would be brought to safety through God's judgment by being united to Christ, the New Testament ark of safety. Deliverance does not come through water baptism but by testifying of entering the ark of safety (i.e., Jesus Christ), which is the basis of spiritual baptism (3:21; see Romans 6:1–7). Jesus now sits at the right hand of God where all authorities, human and divine, are subject to His control.

### **Matthew 9:36–38 Commentary**

9:35–37 As he did earlier (4:23), Matthew emphasizes Jesus's ministry of teaching ... preaching ... healing throughout the towns (9:35). Jesus had deep sympathy for the spiritual condition of the people. They had no spiritual guidance. They were sheep without a shepherd (9:36). There was a need for spiritual workers. While the harvest of souls was abundant, few workers were available to do anything about it. Therefore, He called His disciples—including us—to pray for the recruitment of Kingdom-minded workers (9:37).

### **Romans 1:16 Commentary**

1:16 Paul knows how to keep first things first: I am not ashamed of the Gospel. That should convict us. Though we say we believe the Gospel, in truth many of us *are* ashamed of it. Why? Because we don't really believe what Paul believed that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation. This salvation is not merely for deliverance from hell but also for the deliverance of believers from the temporal wrath of God against sin (1:18). If we're ashamed to share the Gospel, it's because we do not understand the power embedded in it. But how can you be ashamed of something with so much firepower? If you believe that the Gospel has power not only to save sinners but also to give victory to saints, you won't be ashamed of it.

### **Colossians 4:2-6 Commentary**

4:2 Paul urges the Colossians to pray. Christians must take prayer seriously and not casually. Like a lookout watching for the enemy, we must stay alert in prayer. A believer who is outfitted with “the full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11–17) but refuses to “pray” (Ephesians 6:18) is like a front-line soldier outfitted with the best weapons technology and protective gear but who has no communication with his command authority. He won’t last long.

4:3–6 Paul also requests prayer for the sake of his own Gospel ministry (4:3). This is a reminder that Christians must pray for pastors, missionaries, and themselves—that God would open doors with unbelievers so that they will hear the mystery of Christ (4:3). Behave wisely regarding non-believers (4:5), and don’t waste opportunities to share the Gospel. Combine tact with spice. Our witness should be crafted for each person in his unique situation (4:6) so that the Gospel message is applied rightly to those who need to know about the Christian faith.

**Closing Challenge:** Ask God to show you one person this week to serve, love, or invite into a spiritual conversation. Come back next week ready to share how the interaction went!

**Closing Prayer:** "Jesus, thank You for entrusting us with Your message. Empower us through Your Spirit to live on mission with boldness, humility, and love. Amen."