



Deep Dive

Questions About God

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Saint Anselm famously described God as, “The being than which no greater being can be conceived.”¹ This way of thinking about God has been used for centuries to help people consider God’s power—an omnipotent God is greater than a weak one. It has been used to help people think about God’s existence—a real God is better than an imaginary one. This idea can also help us be more comfortable with our questions about God—a God who permits, even invites, the questions of his creations is greater than one who would dismiss those who ask about how and why he works.

And God does let us wonder how it all fits together. All over his Word we see that it’s okay to ask. Job questioned God’s justice. King David questioned His presence and love. Thomas questioned His resurrection. And Nicodemus voiced what we’ve all felt at one point or another when thinking about God: “How can these things be?”

But God can handle our questions. He is wise, and has all the answers. He is powerful, and can take our concerns. He is real, and wants us to experience him.

So, we should ask about the things that are hard to understand, and in this study, we are going to consider several of the most significant questions related to the Christian faith. We will wrestle with difficult concepts like evil, hell, and the exclusivity of the gospel. And we will find a deeper understanding of beautiful truths like the resurrection of the body, the authority of the Bible, and the existence of God. I hope you will ask the Lord to encourage your heart and build up your faith during this study. I pray you will read his Word, see his character, understand him better, and love him more.

God can handle our questions. And the answers to those questions will lead us into a deeper relationship with him.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN THIS JOURNEY

How would you rate your comfort level with talking about God? (1 = lowest, 10 = highest)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why did you rate yourself in this way?

How often do you wrestle with questions about God? (1 = never, 10 = constantly)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why did you rate yourself in this way?

What do you hope to gain from this Deep Dive course?

**Prayerfully engage with the readings before coming to class each week
for the Deep Dive teaching and group discussion.**

DAY 1

JESUS IS THE UNCAUSED CAUSER



There used to be nothing but God. The oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was the only community there was.

Think about that...

Before TikTok, we had Facebook. Before Facebook, there was Myspace. Before Myspace, real people sat in air-conditioned houses, and had face-to-face conversations. Before that, the same thing happened, minus the air conditioning. Before that, the same thing, minus the houses. And before that, Adam and Eve stood in a garden for a conversation about fruit.

But before that... nothing. There was nothing but God. That means, once upon a time, there were no social media platforms, no AC units, no homes, no humans, no fruit, no anything. There was only an all-powerful, triune God experiencing the joy of community with himself. And then everything else came from him.

Read John 1:1-5.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

**Of all the things God created in the natural world, what do you find most beautiful?
What do you find most impressive?**

Who is “the Word” in verse 1?

Why is it important that Jesus was involved in creating the world?

Jesus, the Word, was not only there in the beginning, He was the creative force for everything that came after him. Once, Jesus was all there was, and now all there is, is because of him. It is powerful for us to understand that the one who saves us (Romans 6:23) and sustains us (Hebrews 1:3) is also the one who made us. Jesus has been called the Uncaused Causer who didn't just make things and move on. Rather, he moved in to protect what he'd made. The power that created everything out of nothing is the power that redeems our hearts and redirects our lives.

Read John 1:10-14.

10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Is there a phrase in these five verses that encourages you? Write that down.

What are the benefits of being the children of the Uncaused Causer of everything?

How have you observed the glory of Jesus?

Spend a few minutes praying and worshipping Jesus for these things before you end your time today.

DAY 2

JESUS IS THE GREAT DESIGNER

I'm not great with playdough. I have three young daughters, meaning I've had hours of experience working with playdough, trying to make things that will impress them. It has literally never happened. My lack of creative skills and obviously limited dexterity means I have blown my kids minds exactly zero times in the playdough arena. That means you can give me material made for making things and still I won't turn out a beautiful or impressive design. Not even something a six-year-old will appreciate. It's a little sad, really.

Contrast my playdough problem with the Great Designer of the Universe. Jesus, who we learned yesterday made all things in the beginning, had nothing to work with but his own power and thoughts, and from that he designed everything there is. It's one of the most shocking miracles we can consider. We fumble around making misshapen pizzas out of playdough while God made growing, regenerating, human skin and everything else, out of nothing at all. It's amazing.

Read Genesis 1:1-13

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

6 And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." 7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

How do we know the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were involved in making and designing the universe?

How did God describe what he made?

Where do you see goodness in the way God designed the world?

As we discussed in our session this week, there are at least 10 quadrillion vigintillion atoms in the universe. Remember, a vigintillion is a 1 followed by 63 zeros. That's basically a nonsense number to us. But there are 10 quadrillion vigintillion atoms in the universe that all fit together to make gorgeous sunsets and delicious chicken sandwiches, and even playdough. There is a Universe Designer who has made our world with so much beauty and so much opportunity for joy. We see his goodness in so many places when we look for it.

Read Genesis 1:26-31

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

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

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."

29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

We are made in God's image. What are some of the ways we are designed differently than the rest of God's creation?

List the blessings you see in these verses that God intended for His people.

Is there something in your life right now that you know God did not design for you? Pray that God will help you live the way he designed you to live and experience the goodness he made you to know.



DAY 3

JESUS IS THE RIGHTEOUS STANDARD

As people, we can't really fathom perfection. We experience everything in life through our own brokenness, in a broken world, meaning we don't really have a way of understanding "perfect."

A "perfect game" in baseball means a pitcher got through it with no hits or walks. Still though, he could make dozens of bad throws and we'd still call it "perfect." It is an imperfect definition of perfection.

You've no doubt said something like, "That meal was perfect," but what you really meant was "That meal was delicious, even though it could give me a heart attack." A meal that harms isn't perfect.

Yesterday, I went to Disney for the first time with my family and we said it was "perfect." I got into a brief but passionate argument with my wife about a person in a penguin suit and we were all so sore we could barely walk when we got home. Still, it was about as "perfect" a day as I've ever had, which says more about the human notion of perfection than it does about Disney.

Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". A few verses earlier (v.12), it is even harsher. "All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one."

Naturally, we only know imperfection, worthlessness, and unrighteousness. That is, until we know Jesus.

Read Hebrews 7:22-28

22 Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.

23 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; 24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

26 Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

What are the reasons Jesus is the kind of priest we need?

Which of those descriptions impacts you most right now? Why?

Jesus, unlike the people He loves and interceded for, is holy, innocent, undefiled, set apart, and exalted. He is able to save completely. He is the one-time, perfect sacrifice that we needed in order to be made right with God.

Much like the “perfect” baseball game, the sacrificial system prior to Jesus had an imperfect definition of perfection. The lambs were “spotless,” but they were still just animals. The sacrificial tools were purified, but they were still only metal and wood. But Jesus came, as the true Righteous Standard, to be both the priest and the sacrifice we needed.

Read verse 25 again. How do you need Jesus to intercede for you at this moment?

Close out your time thanking Jesus for his perfection, and for giving you his righteousness through the cross. Ask him to help you to live in the righteousness he’s provided for you.

DAY 4

JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE GLORY OF GOD

What is the most powerful thing you've ever experienced?

If your answer is "Fireworks," you need to move around more. If your answer is, "A passenger plane taking off," I will allow it. Also, I asked my 10-year-old that question and she answered, "YOU'RE pretty strong," and I need you to know that.

But, chances are, if your answer is more powerful than fireworks, planes, or a 10-year-old's dad, then you have experienced something dangerous, or even deadly - a tornado, hurricane, bomb, etc. The most powerful things in our life are often things of death. With one major exception...

If you have a relationship with God through Jesus, the biggest display of power you have experienced is the power of the knowledge of the glory of God exploding to life in your heart.

The Bible says you were spiritually dead, spiritually blind, spiritually broken, and spiritually lost, all at once. It was full darkness and death for you until the same power that invented the sun burst into your heart with a staggering understanding of the incomparable beauty of God that brought you to life, gave you sight, made you whole, and found you a home. All at once, what you could never do happened to you with the same power by which the world was made. God said to your heart, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

List a few ways in which you have been shown mercy.

How does “the god of this age” blind the minds of unbelievers?

What is your favorite thing you know about God’s glory?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

Reflect on a way that God has used His power through you in the past? Why do you think God worked through you in that way?

What does it mean to have the life of Jesus displayed in your body?

We are afflicted, but not crushed. We are perplexed, but not in despair. And when we are tempted to despair, we should remember the reality of what has happened to us. Our eyes have been opened to the most beautiful thing in the world - the gospel. Our hearts have been opened to the most powerful power in the world - the creative force of God. Our bodies have been opened to the most wonderful person in the world - Jesus is displayed in us. When we have experienced this, we have experienced God.

Spend a few minutes thanking God for shining into your heart the knowledge of his glory in Jesus. Ask him to help you not despair, but to see his power at work through you.

Day 5

JESUS IS THE BEST THING THAT HAS EVER HAPPENED TO US

When I was thirteen, my grandma was dying of cancer, and because she knew it was likely her last Christmas, she and my grandpa got me everything I'd ever mentioned I might want. I mean, the presents just kept coming that morning. Toy after toy. Gear for every sport. Musical instruments. And finally, a Super Nintendo. She wanted to see me unwrap everything, so she gave me everything. I think of that Christmas morning often when I think about Romans 5. The list of gifts we get when we are rescued by Christ is insane. And, unlike my one crazy Christmas, His gifts are gifts you can't get anywhere else, from anyone else.

Read Romans 5:1-5

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

What does it mean to be justified by faith?

When Jesus justifies us, he makes us right with God through his work instead of ours. His life and death and righteousness are counted as ours so that we can be restored to God as his children and heirs.

Which of the gifts in these verses do you most want to experience right now?

What are some of the gifts you have, because you are in Christ, that are not listed in these verses?

Read Romans 5:6-10

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Try to write the main idea of these verses in your own words.

We don't often think about being God's enemies, but that is what we were. We weren't simply ambivalent toward God, we were hostile. We didn't just ignore him, we hated him. But, the beauty of the gospel is that while we were hating God, He was loving us. While we despised him, he worked to rescue us. And he did more than rescue us... he loaded us down with gift after gift after gift of grace.

Read verses 1-5 again, thanking God for being the best thing that has ever happened to you and asking him to help you live deeply satisfied by the gifts he has given you.

DAY 1

THE BIBLE IS ALIVE



The Bible is a miracle. As we learned in our session, how God gave us the Bible is supernatural. How God preserved the Bible is supernatural. But the Bible's existence isn't the only miracle, the Bible's activity is miraculous as well.

Read Hebrews 4:12-13

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. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

What does it mean that the Bible is living?

What does it mean that the Bible is effective?

If you haven't thought about this in a while, just look back at the words in the verses above. Those words are alive. Those words are active. Those words are interactive. And that is where the big difference lies between God's Word and all other works. God's Word isn't just something we can read about, it is something we can experience. Something people have been experiencing for centuries upon centuries. The Bible, because it is breathed out by God himself, is a supernaturally active book that changes us.

We know the Bible is breathed out by God when God uses it to breathe into us. We know the Bible is living when it speaks to us. We know the Bible is active when it acts within us. We know the Bible is sharp and powerful when it pierces our hearts and changes us in joyous ways that can only be described as supernatural.

How should the nature of God's Word shape how you use it?

I've led small group discussions for years, and there have been so many times when I've said something and then thought, "Ok, that might have been good. People are nodding." Then, someone follows behind me and says something like, "You know, that's what Paul meant when he said..." and then they quote a verse of Scripture, and God's Word just jolts the group and it is tangible. The response is often visible and audible. The Bible is living and active and it's words do things our words can't do. That should encourage us to memorize God's Word. That should motivate us to speak it out loud to each other. To share it with each other.

What is a verse or passage of scripture you can memorize this week?

Who is someone you can share God's living and active Word with this week?



DAY 2

THE BIBLE IS A SEED

My wife and I have called ourselves failed farmers for years. Five years ago, we bought a hobby farm, excited about all the natuery things we would experience – chickens laying eggs, cows giving milk, gardens overflowing with veggies and fruit. It turns out those things are almost impossible to experience. Cows cost a fortune and after you buy them, you work for them. Every creature God has made loves to eat chicken. And gardens, in my experience, are a labor-intensive education in futility. So, we never got the cows, our chickens were carried off by racoons, and the garden became a weedy, mostly barren patch of ground with a few stunted plants that the deer ended up eating before we could.

Failed farmers. That’s because the ground is hard, and the work is hard, and there are so many ways a farm can go wrong. The same thing is true with our faith. As we discussed in our session this week, God wants to speak to us, and we are capable of receiving his revelation, but it isn’t automatic. There are things inside and outside our hearts that hope to keep us from the fruitful life God’s Word intends for us.

Read Luke 8:4-8

4 While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: 5 “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. 6 Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”

When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

What does verse 5 look like in our culture?

What fruit have you seen the seed of God’s Word grow in your life?

Read Luke 8:9-15

9 His disciples asked him what this parable meant. 10 He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,

*" 'though seeing, they may not see;
though hearing, they may not understand.'*

11 "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. 12 Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. 14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. 15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Why does Jesus speak in parables, such as this one?

Verse 10 is pretty heart-breaking. "Looking they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." Jesus taught in parables because he knew many people weren't paying attention, and didn't want to pay attention. Parables have frequently been called, "Earthly stories with heavenly meanings." Anyone looking for heaven can seek to understand the message of Jesus, and hear the truth. Anyone looking only for earth, will find only earth in the stories of God. In this passage, those listening with their ears and eyes closed would have simply heard an explanation of the difficulties of farming. But Jesus wanted to be sure his followers heard the truth - that God's Word in a soft heart bears good fruit.

How can you prepare your heart to receive God's Word in a way that produces fruit?

Read John 15:3-5.

3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "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.

Spend time thanking God for making it possible for you to abide in him through the work of Jesus. Ask him to help you joyfully bear fruit as you remain in Jesus.



DAY 3

THE BIBLE IS MILK

Read 1 Peter 1:22-25

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For,

*“All people are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,
25 but the word of the Lord endures forever.”*

And this is the word that was preached to you.

In one or two sentences, what is the gospel that was proclaimed to you?

Which words in these verses speak to the permanence of God's Word?

In these verses we read that God's Word is truth. It is imperishable, enduring, and forever. This is so unlike everything else in our lives. Verse 21 says, “The grass withers, and the flower falls,” but that's true of all things we experience. We cannot keep our things, our bodies, or the people we love. And we know this. Peter was writing to human beings, and deep down human beings know that nothing in our lives is enduring. Nothing in our lives can last. But... “You have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God.”

Read 1 Peter 2:1-3

1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Why does the Bible give us commands like verse 1?

One of the reasons that we should desire God's Word is that we experience God's wisdom through his Word. It helps us grow up into salvation, meaning that when God's Word tells us to rid ourselves of things, it is always for the best. A list such as the one we see in verse one is a list of things that will hurt us and those around us. God restricts the things that harm us. God wants it to be well with us. He wants what is good for us, and he commands us accordingly.

Why do babies desire milk?

When God tells us to rid ourselves of something like He does in verse one, it is tied to the fact that He is good, like we see in verse 3. And that helps us understand the command in verse 2. We're told to desire the pure milk of the Word like a newborn baby.

Peter is writing to Christians who were already mature enough in the Lord to be suffering for Him while scattered abroad. Peter is writing to believers, not just new believers. So, the phrase "newborn baby" isn't teaching us how long to desire the pure milk of the Word, but how intensely. We are not like newborn babies in that we grow out of desiring the Word. We are like newborn babies in that we are desperate for the Word because we know it's amazing. It satisfies. We know that's true because of the next phrase, "Desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation, if you have tasted that the Lord is good."

Close in prayer, thanking God for the ways that you have tasted that he is good.

DAY 4

THE BIBLE IS A LIGHT



I'm not just agriculturally challenged, I'm also directionally challenged. My natural compass is consistently backwards. Maybe you know what that's like, but sometimes I'm certain home is left, but it's really right. I'm convinced the grocery store is in front of me, but it's definitely not. And GPS barely helps. My family and I recently moved to California, and I don't know if the roads are that different, or if I'm just that uncomfortable driving here, but I regularly make wrong turns while looking at my phone that is trying to show me the right turn. It's not great. It's also not unlike how all of us are from a spiritual perspective. We get lost. We don't know the way. "There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death" (Proverbs 16:25). We need help to go the right direction, and we can have it.

Read Psalm 119:97-105

*97 Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.*

*98 Your commands are always with me
and make me wiser than my enemies.*

*99 I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.*

*100 I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.*

*101 I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.*

*102 I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.*

*103 How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

*104 I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.*

*105 Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path.*

Which verse or phrase stood out to you the most as you read that passage? Why?

Which verse or phrase best reflects your experience with God's Word?

Which verse or phrase least reflects your experience with God's Word?

As you meditate on these verses, think back to the last session, when we saw God as the Uncaused Cause and the Great Designer of everything. That aspect of God's nature matters so much when you think about Him directing your path through his Word. God isn't just the leader. He is more than that. God isn't just the Commander, he's the Creator. There is a good reason to believe he can illuminate the right path.

That means God is different from any other leader who has ever lived. God doesn't just hope that his way leads to flourishing; he knows it does. Your boss might be a smart leader, but still sometimes he or she will be wrong. But God doesn't just lead people, he made people, he made the planet underneath people, and he made the plans that complete people.

God doesn't guess. He knows where we fit in this world and how we find life and fulfillment, which means he is uniquely capable of making the offer he makes.

How can you make the truth of verse 105 a more consistent part of your life?

Ask God to help you trust him more completely and obey him more consistently as you follow him on the path that leads to life.

Day 5

THE BIBLE IS A DELIGHT

Winnie the Pooh's honey is unrealistic. Let's be honest. My girls have just discovered the show, and the honey pot that Pooh persistently pursues manages to excite me and frustrate me at the same time. On the exciting side, I mean, it just looks delicious. My goodness, it is so golden and creamy and plentiful. And Pooh is clearly captivated. Who wouldn't want that honey? On the frustrating side... Well, it's not real. My mouth waters, but I know honey doesn't really look like that. I want to try it, but real honey has a completely different consistency than Pooh honey. AND, if we consumed even a quarter of the quantity of honey Pooh puts down, we would be sick to our stomachs in moments. We can't experience what Pooh and friends experience. That honey is a lie.

In Psalm 19, though, we find sweet, seemingly impossible promises that we can experience. In these verses, we see something we instantly want, that we can actually have. And, not only can we have it, but it turns out to be better than we could imagine. God's Word promises to be sweeter than honey, more desirable than gold, and abundantly rewarding. And then, it actually is.

Read Psalm 19:7-11

*7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.*

*8 The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.*

*9 The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.*

*10 They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.*

*11 By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*

What does it look like for God's instruction to "renew one's life?"

When was the last time God's commandments made you glad?

What are you most inclined to desire more than God's Word? How have you seen that desire to be less satisfying than God?

As glorious as God is and as desirable as his Word should be, we all find ourselves distracted by lesser things. We all pursue desires that let us down, break our hearts and hurt our lives. Listen then to what God told his people about his words in Deuteronomy 6. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

What can you do to make God's Word more prominent in your life and in your family this week?

How can you know that God's Word really is as good as Psalm 19 says it is? How do you know for sure that what God wants for you is actually sweet and satisfying?

Remember, God's Word isn't just a collection of life-giving commands, it is the story of a life-giving God. The Bible is desirable not just because it is wise, but because it leads us to Jesus. That's why God's Word deserves our obedience. Everywhere you look in the Bible, you find the story of God rescuing his people. Broken people in bondage because of sin. Desperate people needing to be saved by the Word of God. God's Word is sweetest when it helps see Jesus, because he is the delight. In his presence is fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forever more (Psalm 16:11).

DAY 1

SATAN IS THE FATHER OF LIES

As we discussed in our group session, truth is not simply what is practical, or what we feel, or what we intend. Truth is what is real. Truth is what corresponds to reality. Two apples plus two apples is four apples, even if it feels like five. Twelve chicken nuggets minus four chicken nuggets is eight chicken nuggets even if we intended to have ten chicken nuggets and would have preferred ten chicken nuggets. Truth is what aligns to the way things actually are, not what we define it to be based on what we want it to be.

It is fairly easy to see the widespread distortion of the truth in our culture, but that problem is not unique to our culture. Truth has and always will be distorted, questioned, and undermined. That is because God and his people have an enemy, and toying with truth is the enemy's primary tactic for attacking the people of God.

Read John 8:43-44

43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.

44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

What are some examples of lies that Satan, the father of lies, told in the Bible?

How have you experienced the lies of Satan in your life?

Read Genesis 3:1-7

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

What is the lie Satan told Eve?

What was the outcome of her believing that lie?

The lies of Satan are intended to make us doubt the goodness of God, the design of God, the power of God, etc. Over and over again he brings the truth into question to cause the followers of God to wonder about God's true character. The lie here in Genesis 3, the lie from which sin was born, was that God didn't want what was best for his children. Satan convinced Eve, who shared with Adam, that God must not love them as much as a beautiful garden and an intimate friendship might lead them to believe. Regardless of what he said or the amount of care he showed, the lie was that God was holding out on them. In believing that what they felt might be true rather than what corresponded to reality, Adam and Eve broke the world, lost their relationship with God, and sowed the distortion of truth into the foundation of our world.

What is your favorite truth about God in this season of your life?

How can you fight to hold onto truth in a world that embraces lies?

Pray right now that God will help you in that fight.

DAY 2

SIN IS THE PROBLEM WITH THE WORLD

I have bad news. Please brace yourself.

Read Romans 3:9-20

9 What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. 10 As it is written:

- 11 "There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.
12 All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."
13 "Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit."
"The poison of vipers is on their lips."
14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."
15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
16 ruin and misery mark their ways,
17 and the way of peace they do not know."
18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

The Bible says that all are under sin, and then it gets devastatingly descriptive about the sinful state of humanity without Christ.

Which phrase from these verses did you find most painful or offensive?

As painful as it is, Romans 3 describes us accurately. Literally as I was reading this chapter and thinking about this section, one of my daughters was popping plastic packing bags that came in an Amazon order. When my wife told her to stop, she bent over, picked up one more, and popped it. Then, she immediately cried, knowing she had directly disobeyed. But still, she just had to pick up and pop that plastic.

Romans 3 applies to everyone, even cute daughters. “Their feet are swift to pop bags; ruin and wretchedness are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known.” It’s true. Without Jesus, we are all led by our sinful desires, enslaved to sinful hearts, and walking sinful paths to destruction. Our sin is the problem with the world.

What event or events caused you to realize you really were everything Romans 3 says you were?

How did you respond to that realization?

Now, I have good news, because thankfully, Romans 3 doesn’t end with verse 20.

Read Romans 3:21-24

21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

What do these verses say about your sin?

What do these verses tell you about Jesus?

Jesus defeated sin for you. Jesus reversed everything Romans 3 says about you. Jesus gave you his righteousness, so that when God looks on you, instead of seeing sin he must destroy, he sees the righteousness of Christ. That is what he sees. You are justified freely by his grace. Not venom lips or grave throats or wretchedness. That’s what you were, not what you are. You are in Christ, so you are redeemed.

Spend a few moments reflecting on how Jesus rescued you. Thank him for justifying you freely as a gift because of his work. Ask him to help you live in the righteousness he has given you.

DAY 3

JESUS IS THE WAY



There is one passcode to the lock on the front door of my house. Only one. If you punch any other sequence of numbers into the lock, it won't open. Anyone can come through the door, but no matter where someone is from or what they look like or how many sequences of numbers they can think of and try, there is only one code that will work.

As we discussed in our session this week, with the help of Norman Geisler, it's not intolerant or narrow minded to say there is one passcode to the lock on the front door of my house. It's just true. The same thing is true when we say there is one way to God. It's true. It's massively important, frequently offensive, incomparably beautiful, and true.

Read John 14:1-6

14 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

What does Jesus give us access to, according to these verses?

Jesus is the one way to the Father, as well as the Father's house. Jesus alone can give us access to God and the place he is preparing that we will enjoy with God.

Write down three reasons you want to be with God.

What are you troubled by right now? How can remembering that Jesus gives you access to the Father help you with your troubles?

Read Romans 7:4

4 So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

What is beautiful about belonging to God?

What fruit do you hope you bear for God as a result of becoming his through the work of Christ?

Close this time praying that God will help you enjoy what you have been given access to through Jesus and that you will bear fruit as you walk with him.

DAY 4

GOD IS THE GOAL



We all want to know why we are here.

The truth, that which corresponds to reality, is that we were made by God, for God, to glorify God and enjoy God. God is the reason for our existence. And God is the goal of our existence. God is the means and the end of your life.

Read Psalm 37:4

*4 Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

Why is it that we can delight in God? What about him is a delight?

What desires does he give us as we delight in him?

Read John 17:3

3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

What have you experienced to be true about God?

When in your life did you feel closest to God?

Read Philippians 1:21-23

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

What in your life is worth delaying being with Jesus? How can your enjoyment of the Lord increase the fruit of that work?

In the following verses Paul writes, “...But to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Since I am persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that, because of my coming to you again, your boasting in Christ Jesus may abound.”

Jesus is our only way to God and the enjoyment of him is the ultimate purpose of our life. However, there are many others, all over the world, who have the chance to enjoy him as well. When we are deeply satisfied by our friendship with God, we not only long to be with him always, but we long for others to have the happiness in him we have. God is the goal, and until we are with him forever, sharing him with others is our goal as well.

Close your time in prayer asking God to lead you to deeper delight in him and to a deeper desire to share him with others.

DAY 5

THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS TO SHARE

Let's recap where we've been in this session so far:

- Truth is objective.
- Satan distorts truth and is the father of lies.
- Because humans believed a lie from Satan and brought sin into the world, the world itself is broken and full of lies.
- The truth is that humans were made to enjoy God and be satisfied in him.
- The truth is that our sin keeps us from knowing God and experiencing God, and therefore enjoying God.
- The truth is that Jesus is the only way to deal with our sin and gain access to God.

If the summary points above really do correspond to reality, what should we do? If there is a way to get to the One who can satisfy, how do we respond?

The first logical response is to accept that way to satisfaction for ourselves. If the above is the true way of the world, we should happily and desperately trust Jesus and find, in him, the true treasure of the universe. The second logical response is to share that way with others. If the reality of the world is that people were made for God and that Jesus is the way to God, then sharing Jesus might be the most logical thing in the world. And it is certainly the most loving. If there is no other way for men to be saved and satisfied then there is no greater priority than sharing that way.

Read Acts 16:25-34

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

In your experience, what gets people to the point where they are ready to ask, “What must I do to be saved?”

What was Paul’s answer to that question?

Who shared the gospel with you? Was there anything about that situation that might have been difficult or uncomfortable for them?

Read verse 32 again. Are you ready to love someone in this way? If not, how can you become ready to speak the word of the Lord to someone who needs Jesus?

Who in your life needs to know that Jesus is the only way to God? Pray that God will help you love that person this week by sharing the truth with them.

DAY 1

GOD IS SOVEREIGN



What's the worst thing that has ever happened to you?

If you are thinking about the most difficult thing you've ever experienced, you are likely remembering a lost loved one or an unrealized dream or a broken body or a ruined relationship. And, whether that was three days or thirty years ago, you might be asking yourself, "Why did God allow that to happen?" That, as we've said, is a good question to bring to God, and that is the right way to think about it. As challenging as it can be to consider the fact that God allows evil to continue, and at times, impact our lives, it is actually comforting to understand that it is fully within God's control to allow or not allow difficulty into our lives. His sovereignty, when rightly understood, is a beautiful relief for hurting hearts.

Read Psalm 3:1-8

*1 LORD, how many are my foes!
How many rise up against me!*

*2 Many are saying of me,
"God will not deliver him."*

*3 But you, LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head high.*

*4 I call out to the LORD,
and he answers me from his holy mountain.*

*5 I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.*

*6 I will not fear though tens of thousands
assail me on every side.*

*7 Arise, LORD!
Deliver me, my God!
Strike all my enemies on the jaw;
break the teeth of the wicked.*

*8 From the LORD comes deliverance.
May your blessing be on your people.*

Write down all the phrases David uses to describe God in these verses.

Write down everything David asks God to do in these verses.

What phrase from these verses encourages or convicts you the most right now?

Let's focus on two words from this text to help us embrace God's sovereign power. "LORD", in these verses, is the Hebrew word "Jehovah." "Jehovah" is considered to be God's proper name and it means "The Existing One." As we have discussed in this study, God is THE being that has always existed. He is the one who must exist. And there are a couple of incredible thoughts that come along with that understanding that matter for a hurting heart.

First, if God is the Existing One, that means, by necessity, that everything else exists secondarily to Him. Everything else has the option to not exist. That might sound strange, but everything that has power only has power to the degree that God allows it to have power. For example, Satan, our enemy, is just as much a created being as we are, which means he doesn't have 40% of the all the power and hopefully we'll be ok because God has 60% of the power. No. Jehovah, the Existing One, is infinitely powerful. Compared to God, Satan has 0% of the power. He is finite. His power is completely limited by God. The Bible even gives examples of this. In Job, Satan had to go to God to ask for permission to test him. He had to run it by God for approval. In Luke 22, Jesus told Peter, "Satan has asked to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you."

So God, The Existing One always has control over the evil in the world. And David also said that the Lord, the Existing One, is our shield. The word “shield” in verse 3 is not communicating a one-sided shield, like we normally picture in our minds, because it is used in relation to an infinite Being. When the Lord is your shield, the shield is before, behind, beside, below, beneath, and everywhere else it could be around you. Christians, you are surrounded on all sides by the sovereign Lord of the universe. The all-powerful, always-present, all-around protecting One is your shield. Nothing can possibly get to you without getting through Jehovah.

How has the LORD brought good out of the worst things he has allowed to happen to you?

Ask God to help you trust his sovereignty and faithfulness as you face difficulties in life.

DAY 2

GOD IS GOOD



We've already seen that God designed the world to be good. He made us a beautiful planet full of pleasures. Even in its current, broken state we can see that. But we need to see God's goodness in more than the design of the world. We need to see God's goodness in how he runs the world. A sovereign, powerful God who isn't good is a terror. A nightmare. And in a fallen world prone to question God's goodness, wisdom, and love, that is often what people imagine, if they imagine any God at all – a heartless deity wreaking havoc because he can.

Thankfully, that is not the God of the Bible. God isn't giving evil free reign in response to our rebellion. He is good. He is good and He's bringing good, even in spite of the evil we brought into the world.

Read Mark 10:18

18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.

How can this verse shape our understanding of God, evil, or suffering?

Read Psalm 23:5-6

*5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.*

How can these verses shape our understanding of God, evil, or suffering?

Read Matthew 7:11

11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

How can this verse shape our understanding of God, evil, or suffering?

Read James 1:17

17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

How can this verse shape our understanding of God, evil, or suffering?

What good and perfect gifts have been given to you by your Father?

Which of these verses encouraged or impacted you the most today? Consider memorizing that verse this week as a way to help your heart worship your good God.

DAY 3

GOD IS WISE



My old boss had a mind vault. He was super intelligent, with an incredible memory and recall. If you wanted to know the name of the actor who played some supporting role in an 80's movie, he could tell you. If you didn't want to know the name of the actor who played a supporting role in an 80's movie, he would tell you anyway. Because he could. He remembered spreadsheets from prior budget years and could tell you where to find almost anything in the Bible. Sometimes I call my kids by the wrong names, but good for him.

Of course, my old boss did have a strong mind, but it wasn't a perfect one. He remembered a lot, but he couldn't know everything. As easy as it is to notice when we encounter a brilliant human mind, it is impossible to fathom the mind of God. God knows everything. He understands everything. He - well, let Paul tell you...

Read Romans 11:33-36

*33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!*

*34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"*

*35 "Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?"*

*36 For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

What does "To him be the glory forever" mean?

What are the reasons, expressed in these verses, that God is worthy of all the glory?

The word "glory" means "weight." Something or someone that is glorious has weight and significance. There is nothing more glorious than the One that everything is from and everything is through and everything is for.

When was the last time you wondered if God knew what he was doing or if he was doing the right thing?

Now ask yourself this question -- Who is the strongest ant that ever lived? Maybe you've never thought about this, but the strongest ant in the history of earth may be alive today. But how much would that matter to you? You might have stepped on the world's strongest ant on the way to work today and not even known it. The ant's strength, size, and mind, isn't in the same category as yours.

That helps us get a little closer to understanding the language in this passage, and a little closer to understanding the vastness of God's infinite wisdom compared to even our best human mind vaults.

"Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!"

His wisdom is so far above ours, we can't grasp it. But of course we can't. The gap between God's wisdom, power, and vastness and whatever we might be able to bring to the table is immeasurable. He made everything and he knows how it all fits together.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

What does Paul call Jesus in verse 24?

How does Jesus show us the wisdom of God? And how does Jesus help us trust the wisdom of God?

DAY 4

GOD IS LOVING



My daughters do this thing where they try to test how far I would be willing to go to take care of them. They like to know they are loved, and so they often ask what I would do for them to prove my love. And they usually set me up. For instance, they'll ask, "Daddy would you eat everything in that trash can?" When I answer, "No way," They say, "Would you eat everything in that trash can if that was the only way to keep me alive? Then I tell them, "Of course I would; I'd eat that trash so fast if that's what I needed to do to save you." And they squeal.

Or one will say, "Daddy, would you get your arm cut off to save my life?" And I tell her, "Of course, Beauty, I'd do anything in the world for you." And they always smile real big like they feel treasured and then they move on.

But you know what? They don't know for sure, right? I can tell them I would do anything to save them, but until I actually do it they can't know for sure.

How do we know for sure that God loves us? Read Romans 8:31-32

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

The message of the cross is that we know for sure. The work of Jesus isn't something we are waiting for, it is something we are living in. Guys, we know for sure. We know how God feels about us beyond a shadow of a doubt. We know God loves us because He's already proved it in the ultimate way. Jesus is the Uncaused Causer of everything... Jesus is the Great Designer of everything, and he put himself into the world to be tortured and killed and buried in our place to accomplish the good purposes he has for his people. We know for sure he loves.

Read Romans 8:33-39

33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:

*"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What are the examples of evil and suffering in these verses?

What does Paul say is the end result of these difficulties in the life of a follower of Christ?

No matter what we face in this life, the cross helps us remember that the presence of evil doesn't mean the absence of God's love. God is sovereign and wise and loving beyond doubt. He is always there working for our ultimate good.

Where in your life do you need to trust the love and goodness of God right now? Spend a few minutes reflecting on Jesus' love for you and ask him to help you see his love in your present pain.



DAY 5

GOD IS PATIENT

Hasn't isn't the same as can't.

Didn't isn't the same as won't.

When we wrestle with the nature of God and the presence of evil in this world, it is critical we understand that part of his plan is his patience. God can end evil, but he hasn't yet because he restrains himself in love. He will judge wickedness, but every day he delays is a kindness for those who may still escape his wrath and experience his joy instead. God allows evil to continue, showing us that he is still willing to draw evil people to himself.

Read Romans 2:1-9

1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. 2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 God "will repay each person according to what they have done." 7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile;

What does this text say will eventually happen to evil people?

Does this truth comfort you? Why or why not?

9/11 was the first time I remember thinking of God's future judgement of evil as a comforting thing. I've heard others share the same sentiment. Seeing something so blatantly evil as the World Trade Center towers collapsing, full of people, because of the malicious intentions of a few men, is still hard to process. It was such a shocking and heart-breaking wrongness. In the face of obvious evil, it is comforting to know that God "will repay each one according

to his works.” “‘Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay,’ says the Lord (Romans 12:19).” It is a comfort to know justice is coming. But it is also a comfort to know why that justice might sometimes be delayed.

Rewrite verse 4 in your own words.

How has God shown his patience in your story?

Why should verse 6 also be an encouragement to those of us who have repented in response to the kindness of the Lord?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Close by thanking God for being patient with you, for replacing your work with the perfect work of Jesus. Ask him to help you trust that one day he will end evil once and for all.

DAY 1

Hell Is Real



There are a lot of little things I don't like to think about. My twelfth-grade acne, balsamic vinegar, and the "Scott's Tots" episode of The Office come to mind. These things make me uncomfortable and I'd rather dwell elsewhere. Other things though, like 9/11, or my wife's ectopic rupture, or my grandpa after the stroke took his mind, are thoughts that break my heart. I rarely linger on topics like that because some realities are painful and eventually lead to bigger questions about why the world is the way it is.

But, just because something makes me uncomfortable doesn't mean it isn't real. Death may feel unnatural, but it is inevitable. Injustice may be heart-breaking, but it's not infrequent. Balsamic may be optional, but it makes everything worse.

As humans, we don't like to think about hard things. But that doesn't make them go away. And while there may not be a more difficult reality to contemplate than hell, it is still a reality. As we discussed in our session, hell is an irreversible, eternal punishment for those who die rejecting God. It's awful. But it's real, and it's existence is massively important. So important that it was one of the main themes of Jesus' teaching. Let's look at what he had to say.

Read Luke 16:19-26

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

We talked about the nature of parables in week 2. What can we learn about hell from this parable?

Read Mark 9:47-48

47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 where

*“the worms that eat them do not die,
and the fire is not quenched.”*

What does verse 48 tell us about the nature of hell?

Matthew 13:41-43

41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Why will hell be a place of weeping?

In contrast, why will the righteous shine like the sun?

God made people to enjoy him forever. That was our original design. Of course, as we've seen, we rebelled against him. We sinned. We rejected God, choosing enmity instead of enjoyment, and we brought evil into the world.

We can't fully understand God's holiness – his pure, beautiful uniqueness – because we can't completely comprehend infinity. But the gap between God's perfection and our impurity is immeasurable. We must know this. And yet, even though all humans are born set against God in our sin, we are still made for forever. And forever is what we will have, with or without God. We are too permanent to cease. God is too perfect to welcome us without justice. That is why hell is real. Jesus made it clear that hell is the logical home for those who reject the goodness of God.

What do you remember about the first time you considered hell?

How have your thoughts about it changed?

Spend time thanking God for rescuing you from hell and leading you to repent of the sin that would have taken you there. Thank God for His mercy and ask him to save those in your life that do not have a relationship with him through Jesus.



DAY 2

God Is Holy

I've known for about 25 years that I don't have what it takes to play in the NBA, but I still played basketball several days a week deep into my thirties. Pastor Eric is one of the guys I've played with regularly, and a few years ago we drove from Nashville to Memphis to see the Warriors play. We wanted to see Steph Curry. (For those of you who, like my wife, are tempted to stop reading when sports are mentioned, Steph Curry is considered to be the best shooter that's ever lived.) As we were watching him warm up, he was making so many shots that Eric leaned over and said, "What are we doing? We should just quit." We saw how great Steph Curry is and thought, Why are we still playing basketball?

We can look at the best basketball players in the world and think we so dramatically don't measure up that we shouldn't even play anymore. The prophet Isaiah, when he encountered God, thought he so dramatically didn't measure up that he shouldn't exist anymore. Isaiah reacted so strongly to the holiness of God that he believed he should be unmade.

Read Isaiah 6:1-5

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."*

4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

What do you think was the scariest part of Isaiah's experience?

Can you describe a time when you've been overwhelmed by God's holiness?

Rewrite Isaiah's response in verse five in your own words.

The Hebrew word translated “woe is me” is actually a “passionate cry of grief or despair.” The reason we put “woe is me” in our Bibles is because it would be weird to put “ahhhhhhhh” in our Bibles. But that is how Isaiah responded when he encountered the Holy God. “Ahhhhhhhh!” A cry of despair.

And “I am lost” or “I am undone” in the original language is “to cease” or “to destroy.” Isaiah, a guy like us, saw the Lord on his throne. He heard the shouts of His holy, holy, holiness. He experienced the impact of that infinite perfection and he immediately assumed he shouldn't live anymore.

Does Isaiah's response to God's holiness help you with the concept of hell? Why or why not?

God is not just a little bit holy. He is perfect and unmatched. He is justified in punishing our sin, and one second in his presence would remind us of that. God, by his very nature, is terrifyingly beyond us. That is, until he chooses not to be.

Read Isaiah 6:6-8

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

Close by thanking God for atoning for your sin. Ask him to help you be in awe of his holiness, grateful for his grace, and joyfully responsive to the call to serve him.

DAY 3

Sinners Are Judged

You know how we feel when we think about the holocaust? Or 9/11? Or other tragic, large-scale injustices? We are furious, sure. We are somewhat confused that it could happen at all. And there is also a deep desire for justice. Can't someone step in and fix this? Can't we just pronounce judgement on the evildoers and make things right? That is, to some degree, how we feel, whether or not we can do anything about it. And it is how we should feel.

However, I'm guessing we don't feel the same way about our own sin. We are not as quick to request judgement. It's easier for us to downplay the severity of our actions against God. Many cry, and even rage, when imperfect humans wrong other imperfect humans, and they should. But God is, as we've discussed, perfect, all-powerful, and absolutely necessary. There is no greater injustice than when his own, finite creatures reject him, hate him, and curse the world he's made.

Read Romans 2:5-10

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 God "will repay each person according to what they have done." 7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

What does this text say there will be for those who are subjected to God's wrath?

What words or phrases in these verses remind us that God's wrath is just?

The hearts that will be judged are “unrepentant.” They will not turn from their sin to God’s satisfaction. The judgment of God is “righteous” and it will “repay” what the evil heart deserves.

Wrath is real. And we need to understand wrath the same way Isaiah did in our reading yesterday. When we understand what we have done and who God is, we see his wrath as logical, and as necessary, because it is. Hell, then, is a just outcome for those who choose it instead of God.

What comfort is there in verse 6?

Read Romans 5:19

19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Who is the one man whose work made many righteous?

How can you more fully live in the righteousness Jesus has given you?



DAY 4

Wrath Is Satisfied

Many people believe hell is something we work our way into. It is thought of as a hockey penalty box -- too much high-sticking gets you sent away. Or it's thought of as a penitentiary -- perhaps, if you had manslaughtered a little less, you could have avoided the clink. But that's not how hell works. We are not born good, or even neutral, waiting for our actions to decide where we end up. We are, instead, born dead. Without intervention, hell is our natural future home.

Hell isn't something we work our way into; it's something Jesus worked our way out of.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We were born spiritually dead. How have you seen evidence of that in your own life?

What hope do we have for avoiding God's wrath?

The sinful condition of humanity is a default setting that brings with it the necessary separation from God, forever, in hell. If it weren't for Jesus doing what we could not do, no human would work their way in or out of hell. That is simply where we would end up. That's the future for those born broken, who never receive the gift of salvation – the gift that shifts our future from hell to heaven. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses.”

What does verse 7 mean? How does it make you feel?

What good works has God created for you and prepared you to do?

The contrast in these verses is massive and Jesus-exalting. What starts with sin and wrath, ends with grace and good works, simply through the gift of faith in the work of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we move from death to life. We move from standing under God's wrath to standing under God's love. We move from trespass to kindness. We move from fleshly disobedience to the good works of God.

Go back through these 10 verses and write down every phrase that encourages you to good works.

Ask God to help you focus on the gospel today. Thank him for rescuing you from hell, satisfying his just wrath through Jesus, and preparing you for good works. Ask him to help you do those good works as your heart is satisfied by Jesus's good works for you.



DAY 5

Heaven Is Available

Recently, I took my three daughters to Disneyland for the first time. They squealed, picking out Mickey ears. They gasped in front of the castle. They met Princess Anna, who complemented the pretty ears they'd picked, and they stared in awe like Jesus was descending from the clouds. That's actually how I described it at the moment. Anna leaned over, spoke a few words to three Frozen-crazed girls, and they lit up like it was the second coming of Christ. It was one of the more magical moments I can remember, and when you are a Christian, magical moments make you think about heaven.

In contrast with hell, which we wish wasn't real, heaven is a place we desperately want to believe in. We want to believe a perfect home exists for us; that someday we'll live happily ever after. Our most magical days, and our most broken ones, lead us to look beyond our current world for a hope that lasts. For a joy that endures. And even though we don't deserve heaven, it is real. It is coming. And for those of us who are in Christ, it will be our forever home.

Read Revelation 21:1-5

1 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

What is the last thing that made you cry? Why will it be impossible to cry over something like that in heaven?

What do you most want to see made new about our broken world? What about God's nature makes Him capable of making that new?

Which sentence in these verses offers the best news about heaven?

“Look, God’s dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them.” As amazing as fake Princess Anna was for my girls, nothing compares with being in the presence of God. He is who made us and He is who we were made for. The fact that God will live with us is the ultimate renewal. The sin of humanity, that caused the separation between us and God in the garden, the sin that destined us all for hell, will be no more, cancelled by Christ, and we will be restored in full to the presence of God. Those in hell will be there because they didn’t want the glorious God. Those who want Him will have Him, and a new heaven as well.

Thank God for the promise of heaven and for all the things he will make new when that day comes. Ask him to give you strength, joy, and hope as you wait to be with him. And ask him to give you the grace to serve him well until then.

DAY 1

The Resurrection Gives You Life

I only remember one group project from school. I don't remember the actual assignment, because I did none of the work. I don't remember the sequence of events, because it didn't matter. I only remember the grade - A. The first moment of the first meeting of our group involved one of the smartest and hardest working girls in the class saying to me, and the other student on our team, "You guys don't need to do anything. I'll take care of it. Congrats, you're getting an "A." She was right. We did nothing. She did everything. We all got an "A."

That's not a great example of a quality educational environment, but it is a good example of the group project that is at the core of humanity. One man sinned, and all inherited death. Then one Man did not sin, chose to die in the place of those who did, overcame death on their behalf, and gave life to all who are with him. Congratulations, guys. We're getting an "A."

Read Romans 5:12-17

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

13 To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. 14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! 16 Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

What does this passage tell you you deserve? Why is that what you deserve?

Reread verse 16. What does "justification" mean?

“Justification” means, “That which has been deemed right.” It carries a judicial connotation as though a judge is making a declaration of righteousness on behalf of a person. Somehow, we are the ones being justified, or being declared righteous by the Judge, even though we are not the ones who earned that justification. We are acquitted, we are made right, because of the perfection, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

What do we gain as a result of our justification?

We “reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” Jesus is the best group project participant ever. No one has ever had a group capable of less – we could do nothing about the death spreading to all people, on our own. We are 100% hopeless without him. And no one has ever sacrificed more for another group of people. Not only was Jesus tortured and killed for us, but he suffered as the Uncaused Causer and the Great Designer of those who were torturing him. It is absurd. But, because he was willing and able to carry that burden, when he conquered death, he conquered death for us as well. He began “the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness.” We will live with him forever.

How has the justification you have received through the death and resurrection of Christ shaped how you live? What was different before? What is different now?

Close by worshipping Jesus for his willingness, love, perfection, and power. Because of his resurrection, you have life as well. Ask him to help you live like someone who will live forever.

DAY 2

The Resurrection Gives You Victory

Is there a better place to look for destructive messages than the Disney cartoon Sofia the First? Ok, maybe there is, but Sofia the First has led to many gospel conversations with my kids, because Sofia sweetly and passionately preaches the opposite message Jesus preaches. Here's one of many examples, from the song, "Stronger than You Know."

It doesn't matter what they say
There's only one voice to obey
And it's that little voice inside
So let that be your guide
Then you can save the day
'Cause you are stronger than you know
Stronger than you know

It's a soaring and hopeful song, and immediately little girls everywhere are pumped up and ready to be princesses and ready to save the day, but it's a lie. "Listen to the voice inside." "Follow your heart." "Just do you." "Be true to yourself." We live in a time in which nearly the entire cannon of cultural communication says, "You are the answer." "Follow your desires and your dreams will come true."

But here's the thing. Culture preaches that message without really showing the results of it. They don't make Disney cartoons about people who follow their hearts to heroin addictions. They don't make Pixar films about people who follow their hearts through four divorces with kids in four broken homes. And the countercultural message of the Bible is that we are broken and can't give ourselves what we really want or need.

What is a recent example in our culture of the "you can be enough" or "you have what it takes" message?

Read Proverbs 16:25

*25 There is a way that appears to be right,
but in the end it leads to death.*

What paths have you taken that seemed right but only ended up hurting you?

Read 1 Peter 2:25

25 For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

What most frequently leads you astray? How have you seen Jesus shepherd your soul?

Many messages and stories in our world ignore the truth by not telling the whole story. Our movies don't show what happens after the slipper goes on or after the beauty is rescued. They just throw, “And they lived happily ever after” up on the screen. But, removed from the movies, we know that to be false. Sleeping beauty gets old and she isn't beautiful anymore. Or Cinderella gets divorced and moves in with her aunt in Sacramento. The victory our heart promises doesn't last and even if it could last, we can't last. We need something more than ourselves; otherwise, our lives would be an endless string of disappointments and defeats. We can't win on our own and we can't win forever.

Read Romans 6:1-11

1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Write down all the benefits we see in these verses that result from the fact that “Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.”

Reflect on a time you were able to experience victory over sin. How did God help you win?

Thank God for all the truth represented in Romans 6:1-11. Thank him for the victory you can experience today and forever through the resurrected Jesus.

DAY 3

The Resurrection Gives You Power

How much do you bench press? If you don't know, it's not a lot.

How high is your IQ? Again, if you don't know, it's probably somewhere between "almost fine" and "pretty good."

How firm is your will? I can't tell you precisely how to gauge that, but I bet I can name something that makes your willpower weaker in seven words or less.

Dessert

Sex

Netflix

Amazon Same Day Delivery

A consistent message of Scripture, as we've seen in various ways throughout this study, is that humans are weak. We can't be smart enough, strong enough, for long enough to lead ourselves, protect ourselves, or save ourselves. Our muscles atrophy, our minds dim, our wills fail. It's pretty depressing, right? But before you stop reading and just surrender your day to the Oreos in your pantry or the items in your Amazon cart, let's remember that we aren't alone anymore. The resurrection of Jesus means resurrected life for us and the power of God that goes with it.

Read Ephesians 1:17-21

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

How have you experienced the reality of verse 17?

How would you describe "the hope of his calling?"

What do you know to be true about “his glorious inheritance?”

When have you felt the most powerful in the Lord?

What led to that experience of God’s power?

What did you do with it?

What can you do this week to operate in the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead?

Ask God to help you have his wisdom, knowledge, hope, power, and strength. Ask him to give you confidence in the resurrection of Jesus and how that truth shapes who you are. Ask him to give you opportunities this week to be powerful in his name.

DAY 4

The Resurrection Gives You Hope

When have you felt the most hopeless? What was going on in your life at that time?

The most hopeless I ever remember feeling was the fourth day in China when our family was adopting our middle daughter, Joy.

Joy was born without ears and Deaf. She was dramatically developmentally delayed. She was almost four and she couldn't walk and wasn't potty trained. We talked to tons of doctors before leaving the states, and no one could give us any assurances that she would walk or have a healthy brain or the ability to communicate in any way. In fact, our pediatrician asked us not to go through with it. And so, Scarlet and I felt like if we are going to be this little girl's parents, we needed to be prepared, not only for sign language, but for the possibility of loving a girl who might wear diapers and live in wheel chairs for the rest of our lives.

Then, when we got there, it seemed like the worst-case scenario was coming true. There was so much trauma and so many health issues that I called my dad that fourth night and told him everything the doctors had warned us about was coming true. We were crushed. We were scared. We couldn't give ourselves hope on our own. It felt like life would be hard the rest of the way.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-22

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

What is the great hope we read about in this passage?

How does that hope impact everything else in our lives?

“But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead...(20)...So also in Christ all will be made alive” (22). Christ has been raised from the dead, so we will be too. Christ lives, forever, and so will we. Christian, when is the last time that really hit your heart... We. Will. Never. Die. We will move from one life to the next, from hope in the midst of difficulty to hope in the midst of bliss.

But, we don't just have Jesus later. We have him now. We have the power, the victory, the joy, the hope, the everything else God's word promises his people, right now. Remembering this life is not the end helps us remember that the God who makes that true is with us long before the end. He is our hope right this second.

I'll never ever forget the moment, in China, when God gave us hope by reminding us we had him both now and forever. I've never had a moment when the water of my circumstances seemed so high. I thought my family might sink in despair, but then God put these verses in my heart from Romans 8.

Read Romans 8:15-18

15 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.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 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.

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

What comes to mind when you read that we are “heirs of God and coheirs with Christ?”

How does your heart need to cry out to your Abba Father, today?

Ask God to help you live like his child, like one who has hope. Ask him to lead your heart to believe the truth of the resurrection so deeply that you receive all the benefits of living fully in light of that truth.

DAY 5

The Resurrection Gives You Fellowship with God

When my oldest daughter was really little she started asking me for a password before letting me into rooms or before telling me things. She's a big girl now, but we still do that. The password is "Apacopoopocapants."

For example, I might be coming down the stairs and she'll block them off and say, "What's the password?"

"Apacopoopocapants."

When people are in the house, she'll make them give the password before getting into a room or before getting dessert, and of course they never know the password because it is "Apacopoopocapants." But when I share it with them, we all get right in.

By the way, she told me I could share the family password and now she's going to change it.

But that is how it works with fellowship with God. There's a password, so to speak. There is a way in. And when you have it, you get everything you were made for. And you won't be shocked to learn the way in isn't "Apacopoopocapants."

Read Romans 4:22-5:2

22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." 23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Why do we have access to God?

What does this text tell us we receive in God?

Why can't we enjoy fellowship with God without the death and resurrection of Christ?

The “password” is Jesus, crucified and risen again. It has to be, because we could never have been pure enough to enjoy God’s presence any other way.

It’s not your momness or dadness that gets you closeness with God, it’s the death and resurrection of Jesus. It’s not the size of your paycheck that gets you the presence of God, it’s the work of Jesus. It’s not even your holiness that gets you the hope of God. It is the holiness of Jesus, given to you by grace through faith. Jesus is the way to the fellowship with God you were literally made to experience.

What is your favorite thing about being in God’s presence in this season of your life?

Where would you like to see growth in your relationship with God?

Thank God that because Jesus rose from the dead, you have access to his heart, his throne, and his presence forever. Ask God to help you constantly long for his presence and be satisfied fully in him.