



second baytown

A weathered, black and white directional sign pointing to the right. The sign has the words "Walk the WALK" written on it in a mix of bold, block letters and a script font. The sign is mounted on a wooden post. In the background, a city street is visible with cars and pedestrians, and the Chrysler Building is prominent in the distance.

Walk the
WALK

SECOND BAYTOWN SMALL GROUPS

Take the Walk the Walk Challenge:

- Join us each week for our Sunday messages beginning Sept. 19th live or in person.
- Watch our weekly “Walk the Walk” small group video on Right Now Media or our Youtube channel.
- Connect with an in person/online group or share with a friend what God is teaching you.
- To get free access to Right Now Media, go to secondbaytown.org/resources. Click “Sign Up Today!
- Let us know what you are doing! Scan the QR code to fill out the form.



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FROM THE PASTORS

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." - Ephesians 4:1-3 ESV

Would you like to go for a walk? Most of us just love being asked to enjoy a stroll through a park or the neighborhood. There's just something about getting out of the house and enjoying a walk that lifts our spirits and often helps us gain a new perspective.

The Bible has a lot to say about walking. The Old Testament patriarchs like Abraham walked the lay of the land while seeking the will of God. Jonah walked the city of Nineveh after his rebellious moments that landed him in the belly of the great fish. Nehemiah walked the city of Jerusalem and contemplated God's plan for rebuilding the wall.

Jesus was no stranger to walking either. He walked together with his disciples and ministered for three years during the time that changed the world! And even after his death and resurrection, our Savior walked the road to Emmaus with two disciples that had lost all hope...and yet by the end of their walk, they found a joy that they could have never imagined before!

Walking...can change our perspective.

The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians chapter four urges Christians to "walk in a manner worth the calling to which you have been called." In others words, Paul says... "If you are a Christian, you need to walk the walk of faith by following Jesus completely on a daily basis."

We, as your pastors, are inviting you to "Walk the Walk" of faith in your small group and with our church over the next six weeks. Together, we will allow God's Word to teach us how-to walk-in love and learn the secret to humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with each other, and how to live in the unity of the Spirit.

So, would you like to go for a walk? We hope you do! Let's walk the walk together for the glory of God. Together, we expect to see God do amazing things in your life and the life of our church step by step.

Your Second Baytown Pastors

HELPS FOR HOSTS

Top Ten Ideas for New Hosts

CONGRATULATIONS! As the host of your small group, you have responded to the call to help shepherd Jesus' flock. Few other tasks in the family of God surpass the contribution you will be making. As you prepare to facilitate your group, whether it is one session or the entire series, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind.

Remember, you are not alone. God knows everything about you, and He knew you would be asked to facilitate your group. Even though you may not feel ready, this is common for all good hosts. God promises, "I will never leave you; I will never abandon you" (Hebrews 13:5). Whether you are facilitating for one evening, several weeks, or a lifetime, you will be blessed as you serve.

1. Don't try to do it alone. Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy team. If you can enlist a co-host to help you shepherd the group, you will find your experience much richer. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is ask people to help. You'll be surprised at the response.

2. Be friendly and be yourself. God wants to use your unique gifts and temperament. Be sure to greet people at the door with a big smile.... this can set the mood for the whole gathering. Remember, they are taking as big a step to show up at your house as you are taking to host a small group! Don't try to do things exactly like another host; do them in a way that fits you. Admit when you don't have an answer and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it and you'll sleep better at night.

3. Prepare for your meeting ahead of time. Preview the session and write down your responses to each question.

4. Pray for your group members by name. Before your group arrives, take a few moments to pray for each member by name. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of each person in your group. Expect God to lead you to whomever he wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead.

5. When you ask a question, be patient; someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two of silence to think about the question. If silence doesn't bother you, it won't bother anyone else. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple "thanks" or "great answer". Then ask, "How about somebody else?" or "Would someone who hasn't shared like to share anything?" Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who aren't ready to say, pray, or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will blossom over time. If someone in your group is a wallflower who sits silently through every session, consider talking to them privately and encouraging them to participate. Let them know how important they are to you, that they are loved and appreciated, and that the group would value their input. Remember, still water often runs deep.

6. Provide transitions between questions. Ask if anyone would like to read the paragraph or Bible passage. Don't call on anyone, but ask a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Be sure to thank the person who reads aloud.

7. Break into smaller groups occasionally. With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they're learning, and ultimately get more out of their small group experience. A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member.

8. Small circles are also helpful during prayer time. People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud may feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won't take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray. When you gather back with the whole group, you can have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on the prayer requests from their subgroups. The other great aspect of subgrouping is that it fosters leadership development. As you ask people in the group to facilitate discussion or to lead a prayer circle, it gives them a small leadership step that can build their confidence.

9. Rotate facilitators occasionally. You may be perfectly capable of hosting each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to facilitate the group.

10. Go through the Small Group Guidelines. This is a very important part of starting a new group. This will help outline and clarify all expectations for your members.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How Long Will This Group Meet?

This study is six sessions long. We encourage your group to add a seventh meeting for a serve project. In your sixth session, each group member may decide if he or she desires to continue on for another study. At that time, you may also want to do some informal evaluation, discuss your Small Group Guidelines, and decide which study you want to do next. We recommend you contact Jim Herndon at jherndon@secondbaytown.org for more information on future studies.

Where Do We Find New Group Members?

Recruiting new members can be a challenge for groups, especially new groups with just a few people, or existing groups that lose a few people along the way. We encourage you to use the Circles of Life diagram on page 116 in this study guide to brainstorm a list of people from your workplace, church, school, neighborhood, family, and so on. Then, pray for the people on each member's list. Allow each member to invite several people from their list. Some groups fear that newcomers will interrupt the intimacy that group's members have built over time. However, groups that welcome newcomers generally gain strength with the infusion of new blood. Remember, the next person you add just might become a friend for eternity. Logistically, groups find different ways to add members. Some groups remain permanently open, while others choose to open periodically, such as the beginning or end of a study. If your group becomes too large for easy, face-to-face conversations, you can subgroup, forming a second discussion group in another room.

How Do We Handle the Child Care Needs in Our Group?

Second Baytown provides children's activities on Sunday night, Wednesday night and Thursday night. You can contact the church office to find out the specific times and arrange your meetings accordingly. One common solution is to have the adults meet in the living room and share the cost of a baby sitter (or two) who can be with the kids in another part of the house. Another popular option is to have one home for the kids and a second home (close by) for the adults. If desired, the adults could rotate the responsibility of providing a lesson for the kids. The last option is great with school-aged kids and can be a huge blessing to families.

SMALL GROUP GUIDELINES

It's a good idea for every group to put words to their shared values, expectations, and commitments. Such guidelines will help you avoid unspoken agendas and unmet expectations. We recommend you discuss your guidelines during the introduction meeting in order to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience.

WE AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING VALUES:

CLEAR PURPOSE: To grow healthy spiritual lives by building a healthy small group community

GROUP ATTENDANCE: To give priority to the group meeting (call if I am absent or late)

BE CONFIDENTIAL: To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: To avoid gossip and to immediately resolve any concerns by following the principles of Matthew 18:15-17

SPIRITUAL HEALTH: To give group members permission to speak into my life and help me live a healthy, balanced spiritual life that is pleasing to God

LIMIT OUR FREEDOM: To limit our freedom by not serving or consuming alcohol during small group meetings or events so as to avoid causing a weaker brother or sister to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Romans 14:19-21)

WELCOME NEWCOMERS: To invite friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: To get to know the other members of the group and pray for them regularly

OTHER: _____

We have also discussed and agree on the following items:

CHILD CARE: _____

STARTING TIME: _____ **ENDING TIME:** _____

If you haven't already done so, take a few minutes to fill out the Small Group Calendar, which can be found on page 117 at the back of this book.

HOW TO HAVE A QUIET TIME

Transformational Discipleship, a recently published book based on extensive spiritual growth research, found that the most significant catalyst for life transformation is daily time in God's Word. Having a daily quiet time or devotion will literally change your life. It is critical to living a Christ-centered life. So, for this study, we have provided daily devotionals for each week. Here are some tips to help you get started.

1. **Begin with the right attitude.** As you begin, take a minute to pray. Ask God to show you anything in your life that is preventing you from hearing from Him. Ask Him to open your eyes and ears to see and hear what He wants to show you (Psalm 119:18).
2. **Be ready to obey.** Sometimes God will show you things that are difficult to deal with. Maybe it's a weakness in your life. Maybe it's something He's asking you to do. Whatever it is, listen and respond!
3. **Select a special time.** If you don't set a special time to meet with God, someone or something else will undoubtedly take His place. Start by setting aside 15 minutes. As you get more comfortable, add more time. Remember, the important thing is quality, not quantity.
4. **Set a special place.** Jesus had a special place He would go to spend time with the Father. Why? He wanted to get away from the noise and busyness of life to devote all of Himself to His relationship with the Father.
5. **Gather your resources.** We recommend a journal and an ESV Study Bible. If you're ready for more, see other resources recommended throughout the study.
6. **Don't make it legalistic.** The enemy hates the fact that you are making this a priority. He will try everything to get you off track. Don't let him. Be careful, however, to avoid having a quiet time "just to check it off the list."
7. **Don't give up or feel guilty if you miss a day.** That's exactly what the enemy wants. Just pick back up where you can.



WEEK 1: THE JOURNEY WITH JESUS

Beginning the Journey: Today is your first meeting in our *Walk the Walk* series, and we are excited that you have chosen to pause for a moment and focus on your spiritual growth and the key relationships in your life. Each week we will take a few minutes to “look back” and discuss what you learned the week before through the daily devotionals. Then, we will “look up” at what God wants to teach us today in our study. Finally, we will “look forward” to how we will live out the principles that God has taught us today.

Looking Back: Take a minute to introduce yourselves to one another, and go over the group guidelines on page 9 as you begin your journey together.

Looking Up: Play the video and consider the discussion questions together.

1. What are some ways the world would define a life well lived? Why?
2. After watching today’s video, how would you answer the question, “What does it look like to walk worthy of the calling you have received?”
3. What does it look like to fall short of that calling?

4. Read Colossians 1:9-10. According to these verses, what should happen as you journey with Jesus?
5. Why must our journey with Jesus have a very real effect on our lives? What might it mean about a person if it doesn’t?
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1. How does it encourage you to know your journey with Jesus is a process of continual growth? At the same time, how does it challenge you?
7. Read John 21:15-22. In regard to our journeys with Jesus, what do we all have in common? What differences are there that we shouldn’t be concerned with?
8. When you think about walking worthy of the calling you have received, how do you feel: hopeful, guilty, excited, apathetic, defeated, or something else? How can this group help you address that and get the most out of this study?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 1: THE JOURNEY WITH JESUS

DAY 1—READ EPHESIANS 4:1

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Have you ever been in a position where you tried to live up to a name, title, or a role you were given? Ever tried to live or act in a way that made someone else proud? Maybe when you were a teenager, your mom or dad told you to represent your last name well. Or maybe in an effort to create a sense of team pride, a coach told you that it's the name on the front of the jersey that matters most, not the one on the back.

That's the idea Paul had in mind when He encouraged the believers in Ephesus to walk in a manner worthy of their calling as Christians. Every believer in Christ has a name and a calling to live up to. To be clear, we don't earn this calling but we are called to live into it daily. In other words, if we say we follow Jesus, our day-to-day lives should reflect it.

Our worthiness isn't dependent on our walk, but our walk should always reflect the One who has called us. Regardless of the specifics of God's call on our lives—whether to teach, lead, shepherd, inspire, or build—our lives should always be a reflection of the gospel. We should daily be walking in humility, gentleness, patience, and unity. We should daily be seeking the direction of God alone. That is the call of Christ working in and through us.

What is “the calling to which you have been called”?

Notice the word “therefore.” Ephesians divides into two sections. Chapters 1-3 explain the gospel and chapters 4-6 express the implications of the gospel in our lives. In your own words, what should be the result of gospel transformation in a person's life?

What are some specific ways you can walk worthy of Christ's call this week?

Ask the Lord to help you walk the walk in a worthy manner. Confess the ways you have fallen short this week. Ask Him to remind you daily of your calling as His own.

DAY 2—READ 2 TIMOTHY 1:9

[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

We love taking credit for things that were never ours to begin with. As Christians, we know it is only by God's grace that we have a relationship with Him through Christ. Yet, it is so easy to lean on our works, as if they earn us favor with Him. When things don't go our way, or we want something different, we often hold up our good works and church attendance and ask God to make good on His promises, believing we have checked off enough boxes for our will to be done. Yet, our holy calling has nothing to do with our own holiness. It has always been God's grace that has taken unholy people and given them a holy calling.

As Paul wrote to Timothy and his fellow believers, he knew they needed to be reminded of their calling, or they would start to shrink back. They were persecuted, challenged, and pressed on every side. Maybe they also had some of the same instincts of the flesh that we do. Maybe they thought if they did more, tried harder, or kept the law a little better, then God might ease their suffering. But Paul knew that was never a guarantee, and that their very lives were evidence of God's grace and purpose at work in them.

While we may not find ourselves persecuted as Paul and Timothy were, we still need the reminder that it is only by God's grace that we have been restored to Him. We can hold up our good deeds and our Christian merit badges, but they are ultimately useless. Our holy calling is only holy because of Jesus who has called us. It's a call to die to ourselves—including all our efforts to earn right-standing with God—and follow Him daily.

What “works” are people tempted to hold up to earn favor with God?

Read Titus 1:2. What does knowing that salvation by grace alone was God's plan “before the ages began” teach you about God? About yourself?

If God has called us according to His grace and purpose, how are you walking in step with those realities? Are you walking according to His purpose or your own?

Confess the ways you have tried to earn favor based on your works. Ask the Lord to remind you daily of His grace that saved you and His purpose that guides your life.

DAY 3—READ COLOSSIANS 2:6-10

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

While our daily lives may often seem non-eventful and ordinary, this is often the case because we heed numerous warnings about potential dangers that threaten us. We are warned to slow down in a construction zone on the highway; we are warned not to click on that email from a stranger promising us we've inherited a fortune from a long-lost relative; we are warned about keeping our luggage close by in the airport lest someone mistake it for an explosive device. Some of these warnings are common sense and easy to follow. Others are new, unusual, or contrary to our preconceived ideas and require us to pause and consider the warning more seriously.

In the middle of Paul's exhortation to walk the walk in Colossians, Paul inserted a warning. He was convinced that there was an intentional strategy at work to derail Christians from the gospel truth. Whatever this empty, deceitful philosophy was, Paul said it wasn't from Christ. This teaching represented man's attempts to arrive at the truth. It was in direct contrast to the work Jesus did on the cross.

If we are going to walk the walk, we're going to have to see to it that we don't go about our spiritual lives with only human insight. It is a natural tendency to lean into our own understanding, but in doing so we minimize the gospel. Instead, we must learn to go to God, to the revelation of Christ, and to the Holy Spirit who guides us in all truth.

What do you think Paul was specifically referring to in verse 8? What are some ways people today are taken captive by "philosophy and empty deceit, ... human tradition," and "elemental spirits of the world"?

Are competing philosophies to the faith easily recognizable? Why or why not?

How might we guard ourselves against teaching that would add to the gospel?

Thank God for the truth of His Word. Thank Him for salvation and the free nature of such a glorious gift. Ask Him to help you remain steadfast in the truth when you face the opposition of false beliefs or practices.

DAY 4—READ JOHN 21:15-17

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Have you ever gotten spiritually off track? This is what happened with Peter. So, Jesus served some breakfast. As He commonly did throughout His earthly ministry, He used a physical need to emphasize a spiritual calling.

Peter hadn't stopped loving Jesus. In fact, he was so certain Jesus knew that he loved Him it upset Peter to have to affirm it three times. But Jesus made sure to get the point across. As Jesus had loved Peter and fed him, taking care of his need for physical nourishment, Jesus called Peter to love people and give them the spiritual nourishment they needed.

As we journey with Jesus, we are to be on the lookout for those we can invite to come alongside us. The gospel message is a message to be shared. We who have received the grace and lovingkindness of God through Jesus' work on the cross have a responsibility then to extend that same invitation to others. With humility, gentleness, patience, and unity under the direction and sovereignty of God, our calling is to simply love and shepherd people in the same way Christ Jesus has loved and shepherded us.

What did Jesus mean by the phrase "feed my sheep/lambs"?

In John 18, Peter denied Jesus three times. Here, Jesus gave him the opportunity to acknowledge his love for Jesus three times. What does this mean for us when we've failed to walk the walk?

Jesus calls all believers to the same task today—to feed His sheep. What specifically does that mean for you? Where can you start?

Thank God for continually inviting you into a deeper love relationship with Him. Ask Him to show you what it means to love and shepherd people in the same way He has loved and shepherded you.

DAY 5—READ JOHN 21:20-22

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?”²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?”²² Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”

As was his habit, Peter said what no one else would. Peter often gave very human responses in holy moments. But Jesus was quick to make sure Peter kept his priorities in line. Peter was worried about the wrong things. Jesus had given Peter a high calling, and Peter was wondering how his calling compared to the guy standing next to him.

Some of us are so busy comparing our lives to the people around us that we forget the simplicity of our calling. We look to our left and right at others who are following Jesus. We compare our circumstances, our challenges, our successes, and our failures. We question why others receive the very things we have prayed for. We wonder why their path seems to have come with fewer obstacles. We want to know if their future is going to be carefree when ours seems to continually bring hardship. But those continual comparisons only distract our gaze. We are looking at the wrong people.

Jesus wants us to lock eyes with Him again and hear the words “follow me.” That is all we have to focus on—following Him. We are free from having to worry about God’s plans for everyone else around us. God has called us—just as He called Peter—to radically participate in the kingdom of God and He has given us work to do that He has prepared for us in advance. If we spend our days looking around at everyone else, wondering what God will do for them, we will miss endless opportunities that God has specifically planned for us.

Why is it impossible to compare yourself to others and at the same time follow Jesus well?

Personalize verse 21 with an earthly concern that tends to take your focus off Jesus: “Lord, what about _____?” Based on Jesus’ answer to Peter in verse 22, how do you think Jesus would answer your question?

How can you respond to Christ’s call to “follow me” this week?

Thank Jesus for the simplicity of His call in your life to walk the walk. Ask Him to help you fix your eyes on Him and free you from comparing yourself with those around you.



WEEK 2: THE WAY OF HUMILITY

Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and go through the discussion questions.

1. What would be a walk-up song that would be a good reflection of your attitude at work? At home? At church?
2. Read Philippians 2:3-8. Is it fair or reasonable that Paul expected humility in the life of every believer, even those who never had any earthly examples of genuine humility to go by? Why?
3. When is it easy for you to consider other people more important than yourself? When is it hard?
4. What do you have to believe about God to humbly put others' needs before your own?

5. Read 1 Peter 5:6-8. Is it fair to say the devil uses pride as a weapon against you? Explain.
6. Why is it important to recognize Satan's plan to keep you from being humble like Jesus?
7. Read James 4:6-10. What promises are there for those who humbly submit themselves to walking humbly with God?
8. Considering this call to humility, in what situation does your "walk-up song" need to change this week? How can you make that change?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 2: THE WAY OF HUMILITY

DAY 1—READ PHILIPPIANS 2:3-5

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

It's easy to see that looking to the interests of others before our own is a foreign idea in our society. Think about the way restaurants get people to buy gift cards these days. They attach the incentive of a bonus gift card to keep when you purchase a gift card for someone else. Have you ever taken advantage of that type of marketing campaign and kept both cards for yourself? No judgment here! The point is, we're rarely motivated to consider others' needs unless there's something in it for us.

It is hard to consider others' needs before our own. It is natural to look out for self first. We find ways to excuse this type of self-seeking behavior with phrases like, "I can't let people walk all over me," or "I have to make sure my own needs are met." But the reality is, we are always prone toward self-preservation over sacrifice for others.

We learn in Philippians 2 that when Christ has redeemed us, we don't have to "look out for number one" anymore because we have everything we need in Him. And when we don't have to "look out for number one" anymore, we think about others' needs more often, and even think of those needs as more important than our own. It frees us up to live and love like Jesus.

Why did Paul say humility is such a struggle?

Read Proverbs 18:12. Why does walking the way of humility matter so much?

How might you seek to specifically sacrifice your own needs for the sake of others this week?

Thank God for giving you everything you need in Christ. Ask Him to show you ways He is calling you to humbly sacrifice for the sake of others in our church and in our community.

DAY 2—READ 1 PETER 5:5B-8

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Warning signs are important. They protect us and keep us from harm. If a bottle of poison didn’t have a label, or a bridge that collapsed was missing a sign, you might be at significant risk. At the same time, if you saw those warnings, it would be reckless to ignore them.

In these verses, Peter tells us to clothe ourselves with humility, and then he follows up with a warning. That’s because Satan doesn’t always come through the front door wearing a name tag. He usually finds small ways to sneak into our thoughts. We might not even consider that human pride is one of his favorite and most powerful tools. This is why Peter warns believers to keep alert. If we aren’t paying attention, we can easily walk into a trap without even realizing where we are stepping.

Standing firm against the devil requires our constant attention. Each and every day we have to clothe ourselves once again in humility. The enemy is looking for any opportunity—great or small—to overcome our defenses. Satan knows our weaknesses and won’t hesitate to capitalize on them. We need the Holy Spirit to make us alert at every step.

Where do you need to stay most alert to the enemy’s attack? What are your weak areas where he continues to creep in before you are even aware?

Giving your anxieties to God is a key to walking in humility. Why does anxiety lead to pride? How does giving your anxieties to God bring about humility?

In regard to humility and pride, when have you experienced Satan’s attacks in times of inattentiveness? When has attentiveness to his attacks helped you walk in humility?

Ask the Lord to give you eyes to see and ears to hear Him above the lies of the enemy. Ask Him for vigilance to fight against the enemy’s repeated attempts to keep you from walking in the way of humility.

DAY 3—READ MICAH 6:8

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Humility isn't optional. It's a requirement for anyone who wants to walk with the Lord. We know God doesn't require anyone to walk with Him. But those who make that choice must make it in humility.

Many people quote this verse as a call to social justice, and it certainly speaks to that responsibility. But for any kind of justice and kindness to be meaningful beyond this life requires humility in one's walk with the Lord. Walking humbly with God is a precursor to walking in biblical humility with other people, bringing about justice for those who are oppressed and also practicing loving kindness.

That's important, because many of us tend to think about humility before the Lord as synonymous with fear of the Lord. In other words, our humility isn't as much a loving choice as it is a response to the knowledge that He could unleash His wrath on us if He wanted to. But this isn't the kind of humility we read about in Micah 6:8. Instead, we are to walk humbly *with* God. It's amazing if you think about it. The God of the universe wants us to walk *with* Him in freedom and joy—not cower in fear behind Him. That is the only way any of our acts of justice and kindness can ever truly be "good."

In your own words, what does it mean to "walk humbly with your God"?

Read Micah 6:6-7 to see the attitude that prompted this response in verse 8. Why do we often need the reminder that our hearts, not our actions, are the true test of our faithfulness?

In what areas of life do you go through the motions rather than put in the hard work of humbly preparing your heart to serve God in the way He desires? What changes can you make this week to develop a heart of humility?

Thank the Lord for caring about your heart and for inviting you to walk with Him. Ask Him to help you develop a heart of humility so that as you walk with Him, you will see and know how to do justice and love kindness.

DAY 4—READ PROVERBS 11:2

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.

Everybody wants wisdom, right? We want to gain wisdom, and we want to be able to give it to others. But we often let pride lead the way, and pride leaves no room for wisdom.

If we want to both gain and give wisdom, then we have to humble ourselves. We can't receive wisdom from others if we don't put ourselves in a position to learn, recognizing that we don't have all the answers. People who become wise do so because they listen and submit to the authority of another.

At the same time, if we truly want to offer wisdom to someone else, we can't be prideful. People who are wise don't dole out "wisdom" so others consider them wise. Instead, they share their own experiences of humility. They say, "I have been where you are, and I didn't have all the answers either. Let me show you what I learned along the way."

We live in a world where few people are willing to walk the way of humility because everyone thinks they have the answers. But the gospel calls us to a different way. Just as we were insufficient to attain our own salvation, we are insufficient to attain wisdom by our own understanding. In humility we can say, "I don't know everything. But I want to learn." As followers of Jesus, we should daily humble ourselves before the Lord in the confession that we have nothing apart from Him. If we don't, we will pave the way to our own destruction through pride and arrogance.

Who in your life has demonstrated true humility and wisdom? How have you seen these people reflect Christ in their humility? How can you learn from them?

This verse applies to both our earthly relationships and our relationship with the Lord. Spiritually speaking, what disgrace comes to the one who is prideful before the Lord? What wisdom is there for the one who is humble before the Lord?

Where do you have the hardest time humbling yourself to learn from others? Where do you believe you already have the wisdom you need?

Take some time in prayer to acknowledge the points of pride in your heart. Acknowledge the places you are puffed up with knowledge rather than humbled for learning.

DAY 5—READ JAMES 4:10

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

The way up is down. That's not just a clever saying. Jesus' entire life demonstrated it. From His birth to His death, He was the truest picture of humility. He was born in a barn off the beaten path of Bethlehem to a poor, unwed mother. He was taught a blue-collar job and made His way by working with His hands. He was rejected by His own family and friends. He didn't have a home, but slept in different places. He was hated by the religious and misunderstood by the crowds. He was beaten, mocked, and wrongly accused. He died the death of a common criminal. He did all of this as the very Son of God who could have reached for His rightly deserved status. Instead, He made Himself nothing and became obedient, even to death on a cross. (See Phil. 2:5-8.) But it was by His humiliation that He was exalted above everything else. (See Phil. 2:9-11.)

James's urge toward humility was countercultural in his day. For the Greeks, humility was associated with servitude. Early Christians might have been surprised that this specific trait was being emphasized above others. While many things have changed in our day, the human instinct to get ahead has not. The American dream calls us to do whatever it takes to get ahead, get the right job, make enough money, get the right house, have the right family, and continually seek to move up in wealth and status. We often have to step on others to get more. But the gospel gives us a different way, and Jesus showed this in His life. We are to follow Him to the cross daily, laying ourselves at His feet.

If God exalts those who humble themselves in His presence, then what does that say about His response to those who remain prideful? Where are you trying to exalt yourself in your own power?

Sometimes God teaches us humility, even when we're not looking to learn that lesson from Him. What is the difference between humbling yourself as James commanded and being humbled? Which is more favorable? Why?

What are your daily patterns for humbling yourself in the presence of the Lord?

Physically bow low before the Lord in prayer today. Name the ways you are figuratively tempted to raise yourself up, and ask the Lord to humble you there.



WEEK 3: THE STRIDE OF GENTLENESS

Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and go through the discussion questions.

1. In the teaching video, gentleness is defined as “a submissive and teachable spirit toward God that manifests itself in genuine humility and consideration toward others.” What are some situations where it's difficult for you to respond with gentleness? What are some situations where it's easy for you to respond with gentleness?
2. Read Philippians 4:5 and note that “reasonableness” is translated “gentleness” in various other translations. Why did Paul make such a broad statement here? Are there times when you're justified to respond harshly instead? Explain.
3. Read Isaiah 40:10-11. How can God both rule with might and also gently lead his flock like a shepherd? Which of those two ways do you relate to God most often? Which of those two ways do you perceive He relates to others most often?

4. How has the Lord shown you gentleness?
5. Has there been a time in your life when someone who could have responded to you with harshness responded instead with gentleness? How did that affect you and your relationship with that person?
6. Read 2 Timothy 2:24-25. What is the ultimate purpose or goal of walking in the stride of gentleness?
7. Galatians 5:23 lists gentleness as the fruit of the Spirit. But we still struggle to be gentle with others. What choice do you need to make to walk in the stride of gentleness this week?
8. The stride of gentleness doesn't lack power, it restrains power. The stride of gentleness sees the bigger picture. The stride of gentleness doesn't insist on its own way but makes room for God to have His way. The stride of gentleness is a gift and a choice. Of these four points of application made in the video, which stands out the most to you? Which is most challenging for you right now? Why?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 3: THE STRIDE OF GENTLENESS

DAY 1—READ ISAIAH 40:10-11

Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

People have a way of surprising you. You've known someone for years and years, then suddenly you see them in a new light. Something tests the relationship and reveals a different facet to their personality. Most of the time, though, you'll reach a point where you have someone mostly figured out. One of the joys of knowing and loving God is that He is truly unique. Because God is infinite (and we are finite), you will always learn new and wonderful things about God. He is multi-faceted to an eternal degree.

What we see in this small portion of Scripture is that God is both powerful and comforting, strong and gentle, exalted and humble. Though some people only view Him in one way, He is more than we ask or imagine Him to be. (See Eph. 3:20.)

God carries us close to Him and provides for our needs, careful to care for any wounds we might have. What makes this reality even more awesome is the fact that this tender, gentle, personal God is also the One who created the entire universe and holds all things together in His power. Each facet of God's character draws our worship, leads us to love Him more, and stretches our understanding of how we are to relate to others. Even more incredible, His power is at work in us to help us live out those same qualities in our relationships with other people.

Why are both sides of God's personality identified in this passage necessary?

The Bible is all about God. Each verse proclaims and extols His character. As we learn more about who He is, we are better able to walk the walk He calls us to. In what current relationship or situation is God's character of gentleness calling you to think and act differently?

Are you amazed by the character of God? How might being amazed by God lead to gentleness in your relationships with other people?

Thank God for His power and gentleness that always simultaneously act together for your good and His glory. Ask Him to show you more about His gentle character this week.

DAY 2—READ DEUTERONOMY 32:2

*May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew,
like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon
the herb.*

Here in Baytown, Texas, we know firsthand what a powerful rain looks like and the damage it can cause. That kind of rain is destructive and causes us to seek shelter from it. But in Deuteronomy 32:2, Moses describes a very different kind of rain—one that is gentle and welcome, producing growth even in tender places.

You might not expect Moses to use such a metaphor in his situation. After all, he wrote Deuteronomy while the people of Israel wandered in the desert for forty years because they wouldn't stop complaining and disobeying God. Were we in Moses' sandals, we might have asked God to let us respond more like thunder and lightning to harshly confront them all.

It's not that confrontation is never necessary; it is. But even in confrontation, we should seek to demonstrate the gentleness of the Holy Spirit in us. (See Gal. 5:23.) We lead some to faith and others to a deeper walk of faith when we reflect the Lord's character. When we respond to people harshly, we cause relational destruction and can even obstruct spiritual growth.

Rain is the difference between life and death in the desert. Gentleness can be the difference between life and death, too. The Lord wants you to communicate life by giving His Word to people gently, so that they will be refreshed and renewed, even in the most tender places.

What was Moses' aim in teaching God's Word?

Read John 4:14; 7:38. How does God's Word relate to water?

What is your part in seeing the Lord's Word cover the earth like a gentle rain?

Thank God for the ways His Word has come to you like a gentle rain on tender grass. Ask Him to make your conversations with others like a gentle rain, too, so that they might know and understand His mercy and grace.

DAY 3—READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:24-25

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.

There is an old saying that goes “you get more bees with honey.” The gospel does not need sweetening, but sometimes God’s people do!

One temptation to avoid offending people might be to soft-peddle the truth and avoid speaking at all, but then we are denying people the hope of the gospel. Knowing the gospel must be spoken, how should we speak it? Paul wrote to a young pastor named Timothy to help him figure this out. Christians are to be kind, patient, gentle, and should not be quarrelsome. Unfortunately, most Christians are not seen this way. When someone disagrees with us, there is never a reason to be angry or afraid. The truth of the gospel is not dependent upon whether or not someone believes it. When we speak the truth, we don’t have to argue someone into believing; rather, we can rest in the confidence that our message is true and offer it with resolve and gentleness.

As you disagree with people over issues like politics, morality, and religion, consider how you would like to be disagreed with and remember how Jesus dealt with people trapped in sin. Jesus was full of grace for sinners, as seen in the Gospels. Arguments do not bring people into the kingdom of heaven, but grace does.

Identify the other qualities Paul listed in 2 Timothy 2:24-25 besides gentleness. How are these qualities all related to gentleness?

Read Jude 1:22-23. What challenges are there for you in relating with gentleness to people who doubt, are lost, or who live in rebellion?

How can we cultivate an attitude of love and gentleness toward those who disagree with us?

Thank God that you can rest confidently in the truth of the gospel. Ask Him to help you gently teach and submit to His Word.

DAY 4—READ GALATIANS 5:22-26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

There is a well-known phase of life among children when they ask the question, “Why?” far more than adults would prefer. That’s because there are many things kids don’t understand. They learn some things just by watching and observing the world. But there are other things that need to be described for them.

In a way, we’re all kind of like that, even as adults. We don’t understand God’s ways and we need the Holy Spirit to reveal His truth to us. We don’t understand how we can possibly respond with gentleness when everything in us wants to react in turn, believing we are justified in certain unkindnesses.

That’s why we need God to work in us to shape us into the people He has called us to be. In this well-known passage, Paul called for the Galatian believers to do just that, to follow the Spirit’s leadership and avoid destructive attitudes and behavior. Spiritually speaking, “Why?” is far less important than “How?” The Spirit’s presence in our lives gives us the power we need to live out our faith. He replaces those sinful works with His fruit, and as a result, we’re able to love and serve others rather than ourselves.

Where do you see the Holy Spirit bringing out the characteristic of gentleness in your life?

If verse 26 describes the attitude of someone not in tune with the Spirit, what’s the attitude of someone who is?

How can you be more aware of and sensitive to the Spirit’s presence and power to help you respond with gentleness?

Thank God for sending the Holy Spirit so that you can have a guide and an advocate to help you live a life that glorifies God. Pray that God would help you listen and heed the instruction of the Spirit in your life.

DAY 5—READ PHILIPPIANS 4:5

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

In this week's small group discussion, we learned that the stride of gentleness sees the big picture. That's easier said than done, right? It's hard to be reasonable or gentle to everyone. Even those who manage to demonstrate gentleness in person, struggle sometimes to be gentle in our email responses, social media posts, and driving experiences!

But that's why Philippians 4:5 is so very helpful. The Lord is at hand. It bears repeating: The Lord is at hand. And let's go ahead and say it once more for good measure: The Lord is at hand!

That's the big picture. Life is short, and people all around us don't know Jesus. Their eternal destiny is horrific. And in every interaction you have with people, you have the opportunity to either help them see the bigger picture or to fail to do so.

Walking the walk with the stride of gentleness isn't just a nice way to live. It's bigger than your personality as defined by an Enneagram number. It's not just a tip for how to win friends and influence people. The reason why the Spirit bears the fruit of gentleness in followers of Christ is because it is a matter of life and death. The Lord is at hand.

In your own words, what does it mean that the Lord is at hand?

Read Philippians 4:6-7. What is a situation where you struggle to respond with gentleness? What do these verses instruct you to do about it?

How would you respond differently to people if you truly believed the Lord was at hand this week?

Confess to God your weakness and inability to be "gentle" in your own power. Ask Him to remind you daily of the bigger picture—He is coming soon, and there are people around you who are not yet saved.



WEEK 4: THE PATH OF PATIENCE

Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and go through the discussion questions.

1. Who has shown you great patience? Why do you think they did so?
2. We walk the path of patience when we acknowledge God's great patience toward us. Why do you think we tend to compartmentalize God's patience toward us—not taking it into consideration when our own patience with other people is stretched?
3. What are some things we can do each day to remember God's patience toward us?
4. Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17. What did Paul do to remember God's patience toward him? How did this remembering influence his relationships with others?

5. Read Colossians 3:12-14. What does it mean to "put on ... patience"?
6. John Newton said, "I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am." How can you relate?
7. We walk the path of patience when we let go of our old nature and put on the nature of Christ. In what situation or relationship do you need to do that this week? How can you?
8. Read Galatians 6:2. How can this group help you walk the path of patience? How well does our group bear each other's burdens?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 4: THE PATH OF PATIENCE

DAY 1—READ 1 TIMOTHY 1:13-16

Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

What do you often see or experience that continually amazes you or gives you a sense of joy? Maybe it's the ocean, a sunset, or the night sky filled with stars. Whatever those things may be, it is a gift to be able to find consistent joy in something so beautiful and never take it for granted.

For the apostle Paul, the gospel was like that. Paul lived and breathed the gospel, but his familiarity and constant exposure to it never led to boredom or indifference. Rather, the more he considered the gospel, the more he marveled at it. This passage reflects Paul's ever-increasing awareness of his sin, God's grace, and God's glory.

In short, Paul demonstrated what it looks like to mature in the faith. We neither think more of ourselves as we mature nor do we think less of others. We grow in our awareness of the depth of our sin and the holiness of God so that what God did for us in Christ blows our minds more than ever. This leads us not to think of ourselves as superior to others, but as the worst of sinners. And when we understand Jesus' great patience with us, we are better able to extend grace and patience to others.

What are some ways you can continually give honor and glory to God for His patience toward you—a sinner who has become His child in Christ?

Patience, along with the other qualities listed in Ephesians 4:2-3, is a gift of the Spirit and also a byproduct of spiritual growth. How actively are you pursuing spiritual growth?

How can your testimony—Christ's redemption of your past—be a platform to share His grace and patience with others?

Pray that your path to maturity would mirror Paul's—that you would daily grow in your awareness of your sin and of the holiness of God, thereby giving all the more praise to Him for His work on your behalf in Jesus. Pray that you would become more humble every day.

DAY 2—READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-13

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

When you think about needing patience and bearing with another person, what comes to mind? Do you think about putting up with someone who annoys you? Do you think about walking through a difficult situation with someone you love? It is likely Paul had both in mind when he wrote these words.

God looks at you differently when you come to Christ and receive His salvation. And when you recognize that you are chosen, holy, and loved by God Himself, it makes you look at other people differently too. Everyone in your life is either someone who has come to Christ, and is also holy, chosen, and loved by God, or someone who has not yet come to Christ, but God longs to know in those ways. People who annoy you are also people you must choose to love because they are either part of your spiritual family or people God wants to become part of your spiritual family.

We must choose to “put on” patience and bear with people in whatever ways we can, no matter what our relationship with them is. We don’t take the path of patience only when we’re in a good mood or bear with people only if we have some time on our hands. Instead, we are to endure offenses and enter into struggles with one another with grace and patience because God uses those things to draw people to Himself, and we are all in a battle against our worldly natures.

How does your standing with God affect the way you relate to other people?

In this passage, Paul also identified the necessity of forgiveness. What is the correlation between patience, bearing with others, and forgiveness?

Is there someone in your life you need to show patience to right now? To bear with? What keeps you from doing so?

Thank God for choosing you, showing you His steadfast love, and making you holy. Ask Him to help you learn to be patient and bear with others as He has been patient and bears with you.

DAY 3—1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Loving someone requires maintaining a measure of optimism on that person's behalf. Failure invades every Christian's life, and it often causes others to give up on the one who fails. But Christians who love continue to hope for the best. Patience, then, demonstrates optimism and encourages others to keep moving forward. This hope is based not on the person in question, but on Christ, who draws all people to Himself and then preserves us to glory. Christ is the One who promised to finish the work He began. (See Phil. 1:6.)

Loving someone is easy when the other person does not challenge your affections by offending or failing you. Love's qualities become evident when it must endure trials. The New Testament encourages Christians to persevere in the Christian walk. (See 1 John 5:2–5.) Here Paul specifically has in mind the need to persevere in love for others, having patience and enduring all things. We only have to look to the lengthy perseverance of Christ's love for us as the standard for our own. When our love mirrors Christ's, it will be filled with hope, patience, and endurance.

Do you consider yourself optimistic or pessimistic? How does this affect you on the path of patience?

Read John 13:34-35. If love and patience are synonymous, then what can you conclude?

How has love caused you to endure hardship with someone?

Thank God for desiring the best for you. Ask Him to help you hope for the best in other people, too.

DAY 4—READ GALATIANS 5:25-6:2

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

²⁶ *Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

6 ¹*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.* ² *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Relationships need healthy boundaries and it's not your job to fix other people. At the same time, Christ does call His followers to bear the burdens of others in a way that honors Him. Finding the right balance in relationships can be tricky, but one thing is clear: the Christian life is meant to be lived in community. It's not just about overcoming your own challenges; it's about helping other people overcome theirs. This passage helps us know what that should look like — and what it doesn't look like.

Paul started with what it doesn't look like. Impatience is the child of conceit and envy. When you think highly of yourself or are constantly striving to measure up to others, it's tough to have patience with people or bear their burdens. That's because other people's concerns are the last thing on your mind.

On the other hand, as we learned earlier this week in 1 Timothy 1:13-16, a humble view of self and grateful understanding of God leads us to relate properly to other people, especially when they have issues. God wants to reach out to struggling believers so that they might experience renewed fellowship with Him. He does that through Christians who, though imperfect, are living under the Spirit's leadership.

How does Galatians 6:1-2 illustrate ways of helping someone “keep in step with the Spirit” (5:25)?

Read Matthew 22:37-40. What is likely the “law of Christ”? Can you love people without also showing them patience and bearing their burdens?

What steps can you take to become the type of person other believers know and trust will restore them and carry their burdens when needed?

Thank Jesus for loving you and showing you how to love other people. Ask Him to produce in you and around you an authentic spiritual community in which sin is confronted, encouragement is given, and resources are shared.

DAY 5—READ 1 PETER 4:8

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Just how important is it to take the path of patience and bear other people's burdens? In beginning this sentence with the phrase, "Above all," Peter indicated that what we've been talking about this week is top priority. This is not optional for any believer.

There's no shame in admitting it's not easy. There aren't a lot of examples of enduring relationships in this world, even in the church. It's often easier to walk away from people than it is to stick in there and do the hard work of earnestly keeping on. If you want to love people earnestly, you will be stretched. The kind of love we're talking about requires much of us. And at a certain point, it becomes a choice.

The reminder to love each other deeply is crucial to the Christian identity. We love people, showing them patience and bearing their burdens even when it's inconvenient. One of the most difficult times to extend love is when someone in the church has hurt or wronged us. We must demonstrate a love that is willing to be stretched because "love covers over a multitude of sins". Because of God's love, He is willing to forgive our sins. The present tense verb means forgiveness is ongoing and consistent. Patience, then, is ongoing and consistent. Bearing with others is ongoing and consistent. This is the character of love we are to pursue in all our relationships.

**What makes it difficult for you to love people earnestly?
To keep loving people that way?**

**Read 1 Peter 4:8. How does this help you understand
why you need to learn to take the path of patience?**

**What are some practical ways Christians can maintain
earnest love for each other?**

**Thank God for His Word that gives us all we need to
know how to follow Him. Ask God to help you grow in
love, patience, and bearing with others so that your life
might clearly communicate the gospel.**



WEEK 5: THE PACE OF UNITY

Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and go through the discussion questions.

1. Who are some people that you would say you are unified with? What unifies you with those people (i.e. a project at work, a social cause, a sports team, etc.)?
2. Have you ever been part of a church or group of believers within a church with whom you would say you were unified? If yes, how so? If not, why not?
3. Read Ephesians 4:3. Here at Second Baytown, how can we know if we are unified around the right thing?
4. Read Philippians 1:27-28. There's only one source for Christian unity—the Spirit of God. Why will every other source of unity eventually fall apart?

5. Read Philippians 2:1-2. The pursuit of Christian unity is truth. What are some ways we can pursue truth together?
6. Read John 17:20-23. What is the outcome of unity in Christ? Why?
7. How will outsiders know we are unified? What are some ways unity reveals itself among us?
8. Why must Christian unity never be cliquish but always invite others in?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 5: THE PACE OF UNITY

DAY 1—READ PHILIPPIANS 1:27

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

Many are curious about Christianity, eager to see how being a Christ-follower makes a difference. But that shouldn't make us feel guilty or weighed down by the responsibility of it all. The grace of God given to believers and the Spirit of God living in believers truly bring significant change in Jesus' followers. Not perfectly so, but definitively so.

The call to live according to the gospel to a watching and unbelieving world is not new, as Philippians 1:27 illustrates. The believers in Philippi were facing opposition, and as Paul urged them to live a life worthy of the gospel, he also urged them to stand together as one. As they lived out their faith for all to see, they were to be of one mind, focused together on the call of the gospel. In fact, living their lives in a manner worthy of the gospel would require this kind of unity of faith, calling, and purpose.

While God offers each of us salvation as individuals, we must live out our salvation in the context of community. Working for the advancement of the gospel is a cooperative venture. It requires team effort. If individuals on a team contend individually, rather than cooperatively, their efforts fail. The same is true of us. That's why we're called to walk with the pace of unity. Without it, we'll perpetually struggle to walk the walk in a way that brings God the glory He deserves.

What does unity have to do with living your life worthy of the gospel? Do you usually put the two things together as one? Why or why not?

What is the purpose of the church? How does disunity hurt that purpose?

What are some practical ways we can encourage and build unity among the believers at Second Baytown?

Thank the Spirit for the unity He promotes in your life with other believers. Ask God to help you walk side by side with those believers, standing firm in faith and purpose so that others might come to know Jesus.

DAY 2—READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,
² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*

We've watered down the word "encouragement" in our culture. It has become a passive idea, as if encouragement is simply something we receive—"here I am...encourage me!" But the root word itself indicates true encouragement facilitates new attitudes and behavior. This is what Paul was saying in Philippians 2. If Jesus has encouraged you, then show that courage!

In Philippians 1:27, Paul challenged the Philippian Christians to be unified with his charge to stand firm "in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith." That theme of unity continues in Chapter 2 as a way of explaining what having received Christ's love means in our lives—how it causes us to think and act differently. His words are as challenging today as they were then. One of the ways Christians show they bear that name, having been set apart, is through truly considering the interests of others ahead of their own.

Paul called them to fulfill his joy by pursuing unity with one another. Their harmony could exist only by their having the same outlook—thinking the same way. They would express that unity by having the same love as Christ had, sharing the same feelings, and by their focusing on one goal. Jesus Christ stated that this kind of obvious, mutual love and practical unity is the distinguishing characteristic of His disciples.

What four specific areas of unity did Paul desire for the Philippian believers? How would you describe what Paul meant by each phrase?

Read John 13:34-35. What additional insight does Jesus' commandment give into the purpose of unity among Christians?

How would this kind of unity in the church complete your joy?

Thank Jesus for His encouragement, comfort, and joy. Invite the Spirit to move in you and Second Baytown to bring you to the place where you are fully unified in mind and love.

DAY 3—READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

As long as the church is made of more than one person, divisions will exist. That's what happens when broken people get involved, and we're all broken people. By nature, we create groups and dividing lines to define who we are and who we are not.

This is not how God designed us or how He wants us to live. We are one body, united by one Spirit, under one God through Jesus Christ. (See Eph. 4:4-6.) All of the dividing lines that separated us from God due to sin have been broken down through Jesus. (See Eph. 2:14.) Yet, we often seek to rebuild the walls Christ has broken down. Be it race, socioeconomic status, or worship style, we can always find something to be divided over in the church. Of course, not all distinctions are bad. Some core theological distinctions are important enough to draw a line in the sand. But it is most often less crucial issues that cause debate and disunity in the church.

As believers, we're not called to uniformity; we are called to unity. The church is full of people, which means disagreements and hard conversations will happen. Difficult decisions will have to be made, and not everyone will be happy with every decision. It's true that we do have an enemy, but it is not those we disagree with in the church. Yet, in Christ and because of Christ, we must find the way to remain unified as the family God. In our disagreements, we can still listen and offer grace. We can try to understand where we are unclear. We can forgive where there is hurt. We can sacrifice for the sake of one another.

Based on this verse, how can we promote unity and break down the dividing walls that exist?

It appears that church members were divided over teachers and leaders in the Corinthian church. What are some of the things that divide churches today?

How are you personally tempted to contribute to those divisions?

Thank God for tearing down the barriers that stood between us by sending Christ as our Mediator. Repent for the ways you have tried to keep those walls up. Ask God to help you be a unifying presence in the church, both in word and deed.

DAY 4—READ COLOSSIANS 3:14-15

And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Independence is valued in our society. We like to be able to handle whatever comes our way on our own. We admire “self-made” people who have risen against the odds by hard work and determination. But the thing is, as admirable as hard work and determination are, God never intended for us to fly solo.

We are built for community. We need people. That’s part of the beauty of the church. God has brought together a group of people with a range of different experiences and gifts, and in that diversity there is wisdom. The challenge, though, is valuing that diversity rather than allowing it to splinter us. That’s why we have to prioritize love. We have to have an “above all” mindset, pushing aside everything that is non-essential to the gospel, allowing Jesus’ peace to take up residence on the throne of our hearts.

Deciding to live this way is not based on our desires, but the gospel transforms our relationships from the inside out. Putting on love, then, is an outflow of the transformed life. It is a determined good will that seeks others’ best interests. Such persistent good will is the perfect bond of unity. When we live with and relate to other Christians in love and harmony, we benefit from each other’s wisdom and experience. That’s a reason to be thankful!

Why is true unity impossible without love?

Read Colossians 3:12-14. Paul used the analogy of putting on clothes to explain the gospel transformation that happens to a Christian. What is the last garment that covers everything else? Why is this so important?

Who are you struggling to love, even for the sake of unity? What would it look like for you to “put on” love this week in that relationship?

Thank God for calling you to be a part of His body. Ask Him to help you commit to putting on love for the sake of unity, even when your differences with other people might get in the way.

DAY 5—READ 1 JOHN 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Which came first: the chicken or the egg? It's an age-old dilemma that metaphorically represents situations where it's not clear which of two events should be considered the cause and which should be considered the effect. Spiritually speaking, we can certainly relate. Throughout history, humankind has sought to place works as the cause-agent for a relationship with God. 1 John 1:7 should be examined closely, then.

The cleansing of sin in our lives is not the effect of our obedience to His commands. If we could cause or create such a wonderful thing, certainly Jesus would not have needed to die on the cross! The old covenant would have been enough. Rather, Jesus' blood cleansing our sins is the cause which results in the effect John identified. God is the ultimate standard of holiness, a standard by which we fall woefully short. Those who truly possess fellowship with Him, those who are recipients of the New Covenant, will reflect His nature and character by avoiding sinful lifestyles and purposefully seeking unity and fellowship with other believers.

Because of the shed blood of Jesus on the cross making payment for our sins, we make a conscious, continuous decision to live life in conformity with the revelation of God, who is light. When we live in the light, we have fellowship with one another. Fellowship with both God and other believers is made possible by Jesus, and then is experienced fully when we habitually align our lives with the nature and character of God. This is new covenant living!

Why do you think it is such a struggle for many people to fully grasp that Jesus alone is the cause-agent for true unity?

What are some other rallying points for unity among people? Why do these, ultimately, always fall short?

Understanding that Jesus has cleansed all sin from those who trust Him, how can sin still disrupt fellowship and unity?

Thank God for His light, Jesus Christ, who cleanses you from all sin. Ask Him to help you walk faithfully in that light so that your unity and fellowship would deepen and others might come to a saving faith in Jesus.



WEEK 6: THE DIRECTION OF GOD

Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and go through the discussion questions.

1. Would you say you've figured out the secret of life? If so, what has helped you come to that place of peace and understanding? If not, what questions hold you back?
2. Many of us know in our heads that the secret of life is to commit yourself to God and His direction. What are some things that sidetrack us from living that way?
3. What does it mean that "Jesus is supreme over everything"?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 and Colossians 1:15-20. What stands out to you about Jesus in these passages?

5. What implications should the supremacy of Jesus have in our daily lives? Read Colossians 1:21-23 for help.
6. How does it make you feel to know Jesus intends to present you to God holy, blameless, and above reproach. How has this series "Walk the Walk" helped you better understand what that looks like?
7. Read Galatians 3:26-28. Why is Christian community a critical part of walking the walk of faith?
8. How has your connection to other believers helped keep you on the right track, living only for Jesus?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your serve project and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 6: THE DIRECTION OF GOD

DAY 1—READ 1 CORINTHIANS 8:5-6

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

In Acts 17, Paul speaks to the Greeks in Athens about the many gods they worshiped. The people were quite religious and had many altars to different so-called gods. There was even one to the unknown god to cover any they may have missed. They couldn't figure out the one thing that life was all about because all their idols made it about many things. Paul knew that their worship of these false gods would lead to ruin. He spoke against idolatry in hopes of getting them off of the dead-end path and focused on the one true God who deserved their attention.

In Psalm 115:6-7, the psalmist also writes about false gods: “They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat.” When you walk the walk with false gods you become like them—empty, purposeless, and doomed for eternity.

The truth is that there is one true God and one true direction. Everything comes from God and everything is for God. We may not be making shrines of gold and silver like the people in Corinth, but anything that moves us away from God can become a god. Spend some time in self-examination today and let God show you what adjustments need to be made so that He alone is on the throne of your heart.

What are some false gods we are tempted to follow in life? Knowing only God the Father gives the direction we need, why are we tempted to follow other gods?

How does the truth of the gospel motivate you to worship God alone and to rid yourself of the things that draw you away from him?

What in your life are you tempted to turn into a so-called god (note: these are often good things, not bad things)? What needs to change in your relationship with this person or thing?

Pray that God presses into your heart the truth about Him and the gospel in a way that pushes out so-called gods in your life.

DAY 2—READ GALATIANS 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

We see the “one thing” principle throughout Paul’s New Testament letters. Here in his letter to the Galatians, he says his life is lived for Jesus and in Jesus alone. That means he wasn’t thinking only of himself anymore.

It’s sort of like when a person gets married. Things change in life when you get married, like how you make decisions. You have to think about how a decision will also affect your spouse, from planning out the week to spending money. And that new pattern may continue as the family grows. When a couple has children, they have to start thinking about the affect their decisions will have on their kids. Instead of walking an individual walk, they’re walking alongside other people.

To a much greater degree than that, in Christ our decisions no longer affect our lives alone. Instead, we are living as ambassadors for Christ in the world. Every decision must be made in light of this reality.

There is only one reason why a person would set aside his or her own life to walk the way of another—that person views his or her own life as less important. When we put our faith in Christ, we are submitting to His supremacy. We are dedicating our lives to Him fully, believing His way to be more important than our own. This means all we do should be in light of the truth of the gospel and the implications it has for daily living. This also impacts others as we live together as the church and seek to share the truth of the gospel with those who do not yet know Him.

In your own words, what does this verse imply about the walk of any believer?

Why does submitting fully to the supremacy of God always lead us to tell others about Him?

How have you seen your daily choices impact your witness for Christ and your relationship with others?

Pray for the reminder that it is Christ who lives in you each day. Ask that your life would be fully dedicated to His glory and mission in the world.

DAY 3—READ ACTS 17:27-28

That they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.”

In these verses, Paul quotes poets who had influenced Athenian culture centuries earlier. In making this connection with the poets of the day, Paul was walking a tightrope, so to speak, of religious understanding. The original poems were actually about Zeus. But Paul recognized the divine qualities to be true of Yahweh alone. The Athenians had effectively admitted their spiritual ignorance by erecting an altar to an unknown god. So Paul used their culture and religious practices to lead them to a clarified view of the one true God.

In doing so, he identified the source of the people’s spiritual searching. He showed them it is really Yahweh who has a deeply intimate relationship with His people. It is Yahweh who alone reigns supreme over all the earth, gives us life, and sets a good direction before us.

In saying we are God’s offspring, Paul means that every human is dependent on God for life and everything it entails. More importantly, as made clear in Genesis 1:26-27, all human beings are created in God’s own image. He is supreme in the universe. We are created in no other image but His own. As such, we must walk in His direction, not any other.

What does it mean to you that in Him you “live and move and have [your] being”? How should that play out in daily life?

What evidences of general revelation (i.e. nature, beauty) do you see misinterpreted in our culture?

According to verse 27, for what purpose does God give us general revelation? How can you know if you have found Him?

Thank God for His nearness and His desire for all people to live in Him. Ask Him to remind you of His supremacy in your life every day so that you might walk in His direction.

DAY 4—READ COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Has there ever been a moment in your life where you felt like everything else led to that? Maybe it was a series of events or trials that led to a new job, or maybe it was failed relationships that led to finding and marrying the love of your life. *Alexa, play “Broken Road” by Rascal Flatts!*

Scripture teaches us everything points to Jesus. He alone is the center point of history. That should give us courage when the world looks or feels like God isn’t in control. In this passage, Paul puts it like this: Jesus is Lord of all creation. He created all things, and everything in creation was created for Him. He has always existed—He was involved in the creation of the world, and everything exists for His purposes. Everything and everyone holds together in Him. It doesn’t matter that the people of His day didn’t think He was all that special; all of history, even the history of those very people, points to Jesus.

It doesn’t matter what it looks like or how insignificant you or your circumstance seems. Jesus is the center point of the history of the world, and He is the center point of your past, present, and future, too.

What does it mean to you personally that in Jesus, “all things hold together”?

How do these verses speak to Jesus’ centrality in and supremacy over creation?

What does it mean for you to say Jesus is supreme in your life? What patterns or attitudes need to change for you to experience the full benefits of His supremacy?

Thank God that He is always at work pointing you to Jesus. Ask Him to help you join Him in that process each day and to live in a way that helps point other people to Jesus as the center of their history, too.

DAY 5—READ GALATIANS 3:26-28

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

If you had to pick one word to define who you are, what word would you choose? Would you choose a word that describes your profession? Your role in your family? A personality trait? A social or ethnic identifier? A political party?

In the increasingly polarizing world we live in, it is too easy to define ourselves by a group, person, or idea we oppose. Though there might be different groups or distinctions, our human nature to divide has not changed. Paul knew the early church's tendency to do the same thing. As Christ-followers, we should see people through a different lens if we are to live out God's call to make disciples of all nations (even people with whom you may not agree).

Once you are in Christ, He is your true identifier because He holds supremacy over everything else. Not your race. Not your gender. Not your economic status. The things society uses to identify one another are not so for Christians. Those factors are not irrelevant, but they don't give us our identity either. They also don't give any one group a spiritual upper hand. Even though the Jewish people were God's covenant people, they did not experience a deeper spiritual reality with God than the Gentiles who trusted Jesus. Because Christ defines us, He also unites us. We don't overlook our differences and distinctions. God made all of us unique, but we are all made in His image. We can be both unique and unified at the same time under the banner of Christ as we walk in His direction.

What are some human common identifiers you have seen or experienced? How do such identifiers impact us as we walk the walk?

How does the supremacy of the gospel change our perspective on those things which divide us?

What things shape your identity? How should the truth of Galatians 3:28 affect your understanding of who God is? Of who you are?

Acknowledge the far-reaching impact of God's supremacy and the need for it to change the way you see Him, yourself, and other people. Repent of any ways or attitudes that don't match His heart for all people.

WEEK 1

COLOSSIANS 1:9-10

1:9. Paul's letter to the Colossians began with a prayer of thanksgiving. That prayer, based on the good report of Epaphras, reminded the Colossian believers of the power of the gospel so they would not be seduced by the siren song of heresy. The theme of prayer continues in verses 9–14, but the focus shifts from thanksgiving to intercession. Paul prays that the believers will live lives that are pleasing to God. Does it take deep knowledge, strict living, or a rapturous experience to please God? That's what the false teachers were telling the Colossians. We, like the Colossians, need to know the truth about what pleases God so we won't be enchanted by error.

Paul tells us why he prays and what he prays for. When Paul says for this reason, he is looking back to the good report he received from Epaphras. Paul prays for believers who are doing well. He asks that they continue in the process of growth. The focus of much prayer is on those who are struggling and not doing well. While those are good prayers, Paul reminds us of the need to pray for those who are doing well since they are prime targets for enemy attacks. Many of our prayers ask for immediate relief from circumstantial or personal difficulties. While some of these prayers are good, Paul wants us to include prayers for spiritual growth and long-term development.

Paul's prayer is that God fill believers with the knowledge of his will. Paul wants the Colossians to know God's will and then let that knowledge control them. God's will is not a spiritual Easter egg he hides from us. No, God wants us to know his will and so clearly reveals that will in his Word. A mere knowledge of God's Word is not what will please him. We need to be controlled by that knowledge. The word fill means to control. To be filled with something (an emotion like fear or jealousy) means to be under its controlling influence that causes us to do things we might not do otherwise. Being controlled by God's will should cause us to do things we might not otherwise do—things like enduring rather than giving up, like being patient with others rather than getting angry with them.

The knowledge and control of God's will comes through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. This is more than simple intelligence. Wisdom refers to the comprehension of truth, while understanding refers to the application of truth. Being controlled by God's will means believers comprehend the principles of Scripture and then put them into practice.

1:10. Being controlled by God's will is not an end in itself; it is only a means to an end. The goal is to live a life worthy of the Lord and ... please him in every way. The request of verse 9 was made so that the Colossians would live lives which please God. The word worthy refers to conduct that is expected and appropriate for God's children.

If pleasing God is the goal, how do we achieve it? Paul spells that out very clearly in verses 10–12. By bearing fruit, growing in knowledge, being strengthened for adversity, and giving thanks for salvation, we please God.

First, believers please God when they are bearing fruit in every good work. Good works are not a means to achieve salvation, but a natural result of it. Good works in the life of the believer please God because good works are God's plan for the believer (Eph. 2:8–10).

Second, God is pleased when believers are growing in the knowledge of God. The more we know of God's character, his ways, and his expectations, the more we are able to bring our lives into conformity with what pleases him.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1

4:1. The little word Finally does not signal a conclusion. It is a transition to the rest of what Paul had to say.

He was ready to give the Thessalonian Christians another reminder—that they already knew how to live in a way that pleased God. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had personally instructed them while in Thessalonica. What Paul was now writing was nothing new.

Paul reminded the Thessalonian believers of their need to please God. He was complimenting them on their spiritual progress. Even so, they must not relax, and he urged them to do so more and more. The progress of these Thessalonians brought sincere joy and delight, but Paul always expected and urged people to do "more and more." Paul himself modeled that kind of living.

LUKE 21:15-17

21:12–15 These verses return to discussion of the immediate circumstances of the apostles and their co-laborers in the gospel. Persecution by Jews (the synagogues) and Gentiles (kings and governors) will lead to opportunities to witness for Christ (Ac 4; 7; 22–24; 26). I will give you such words basically repeats Jesus's earlier promise in 12:11–12.

JOHN 21:18-19

21:18. Remember, we are talking about end time, Jesus went on. You will be persecuted. You may die, but nothing will be ultimately destroyed. God is protecting you for eternal life with him.

21:19. The flip side of God's protection is your endurance, he declared. I am giving you these signs so you will not be surprised. You will remember I told you they were coming. You will not yield to temptation to join the world or the devil. You are to remain true to me through all persecution and catastrophe. Only by such perseverance can you gain your life for eternity. Remember, I warned you these things were coming. Keep the faith. Trust me through everything. Stay under God's protection.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:12-13

2:11–12. Paul declared, We dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children. Not only did Paul express the nurturing tenderness of a mother; he also demonstrated the strength of a father's love by encouraging, comforting, and urging these people toward godly living.

Encouraging is a heart-felt term, not a one-time shot in the arm just to make a person feel better. It is the strong support and trust that imparts courage to others. Paul wrote it in the present tense, implying that it was continual in his leadership style. People need to be infused with courage again and again, as a matter of practice, to be emboldened in what they know is right.

Comforting is the gentle empathy which comes and stays alongside someone as they experience failures and distresses in life. Urging comes from a solemn and earnest view of a situation, asking someone to do or be something for the highest good. Urging has a clear view of what is right, leading a person through the maze of emotions and conflicts which can confuse an issue.

Why did Paul live among them as a father, inspiring them to be courageous, standing with them in difficulty, addressing serious issues? So that they might live worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. What does it mean to live worthy of God? To gain a fuller understanding of this, we must view God and ourselves accurately.

God determined to create for himself a people who bear his character and nature. It was his intention even before he created Adam. Despite the dark rebellion of Satan and his subversion which penetrated all the created order, God has constantly pursued mankind, revealing his personhood, justice, love, and mercy. He involved himself with his world in order to demonstrate his glory and, after man's rebellion, to bring back to himself what was rightfully his.

Jesus Christ is the extreme effort God went to—God himself planting his feet upon the dirt in the face of injustice, misunderstanding, weariness, and hatred.

As followers of Christ, are we living lives worthy of him? God has put this call upon our lives—to make us like Christ. We are the presence of Christ in this age—here and now, in this time, at this place. Are we living in a way that matches the worthiness of that call?

God has promised us his kingdom and glory. Those who have chosen to follow Christ will be welcomed by him into heaven. But in the mean-time, before that glory is realized, we are to be like him, to bear his character and nature. He gives us his Spirit, enabling us to live as he did. But the choice is always ours. Are we living lives worthy of his plan, his promise, his provision?

WEEK 2

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-8

2:6. Jesus is the preeminent example of humility. He has always been God. John 1:1 speaks of Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." As God, he did not selfishly grasp hold of or tightly hold to his position as equal with God. Instead, he was willing to leave his high position in heaven temporarily and to give himself over to serving our needs. Although he set aside the rights and privileges of being God, he remained God.

2:7. Jesus made himself nothing or "emptied himself." Scholars refer

to this important statement as kenosis, from the Greek word. By becoming a man, Jesus did not lay aside his deity. Charles C. Ryrie sheds light on this event: “Christ didn’t become any less God, but he chose not to use some of his divine attributes. This involved a veiling of his preincarnate glory (John 17:5) and the voluntary nonuse of some of his divine prerogatives during the time he was on earth (Matt. 24:36). For God to become a man was humbling enough, but he was willing to go even further. Christ could have come to earth in his true position as King of the universe. Instead, he took the role of a servant. The Creator chose to serve his creatures.

Jesus did not come into existence as a baby in Bethlehem. As God, he always existed. He did take on human nature as Jesus of Nazareth being made in human likeness but remained sinless (Heb. 4:15). Christ did not have a halo as paintings sometimes portray him. He entered this earthly life looking like an ordinary man. Had you passed him on a street, he probably would not have caught your attention.

2:8. Jesus, looking like a man, humbled himself and became obedient to death. Mark 10:45, speaking of Christ, declares: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Second Corinthians 8:9 is also helpful: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” Even though Jesus was equal to God the Father, he submitted to his Father’s will (John 5:30).

Becoming a man was humbling. Taking the nature of a servant was more humbling. Christ went still further. He humbled himself to the extent of being willing to die like a common criminal on a cross. Crucifixion was the most degrading kind of execution that could be inflicted on a man (niv Study Bible, 1865). It was the form of capital punishment the Romans employed for foreigners and slaves. Many died in this manner. Most paid the penalty for heinous crimes. Christ’s death was unique! He died but not for what he had done. He was sinless with no penalty to pay. He died for others. He died to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. Observe Galatians 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” Isaiah 53:6 asserts: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep (John 10:14–15).

1 PETER 5:6-8

5:6. In humbly following the Lord and submitting to him, we are bowing to his mighty hand or power. This is a far greater power than that of Satan (see Eph. 1:19–21 for a description of this power). The Old Testament speaks of God’s power to intervene in history for the sake of his people (Exod. 13:9; Deut. 26:8) and to exercise discipline by imposing suffering on his people (Job 30:21). The followers of Christ are to humble themselves under God’s mighty hand. Although it may allow us to experience deep pain and suffering, it will still protect us and bring us safely through.

Those who obey God in this manner find the promise that God may lift you up in due time. Trusting God in this way is another way to resist Satan, who would invite us in the midst of our pain to curse God and die. Trusting God ultimately leads to exaltation by him in “due time.” This description means either the time of Christ’s second coming or a time near at hand. God will bring persecution to an end.

5:7. Satan and his attacks have not been mentioned overtly, but another resistance method for believers appears here. As we trust God and his mighty power, we follow a God who cares deeply for us. Peter may have had in mind the words of Jesus (Matt. 6:25–34). If so, he borrowed them and placed them in the context and crucible of suffering and persecution.

Cast means “to throw something upon someone or something else.” This word suggests a deliberate decision of trust. We are to trust God with our anxiety, the things we worry about. The term (merimnan) means “to be drawn in different directions, to be divided or distracted.” Whatever we are anxious about tends to distract us from trusting God. It tends to pull us in different directions so that we do not depend on him. When we limp in this direction, we do not resist Satan, but play into his hand. He wants us to put more trust in ourselves and others as opposed to God.

Peter’s first-century readers, like their twentieth-century cousins, failed to remember this truth even in the midst of anguish and pain: God cares for you. The form in which the verb appears (present active indicative with the dative) indicates that God’s care and concern for believers is constant, ongoing, and unending. God is not indifferent to the suffering of his followers, but desires our active, humble trust in him, especially during difficult days.

5:8. C. S. Lewis once suggested that the two mistakes Christians make in talking about Satan are that we either joke about him or we ignore him. According to this verse, neither of these is an option. In essence, this verse says, “Wake up! Pay attention! We are involved in a spiritual battle. You need to know the enemy and his characteristics. You need to understand that we are in a life-and-death battle.”

Biblically, Satan or the devil (*diabolos*, the slanderer) is described as the prince of this world. His residence is on this earth, and he moves from place to place. Because this earth is the devil’s territory, believers are constantly under attack. Additionally, the Bible speaks of the devil as a personal spiritual being in active rebellion against God. He leads many demons like himself. Peter envisions the devil as a cunning and evil personal being who has the ability to attack Christians and to disrupt the life and unity of the church.

The biblical writers take the existence of Satan and evil spirits for granted and portray them as opposing God’s purposes and the welfare of his people. Satan and his henchmen are bent on destroying life and introducing every sort of evil. They use deceit to attack believers and to blind unbelievers to the gospel. The commander-in-chief of these opposing forces is Satan himself. He is the master of ingenious strategies, and his tactics must not be allowed to catch us unaware.

WEEK 3

PHILIPPIANS 4:5

4:5. A practical way to have joy is by exhibiting gentleness to all. This lets the church and world see that you belong to the Lord. The Greek word *epieikēs* means “yielding, gentle, kind.” It includes the ability to go beyond the letter of the law in treating others, to provide something beside strict justice. It does not insist on personal rights or privileges. Christ embodied such gentleness in his dealing with all people (2 Cor. 10:1; compare 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 3:2; Jas. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:18). Why should we surrender personal rights for others? The Lord is near. In both time and space, God is available to us. He is not far removed in heaven but present in our hearts to hear and relate to us. His nearness also means he knows us and what we are. In time, God is near, for he is coming again. Then we will receive our rewards for living like Christ rather than like the world.

ISAIAH 40:10-11

40:10-11. God is coming with power. No one can stand against his arm. He comes not in vengeance (34:8) but with a reward for his people, probably reflecting the practice of bringing spoils of war and tribute back to the people. Israel does not have to rely on their military trophies. God brings all they need. But he comes to his people not as a military warrior but as a caring shepherd, often an image for a king. He knows those with special needs and treats them as a new mother and her baby. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. This is the comfort we need.

2 TIMOTHY 2:24-25

2:24. Paul declared, And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel. Selfish attitudes and manners are inconsistent with the nature of God and the disposition of his followers, especially his leaders. Unfortunately, infighting and positioning for power often characterize churches. Perhaps we have become too accustomed to this blatant disobedience, viewing it as an inevitable component of modern church life.

But pastors and lay leaders who bicker, creating factions within the church, are wrong. Instead, the church leader must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Kindness presupposes a peaceable attitude. Such a mindset speaks and acts in goodness. This does not mean spineless acquiescence to popular opinion or to those who may oppose us. Kindness must remain firmly rooted in truth.

Paul required that the Christian leader be able to teach, not resentful. Though truth can seem harsh, carrying with it conviction or judgment of sin, it must be delivered with compassion and kindness because God always works for the restoration or repentance of the sinner. Pastors and leaders must model this understanding and care.

2:25–26. If a leader’s heart is pure, humbled before God’s grace, he can then gently instruct those who err, in the hope that God will grant them repentance. God’s earnest desire to draw all people into loving relationship with himself should motivate the pastor to deal kindly with those who oppose him.

Four players participate in this crucial drama for the human soul: the teacher, the unbeliever, God, and Satan.

The Christian teacher not only proclaims truth; he models godliness and kindness as well. As God's representative, he personifies God and his ways. He also recognizes that the battle for human souls takes place on two fronts—the mind and the heart. Unbelievers do not think clearly in matters of the soul or spirit; they need to come to their senses. This is why the teacher must feed the minds of unbelievers, leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

The unbeliever must remain open and responsive. He must choose to come to his senses. Each person stands responsible before God for his acceptance or rejection of God's truth as found in Jesus Christ.

Beyond the human sphere, God and Satan enter man's spiritual struggle. Those who refuse God's truth come under the influence of the devil who has taken them captive to do his will. Satan traps people into his service through clever arguments, fear, and appeals to selfish pride and ambition. Christians should exercise a healthy awareness of the participation of Satan in the thinking of unbelievers. Contending for truth involves contending with spiritual powers; we must not be so naive as to think we confront on purely human terms.

But God remains faithful. He also contends for human souls and minds. As a measure of his grace, he grants repentance. God is sovereign over the universe and all created beings. We should never become overwhelmed at Satan's methods or power. Satan and God are not equals.

As believers, our responsibility is to speak God's truth, live out his nature, and pray earnestly for the salvation of those who continue in Satan's grip. We ask him, by virtue of his authority, to grant a change of heart to those who are estranged from his truth and love.

GALATIANS 5:22-26

5:22–23. In contrast to the "acts of the flesh" presented above, those who are obedient to the Holy Spirit produce beautiful, nourishing spiritual fruit. Notice the fruit in this passage is called the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of self-effort. This fruit the Holy Spirit produces in the life of a faithful Christian. In other passages of Scripture, we are commanded to fulfill the individual characteristics. The answer to this seeming paradox, I believe, is that only the Holy Spirit can produce the fruit; but he will not do so unless we are striving to the best of our ability for them in faithful obedience. These fruits of the

Spirit are in harmony with and not opposed to the law. However, they are not produced by the law but rather by the Spirit working through the believer's faith.

5:24. The struggle between our flesh and our new nature is real. Yet there is more truth to help us win this battle. Paul explains that those who know Jesus Christ do not have to respond to the flesh because they have crucified the [flesh] with its passions and desires. This crucifixion refers to our identification with Christ in his death and resurrection (Gal. 2:20). When Christ died, our flesh was judged. This does not mean our propensity to sin has been eradicated or rendered inoperative. We must accept that our old nature has died with Christ and that as new people we have an increasing power to resist sin (Rom. 6:10–12).

5:25–26. In addition to the flesh that is judged, Paul reminds the Galatians that they have the Holy Spirit to strengthen them against sin. We must keep in step by following the Holy Spirit's direction and guidance. He ends our bondage to evil desires. Finally, Paul challenges the Galatians to live a life of harmony. Conceited legalism sees no need of the Spirit's help and thinks it has accomplished salvation apart from the Spirit. Instead, it leads to arguments. Paul says to stop provoking and envying each other. These negative traits point to the divisions in the church caused by the legalists. The only answer to such disharmony is love empowered by the Holy Spirit.

WEEK 4

1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17

1:12. Paul offered his personal testimony as a contrast to the false teachers and leaders in the Ephesian church. Paul's words (doctrine) matched his life; his manner corresponded with the truth. When our character and lifestyle harmonize with our beliefs, we become a powerful example of God's truth and reality. Paul was an example to all believers, and specifically to Timothy and church leaders, of how life and doctrine must complement each other.

Paul began his personal testimony by directing attention to Christ. I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength. Whatever Paul was able to point to in his life as exemplary was because of Christ Jesus. Paul had an amazing life of powerful ministry for God. His life and work brought about tremendous results for God's

kingdom. Even so, Paul knew it was because of God from start to finish. He was the giver of power and strength.

Paul's thankfulness continued: God considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Paul had demonstrated faithfulness throughout his ministry, and in God's economy this resulted in greater ministry and responsibility. God knew Paul would be faithful and so put upon him the great responsibility of taking the gospel throughout the known world. Even so, "it is God who works in [us]" (Phil. 2:13). So Paul gave thanks, because he knew that who and what he was came from God: "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God" (2 Cor. 3:5).

Paul did not select his role in life. God clearly and specifically called him: "This man [Paul] is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). He was appointed by God.

1:13. Paul had not always been a missionary in Christ's service. Looking back at his life, he described himself prior to his conversion as a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.

We first met Paul (then called Saul) at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:57–58; 8:1). While an angry mob surrounded Stephen, throwing rocks at him until he was battered to death, Saul witnessed the execution with approval. A few verses later we gain a clearer portrait of this zealot: "Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison" (Acts 8:3).

Here is blasphemy, persecution, and violence from the hands of Saul. He opposed the work of God; he was contemptuous of Christ. He harassed the people of God. He was brutal, having people imprisoned and perhaps killed for their faith in Christ the Lord.

Even so, he was shown mercy. In a dramatic encounter with the living Christ, Paul was rescued from his unbelief. He was saved from his rebellion (Acts 9).

1:14. There is no doubt in Paul's mind that his salvation was due to the grace of our Lord ... poured out on me abundantly. Having just recounted how he lived before his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, his rescue from sin can only be attributed to the overflowing grace of God. It was poured out. The Greek verb

actually has the prefix *hyper*, or "hyper" we would say. It means over, above, beyond, in excess. Paul struggled for words to express the greatness of God's grace.

Not only was he saved; he was changed, receiving the abundance of faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The flood from which grace springs also brings forth faith and love. All are gifts of God; all are evidences of those who are captured by the gracious salvation of God in Christ. Perhaps Paul was drawing a contrast between himself and the false teachers with whom Timothy had to deal. People may claim to know God, but the truth of this love will be revealed by their faith and love.

1:15. Paul declared, Here is a trustworthy saying. "Pay attention!" he told them, because what he would now write was true, beyond debate. It carried the same force as Jesus' declaration, "I tell you."

And what was this undeniable truth? Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That was the point of his incarnation. Before Jesus was born, his mission was announced: You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). He proclaimed his own intentions, stating, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). And that truth had been sounded by the apostolic witness: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Many people refuse to believe the truth that they are sinners. It is too hard to admit. They cannot admit that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23)—including them.

Paul pointed to his own experience as he spoke of sinners, claiming of whom I am the worst.

Paul could go back in his mind and point to his religiosity: "a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee ... as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Phil. 3:5–6). Even so, despite admirable efforts, Paul knew his own heart and mind, his selfishness, his motives, and recognized that nothing he could do would satisfy the holiness of God. He was a sinner in need of grace.

It is the place each person must come to, an admission that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

1:16. Paul offered himself as a case study of God's goodness, mercy,

and patience. Although he was the worst of sinners, God saved him. He was forgiven, transformed. His persecution of the church made Paul the perfect example of God's mercy: I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience.

Paul believed that God had selected him, the worst, so that no one then or today could say, "I am too bad, too sinful. God could never forgive me." But no matter how deep the sin, our Lord is able to penetrate deeper with his love and forgiveness. God's patience is unlimited. Literally, it has no limit. It never runs out, never becomes exhausted. It is as eternal as he is.

Paul was an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life. The false teachers, in their self-indulgent pursuit of glory, were examples of God's righteous and holy intolerance of sin. God's patience brings hope to those who struggle and search in life, for those whose past or present is littered with sin. But God will not be mocked; those who refuse his grace will suffer his wrath.

Belief on Christ is necessary to salvation. This is not adherence to dogma, but a personal trust in the sacrificial death of Christ upon the cross and in his victorious resurrection. The demons acknowledge the existence of Jesus Christ and they tremble (Jas. 2:19), but they do not rest in Christ's work on the cross. Belief encompasses trust, dependence, and obedience. It is a belief that changes our lives now and for eternity.

1:17. Having recounted God's grace, mercy, love, and faithfulness toward himself and all who believe, Paul then burst into praise, offering a personal doxology.

To the King eternal—the God of power and sovereignty over all the affairs of men and angels; immortal—eternal, beyond the reaches of death or decay, above all the created order; invisible—beyond the constraints of the physical, beyond the approach of humankind; the only God—not only his supremacy, but his exclusive claim as authority, the foundation of Christian belief that God is—to this trustworthy, incomparable, self-existent God who is rich in mercy and love be honor and glory for ever and ever.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14

3:12–14. Verses 12–17 contain the virtues that stand in contrast to the vices mentioned in the preceding verses. With the old discarded, the character of Christ is to be displayed in its place. The

transformation process includes more than don'ts. There are some dos as well.

Since the old humanity has been put off and the new community has been put on, believers are therefore to clothe themselves with the kind of behavioral apparel that fits their new life. The famous story "The Emperor's New Clothes" by Hans Christian Andersen has many possible applications for believers. One of them would be the simple lesson that we are not to be foolish like the emperor and take off our old clothes and put nothing back on. Before listing the appropriate attire, Paul reminds believers that they are God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. These are exalted titles formerly used as designations for the nation of Israel (Deut. 4:37; 7:7–8) but now applied to the new community in Christ (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

The first piece in the believer's fashionable wardrobe is compassion, which refers to "heartfelt sympathy for those suffering or in need." The next item in the believer's wardrobe is kindness, the friendly and helpful spirit which meets needs through good deeds. This is the concrete action of compassion. If the believer is to be fully dressed, other Christlike characteristics are to be worn as well. The believer is to be clothed with humility, which is a proper estimation of oneself (Rom. 12:3). Humility is not a self-debasing attitude (like the "false humility" of 2:18 and 2:23) but an attitude that is free from pride and self assertion. The believer is to be clothed with gentleness, sometimes translated "meekness." Gentleness has been described as "power under control"; the picture of a powerful horse under the control of its master is a helpful image. The attitude behind gentleness is an attitude of refusing to demand one's rights. The believer is to be clothed with patience which is the capacity to bear injustice or injury without revenge or retaliation.

The idea of putting up with the abuses and offenses of others continues with Paul's call to bear with each other. Believers are to go beyond quiet resignation positively to forgive whatever grievances [they] may have against one another. Believers have been fully forgiven by Christ (2:13–14), and the forgiven are obligated to become forgivers. The standard for this forgiveness is Christ himself.

Paul saves the most important item of clothing for last. Without love, all the other virtues may amount to mere moralism and little else (a thought found also in 1 Cor. 13:1–3). When love is present, there is harmony and unity in the community. It is not clear whether love binds the virtues together, completing a lovely garment of

Christlike character, or whether love binds the members of the community together in mature oneness. Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional. Both ideas make good sense.

WEEK 5

1 CORINTHIANS 8:5-6

8:5-6. Of course, it would have been easy for Paul's opponents to argue that there was a sense in which other gods exist. Paul admitted this himself in 8:5 where he said that there are so-called gods. . . indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords" which people all over the world worship. Even so, for Christians there is but one God. This one God is the Father who is the source and goal of all things. Moreover, there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ. These verses take the form of an early catechism or hymn of praise to the Father and Christ.

To emphasize the singularity of the true God, this hymn of praise attributes similar qualities to both the Father and the Son: all things have their origin in them; and we live in and through them. Simply put, the God of Christianity so overshadows all others who may be called "gods" or "lords" that those others are entirely insignificant.

With this kind of knowledge in hand, it is easy to understand why some believers at Corinth did not hesitate to eat food that had been dedicated to idols. As far as they were concerned, these religious ceremonies were insignificant. Paul affirmed this theology and conclusion to a degree. The Corinthians surmised that Christianity's monotheism precluded the existence of other gods, and thus nullified the significance of the pagan sacrifices.

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

1:15. When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he was countering a clever company of false teachers who sought to replace the Colossians' enthusiastic devotion to Christ with only a mild approval of him. They didn't encourage anyone to forget Jesus altogether; they just said he wasn't the only show in town. According to these false teachers, Jesus got equal billing with a vast number of emanating spirits flowing out of God. They said Jesus could be prominent, but he certainly wasn't preeminent. In contrast, Paul—along with telling believers the truth about the gospel and pleasing God—tells us the truth about Jesus.

Jesus is the image of God. The word for image was used in Paul's time for likenesses placed on coins, portraits, and for statues. It carries the idea of correspondence to the original. It is the nearest equivalent in ancient Greek to our modern photograph. Jesus is the perfect representation of God. This verse and others (John 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:17) tell us that God is invisible. J. B. Phillips translates verse 15, "Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God." Hebrews 1:3 tells us that the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

Not only is Jesus the perfect picture of God, but he also holds the highest rank in the universe. Jesus is the firstborn over all creation. Firstborn is a term of rank more than it is a word of time (see Ps. 89:27). The right of the firstborn was the right of privilege and priority. It was the honored position in the family. In the case of the patriarchs, we know that the honored position didn't always go to the first son born in time. Jesus is the firstborn—the highest rank—in all of creation.

1:16. Jesus holds the highest rank in creation because he is the Creator of all things. There is nothing in the created order that Jesus did not create (see also John 1:3). Because he is the Creator, Jesus has absolute supremacy over all creation, including any spirit beings who were being worshiped by the local heretics. Since only God can be the Creator, this means that Jesus, the perfect image of God, is even more than an image. He is divine. He is God.

1:17. Jesus is eternally existent (an attribute that can only be true of God) because he is before all things. Jesus is also the powerful sustainer of the universe. Because of him all things hold together. His power guarantees that the universe is under control and not chaotic.

1:18. Jesus is sovereign over creation. He is also sovereign over the church, the new creation. Jesus is sovereign over the church because he is the head. While scholars debate whether head should be understood as "origin" or "authority," both are certainly true of Jesus in relationship to the church. Jesus began his church, and HE is its source of life and vitality. Jesus is also sovereign over his church. The church takes its direction from Jesus and is under his authority. While both concepts are true, the context of supremacy certainly lends itself to the idea of authority.

The church is the body of believers who owe their allegiance to Jesus. The position of supremacy in everything (and particularly

the church) belongs to Jesus because of his resurrection and work of reconciliation. He is the firstborn from among the dead. Again, firstborn here has nothing to do with time. Others preceded Jesus in rising from the dead. Lazarus is one example (John 11:38–44). Jesus is first in rank. Others were raised only to die again. Jesus was the first person to rise, never to die again. He is the first person to conquer death, and all other resurrections are based on his.

The glorious truth for us is this: because of his resurrection, we are assured of our own resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20–23).

1:19–20. Jesus has supremacy over all things because all of God's fullness resides in Jesus: He is the full embodiment of God's attributes and saving grace. Through Jesus, God is able to reconcile to himself all things. Reconciliation is the removal of hostility and the restoring of friendly relations to parties who have been at war. Paul also calls reconciliation making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. What God has done is to move toward us to restore harmony, patch things up, cease hostilities, bury the hatchet, smoke the peace pipe, and heal the breach.

1:21–22. This concept of reconciliation is not just a universal theory; it is a personal truth. Jesus' death allows God's enemy to become God's friend. Before the miracle of reconciliation, the Colossians, and all unbelievers, were at odds with God. We were alienated, that is we were separated, estranged. We were alone, an outsider, exiled, shut out, cut off, locked out. Ephesians 2:11–12 gives us another sad perspective on our estranged position before reconciliation.

Paul then tells us we were once God's enemies in two ways. First, we were enemies in [our] minds. Our thoughts and our attitudes were hostile to God. Before we trusted Christ, our entire way of thinking was contrary to God's. For us, and for those who have yet to be reconciled, the problem was and is simple. We refused to accept God's evaluation of us as being sinners. We would also not accept God's remedy for the situation—dependance on Christ.

Second, we were enemies in [our deeds], because of [our] evil behavior. It's not just that we thought wrong; we also acted wrong. Despite our active opposition to God, he reconciled us through the death of Jesus. Jesus died for a race of rebels to offer them a chance to become his allies.

The outcome of this reconciliation is present peace and a future presentation of ourselves before God. The slate of sin has been wiped clean, and we look forward to the day we will stand before God holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

1:23. The if of verse 23 should not be misunderstood. This verse is not saying that we will be presented holy and blameless if we remain faithful, as if our eternal salvation depends on our performance. The Greek construction of the if is not an expression of doubt but an expression of confidence and is better translated as since. Paul is not in doubt about whether the Colossians will remain faithful (see Col. 2:5). He is confident that because they have understood what it means to be reconciled they will remain faithful to the gospel that reconciled them. He writes this as an expression of confidence and as a warning to avoid the religious fads of the false teachers of Colosse.

WEEK 6

PHILIPPIANS 1:27–28

1:27–28. God was in control of the situation. Paul could be released from prison or killed by the Romans. Just as he wanted to maintain his testimony for Christ, he longed for the Philippians to remain faithful, too. They would show faithfulness by living a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Such a life would not just be legalistic, obeying moral laws. It would show forth the spirit and love of Christ in every human relationship. Paul had faced opposition to his efforts for the cause of Christ without fear. He exhorted the Philippians to do the same even as they faced opposition. They could do so but only if they did so together. The world must see a united front defending and proclaiming the gospel. No longer would divided motives of love and selfishness do. The church must face the world in one spirit. A fearless, unified church will astound the world. They will see the truth of the gospel. Opposing the gospel, the world faces God's destruction. Proclaiming the gospel, the church waits for God's salvation.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–2

2:1. In chapter 1, Paul speaks of his joy in prayer and joy in adversity as a Christian serving his God. He could rejoice in almost any circumstance. The key to this joy is a relationship with Christ. In chapter 2, Paul explains how joy comes through another aspect of the believer's life—humility toward others. He begins his appeal for humility by referring to the Philippians' experience. Because they are united with Christ, believers are members of his body. We have special bonds to one another due to our relationship with Christ. Our attitudes toward one another are important. The reality of our oneness in Christ is based on being encouraged by:

1. comfort from his love
2. fellowship with the Spirit
3. tenderness and compassion

JOHN 17:18-23

17:18–19. From the very first days of Christianity, true believers have practiced separation by infiltration. The Father sent the Son into the world and now the Son was sending the believers into the world. Here the Lord introduced the word sanctify in different verb forms. In effect, he said, “Lead these disciples to an act of dedication as I have dedicated myself to your work. Then as they live their lives for you, Father, they will ultimately enjoy the fixed and final dedication you bestow upon them.”

In the midst of modern conveniences and sophisticated technology, the church finds it more and more difficult to live in the world without being of the world. We find it increasingly tricky to escape the snares of the evil one and the enchanting attractions of our own flesh and the world around us. Calvin once put it this way: “As the wantonness of our flesh ever itches to dare more than God commands, let us learn that our zeal will turn out badly whenever we dare to undertake anything beyond God’s Word.”

John probably remembered these words of our Lord when he wrote his epistle some years later. To all believers everywhere he issued a ringing admonition: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). Worldliness is more an attitude than an act; it has to do not so much with what we do as why we do it.

Perhaps the contrast to separation by isolation is separation by infiltration. The disciples were able to go into the world because they were not of the world. Some interpreters suggest that the reason Jesus said “I am not praying for the world” in verse 9 was because the battle plan which he would suggest in his prayer just a few minutes later would be the ministry of his disciples in the world: “In order that I may reach the world, I am not for the moment praying for the world, but for those through whom I am going to reach the world.”

17:20–21. If we had any doubt that this prayer applies to believers today, it is erased by verse 20. The heart of this final paragraph of

the chapter focuses on unity—the ultimate demonstration of God’s work through his people in the world. We learn here that body unity is patterned after divine unity. The absolute oneness of the Father and the Son will now be spiritually transferred to believers for a specific purpose—spiritual unity.

The union of the church is not patterned after some earthly organization or any well-meaning intentions of humanity. God joins our spirits through the Holy Spirit because Jesus’ blood is “thicker than water” and thicker than human bonds.

Some interpreters consider this verse to be a pivotal point separating those words specifically related to the disciples from words now spoken to the universal church. Certainly the implication of the verse goes beyond its actual words.

Perhaps there is no verse in all of Scripture which has been more frequently quoted to support ecclesiastical church union than John 17:21. However, the emphasis of the prayer centers in spiritual unity, not organizational unity. It must be understood in the light of John 10:30, “I and my Father are one.” If we are to understand the unity of the church, we must first understand unity between the Son and the Father.

17:22. Christian unity is facilitated by glory, first given to Christ and then in turn to the disciples. Glory (doxa) in this context is not an absolute attribute of God but a relative possession that can be reassigned to believers. Some interpreters see heaven here, but there would be no point in such a futuristic view with respect to the mission statement of verse 23: “to let the world know that you sent me.” Peter wrote that the divine nature was already in us as a result of regeneration, so we already have a measure of the glory of Jesus himself.

A former ministry companion of mine, now in the ultimate glory of heaven, once wrote, “Child of God, don’t you know only you share the glow. It’s a light from within, when the blood covers sin. It’s the wonderful glory of God.”

17:23. We also learn in this passage that body unity is a witness to the world. Like a set of matched mixing bowls, we are the smaller one that fits into Christ who fits into the Father. Purpose? To let the world know that you sent me. Mixing bowls may provide too mundane a metaphor here, but Jesus’ teaching about the vine and the branches in chapter 15 is affirmed by this prayer of chapter 17.

The unity of believers calls forth a recognition of God's hand by observers in the world even while the church is on earth. Just a few hours before this prayer, Jesus told the disciples, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (13:35).

1 CORINTHIANS 8:5-6

8:4-6 Paul's answer that believers technically have the right to eat food sacrificed to idols may surprise us, but the logic is sound: idols are a "non-reality" and there is no God but one. But his advice on this matter does not stop here (cp. vv. 7-13; and esp. 10:14-22).

COLOSSIANS 1:21-23

1:21-22. This concept of reconciliation is not just a universal theory; it is a personal truth. Jesus' death allows God's enemy to become God's friend. Before the miracle of reconciliation, the Colossians, and all unbelievers, were at odds with God. We were alienated, that is we were separated, estranged. We were alone, an outsider, exiled, shut out, cut off, locked out. Ephesians 2:11-12 gives us another sad perspective on our estranged position before reconciliation.

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GALATIANS 3:26, 28

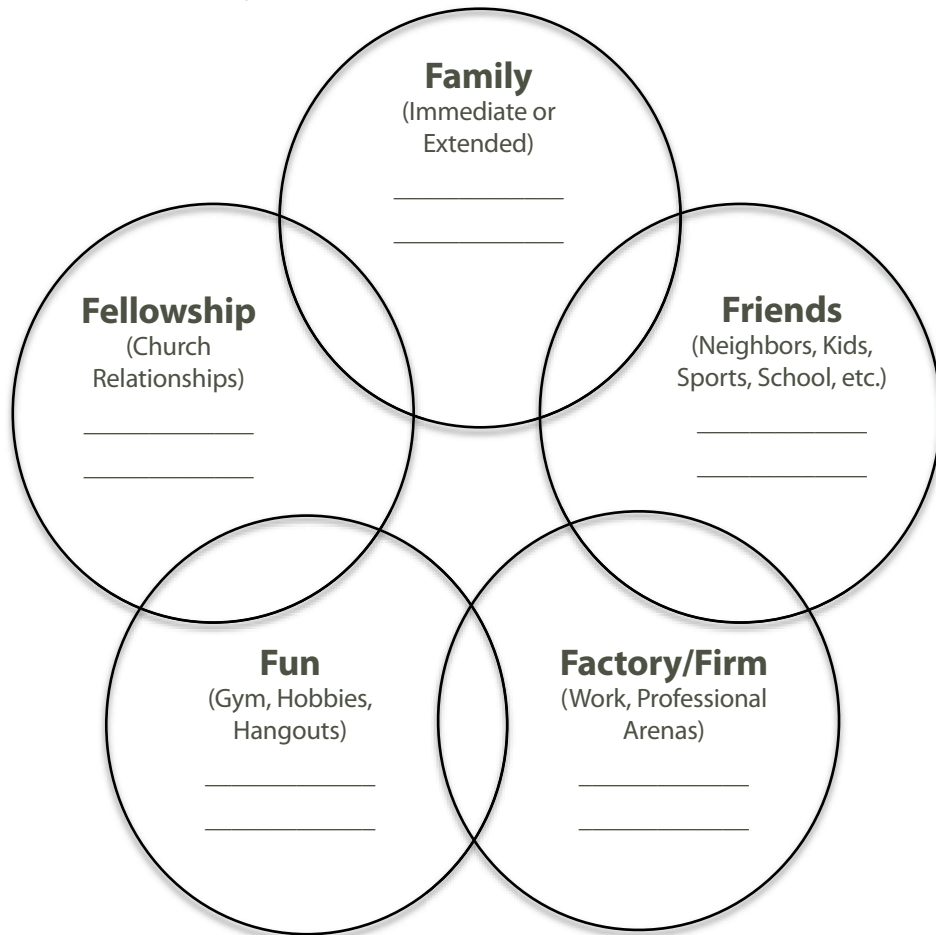
3:26-27. By grace we are God's adult children. Paul calls us sons of God. Under the law we were children. In verse 27, Paul explains how this adult sonship occurred. We were united with him through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). This placement into the body of Christ unites all believers. In addition you have clothed yourselves with Christ. In Roman society, when a youth became old enough to be considered an adult, he took off his children's clothes and put on an adult's toga. This switch indicated that he had adult citizenship and responsibilities. In the same way, the Galatians had laid aside the old clothes of the law and had put on Christ's new robes of righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 4:23-24).

3:28. Having explained the vertical change that grace brought, now Paul shows its horizontal effect when he states you are all one in Christ. In Christ, human distinctions lose their significance. Regardless of race, profession, or gender, all who come to Christ must come the same way—through faith and repentance. As a result, with all distinctions erased, all believers are united in Christ. This does not mean that all distinctions are erased on the human level. A slave was still a slave in the eyes of Rome, but not in the eyes of God.

CIRCLES OF LIFE

Small Group Connections. Discover Who Can Connect In Community.

Use this chart to help carry out one of the values in the Group Guidelines, to "Welcome Newcomers".



Follow this Simple, Three-Step Process

1. List one to two people in each circle.
2. Prayerfully select one person or couple from your list and tell your group about them.
3. Give them a call and invite them to your next meeting. Over fifty percent of those invited to a small group say, "Yes!"

SMALL GROUP CALENDAR

Healthy groups share responsibilities and group ownership. It might take some time for this to develop. Shared ownership ensures that responsibility for the group doesn't fall to one person. Use the calendar to keep track of social events, mission projects, birthdays, or days off. Complete this calendar at your first or second meeting. Planning ahead will increase attendance and shared ownership.

DATE	LESSON	LOCATION	FACILITATOR	SNACK/MEAL
	SESSION 1			
	SESSION 2			
	SESSION 3			
	SESSION 4			
	SESSION 5			
	SESSION 6			
	SERVE			



second baytown

A weathered, black and white directional sign with a large white arrow pointing to the right. The sign is mounted on a wooden post. The words "Walk the WALK" are painted on the sign in a mix of black and white. The background shows a city street with cars and tall buildings, including the Chrysler Building in the distance.

Walk the
WALK

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