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FROM THE PASTORS

“What happens to us after we die?”

This is arguably the greatest unanswered question by humanity today. Through the scientific method and modern medicine, we as a human race have been able to discern how life begins. We have learned about genetics and differing aspects of what makes us different. We even have a much greater understanding for the macro elements of our universe (i.e. the Sun, Moon, Stars, and our planet Earth) as well as the micro-elements that we cannot see (i.e. protons, neurons, cells, and even our DNA strands!). However, neither science nor medicine have yet accomplished quantifying what happens beyond what we can see.

So, what do you think happens after we die?

This is the substance of our study for this Fall Spiritual Journey, Limitless. Our goal is to look and see what the Bible actually says about the eternal, about heaven, hell, and how we can influence forever right now.

Our goal in this study is to discover God's truth about life after death and in so doing bring greater purpose to our life before death.

Our prayer is that this study would challenge you and inspire you toward greater faithfulness in stewarding the temporary to make an impact in the eternal.

Your Pastoral Team

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. 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 five sessions long. We encourage your group to add a sixth meeting for a serve project. In your fifth 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 Rob Gaschler at rgaschler@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 8 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 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: _____

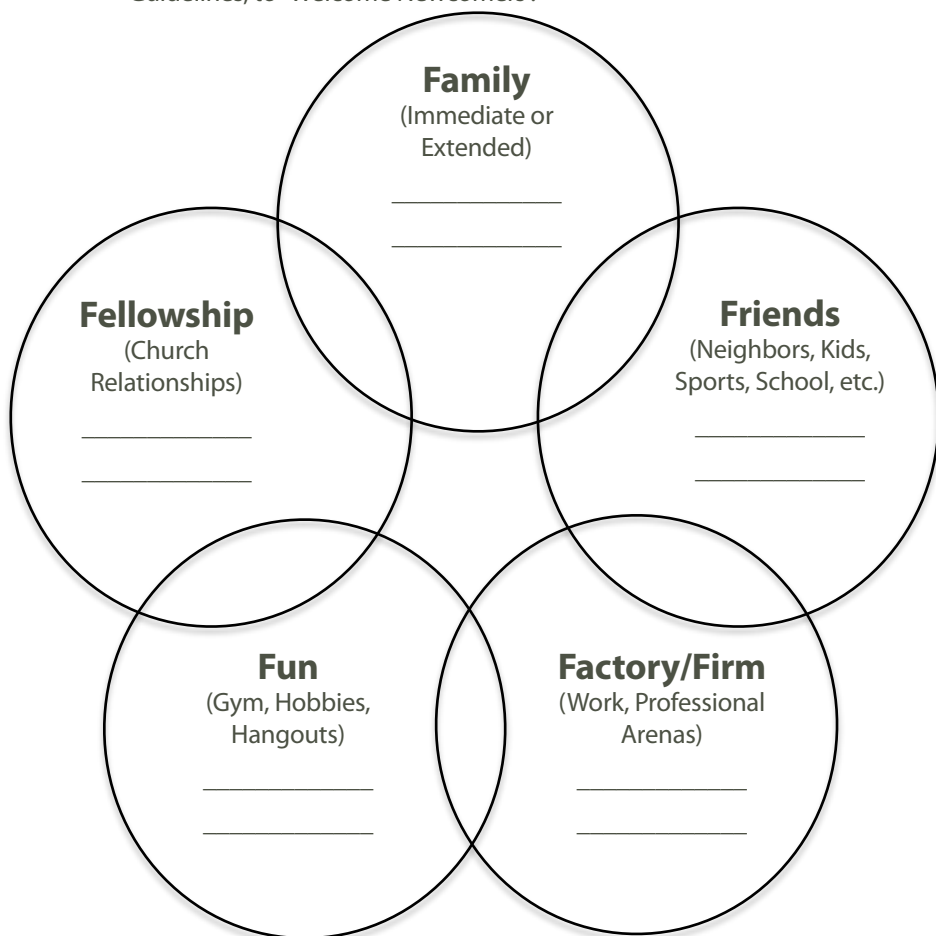
STARTING TIME: _____ **ENDING TIME:** _____

If you haven't already done so, take a few minutes to fill out the Small Group Calendar, which can be found on page 9.

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			

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.

A black and white collage-style image. The top half features a sky filled with soft, textured clouds. The bottom half shows a dark, rocky landscape with some sparse, spiky vegetation. The image is composed of several overlapping, semi-transparent rectangular panels that create a layered, geometric effect. The text 'Week 1' is centered in the middle of the image, overlaid on the sky section.

Week 1

WEEK 1: **THE LIFE BEYOND**

WEEK 1: THE LIFE BEYOND

Beginning the Journey: Today is your first meeting in our “Limitless” series, and we are excited that you have chosen to join us. Each week we will take a few minutes to “look back” and discuss what you learned last week through the daily devotionals. Then, we will “look up” at what God wants to teach us in our study today. Finally, we will “look forward” to how we will live out the principles God has taught us today.

Looking Back: Take a minute to introduce yourselves to one another, and go over the group guidelines on page 7 as you begin your journey together.

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

If you had twenty-four hours where you could set aside all distractions and give full mental energy to a singular focus, what would you choose to give your attention to? Why?

Are you comfortable focusing on the life beyond or is that uncomfortable for you? Why do some families prepare well for that reality and others never once broach the subject?

Read Colossians 4:5b. How do people generally define “the best use of the time”? Contrast the human understanding of using time wisely with what God’s Word says.

When has your focus on today—the earthly realities you can see—caused you to lose sight of eternal realities? How did you get back on track (that is, if you did!)?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. When Paul compares earthly realities to the eternal life beyond, what comes up as most valuable? Why?

How do we maintain perspective of the things unseen when what we see in front of us is difficult and worrisome?

In what ways are you looking to the seen things and neglecting what cannot be seen?

How would you counsel someone whose earthly circumstances have them tempted to lose heart?

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 LIFE BEYOND

DAY 1—READ 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

The apostle Paul went through a lot. He had an abundance of tough times and dark days. The trials he endured were excessive by any standard (2 Corinthians 11:23-29). Still, he didn't ever seem to lose focus. When Paul wrote "do not lose heart," he wasn't playing around. It's who he was. It's how he lived.

When we say, "Don't lose heart" or "Don't give up," we're usually talking about an attitude we apply to earthly circumstances, like health scares or financial situations. Scripture tells us we should pray about everything, and nothing is impossible with God, so it's not wrong to encourage ourselves to not lose heart. But that's not what Paul was writing about here. Paul was talking about the ministry God had given him. It's easy to lose heart in following God's calling and instead focus on what you can see—your life here on earth. The thing is, your life on earth won't last, but eternity will, and eternity matters most.

And so God tells you not to give up. Don't give up on sharing the gospel. Don't give up on encouraging people. Don't give up on hope. Don't give up because God is good, holy, loving, and kind. He keeps His promises. He is faithful. He is the same as He has always been and forever will be. So, in your difficulty, keep going. Keep serving. Fix your eyes on the life

What three contrasts are described in verses 16-18?

What keeps you focused on the things that are “seen” and discourages you from focusing on the unseen realities of the life beyond?

How do Paul’s words in these verses encourage you?

Thank God for the eternal weight of glory that overshadows every earthly circumstance and discouraging emotion. Ask Him to help you live with that truth in view, not giving up on living out His call on your life to tell others about Him.

DAY 2—READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Have you ever been intentional about seeking Christ with great focus for an extended period of time? When we do that, the world starts to look a lot different, doesn't it? That's because we have set our hearts on the things above. Our whole being is focused more on Jesus and His work than the things going on around us. And that changes things!

The phrase "set your minds" (v. 2) means "to think, ponder, consider," and it is a command. We must daily choose to focus on the life beyond.

Doing so doesn't mean we adopt a "Pollyanna" type mentality where everything is happy and carefree. When our life is hidden with Christ in God, bad things still happen. We still grieve. We still experience the effects of sin in our lives and in the world.

However, our perspective changes. We know our eternity is secure in Christ and that God never gives up on us. We know we are forgiven and God is working to mature us with a new focus. We know the things of this earth will fade away, but eternal realities will continue for limitless billions of years. We know they will continue to be meaningful, and they will even be celebrated throughout eternity.

Do you know these truths personally? Set your mind on things above. The reality they contain for you is limitless.

In your own words, express one truth from Colossians 1-4 you need to apply personally.

What are some ways you make time to connect with God in the day-to-day?

How are you leading others to see God and do the same thing?

Praise God for lifting your heart and mind to pursue the things that are above.

DAY 3—READ MATTHEW 16:21-23

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

It is possible to know Christ and at the very same time misunderstand or resist His plan, purpose, and mission. We do it all the time. That's the reason we're digging into God's Word on the reality of eternity this week—we know Christ and we often give all our focus to things of earth, instead.

Matthew recorded an example of this way of thinking. Jesus told His disciples He would be crucified and raised from the dead. Peter didn't like that plan. None of the disciples did. But only Peter was bold enough to challenge Jesus on the matter, face to face.

Peter needed to receive the Lord's corrective rebuke, and He got it. When we resist or reject God's commands or direction, we need to receive correction, too.

It is human nature to wonder and question God's plan. We, like Peter, often fixate on the earthly effects, the discomfort, of God's will. But when we set our minds on the things of man instead of the things of God, it's impossible to walk in God's good and holy eternal purposes. We need a holy reorientation.

What truth did Peter reject? Why? How are you prone to reject this same truth?

Name an earthly circumstance Satan might use to hinder God's eternal work in your life.

How can you "[set] your mind on the things of God" (v. 23) this week?

Ask God to reveal any hindrance that keeps you from setting your mind on the eternal things of God.

DAY 4—READ COLOSSIANS 4:5

⁵ *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.*

Paul encouraged the Colossian believers to pray constantly for the opportunity to preach the word and declare the mystery of Christ (Colossians 4:3).

We might believe such a prayer should be left to “professional Christians.” We might believe God doesn’t call the rest of us—in our jobs, families, and everyday conversations—to make the most of every opportunity to share Christ with those who don’t know Him. But the call is the same for every person who claims to follow Christ. We either spend our lives making much of Christ, pointing to Him in everything we say and do, or we spend our lives on earthly pursuits.

The Lord has given all of us unique opportunities to reflect Him in our different spheres of influence. We don’t have to wait until we are doing a service project or on a mission trip. Every day is filled with kingdom opportunities, if we open ourselves to them. Going to the grocery store, working out at our gyms, picking our kids up from school, and any number of everyday activities are opportunities to be on mission.

But we have to be looking for these kingdom opportunities, seeking to be used. If we are walking in the Spirit, asking Him to guide us and fill us, then we will find people in our everyday lives that we can point to Him. We don’t fully know what God is doing behind the scenes, but we must be ready and willing to be instruments for His use at all times.

Name some specific “wise” ways God wants you to relate to unbelievers, making the most of your time.

How well would you say you take advantage of gospel opportunities? Do you see your everyday activities as open doors for kingdom work? Why or why not?

How do you need to adjust your mindset, prayers, and rhythms to be able to make the most of the opportunities God provides?

Ask the Lord to give you kingdom vision, even in your regular comings and goings. Ask Him for the courage to engage in gospel conversations, even if that feels uncomfortable.

DAY 5—READ EPHESIANS 5:15-17

¹⁵ *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,*

¹⁶ *making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*

¹⁷ *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

When we see the prevalence of pain and difficulty in the world, we wonder, "What can I do?" Paul encouraged the church in the evil days they faced to live out their faith. He encouraged them to be faithful to Christ instead of worrying about all the things that were out of their control. He exhorted them to make the most of the days, loving and sharing the hope of Christ even as they lived in the fallen world.

The thing is, the nightly news only gives us a small picture of the things going on in the world; it does not tell us how our neighbors are doing, how our coworker is looking for community, or how our child is seeking attention. We are to lift our worries up to the Lord about the state of our world while also seeking to love and serve others as the hands and feet of Jesus. We live with hope that goes beyond this life.

We can understand that the days are evil and use that understanding not to live in fear but as a reason to share the hope we have with others. Second Corinthians 5:6-9 says, "So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him."

By the grace of God, we can make the most of our days, living lives that please Him and give glory to His name.

Based on Ephesians 5:15-17, where should your focus be today and every day?

How do you typically respond when you see the evil in the world?

What would it look like for you to make the best use of your time?

Ask God to open your eyes to ways you can make the most of your time as you live for Him.



Week 2

WEEK 2: THE ETERNAL CONSEQUENCE

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 2: THE ETERNAL CONSEQUENCE

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 consider the discussion questions together.

Some of us grew up in households where nothing that might be seen as demonic was allowed (music, TV, movies, games, etc.). Was your home like that, or did you have opportunities to explore “the dark side”? What ideas did you have about hell when you were young?

Was there anything shared in this week’s sermon or in the video teaching that you haven’t considered about hell before? Explain.

Read Luke 16:19-31. Based on Jesus’s telling of this parable, what can we know about hell?

Salvation comes only by grace through faith in Jesus, so then what can we understand about why Lazarus went to heaven and the rich man to Hades?

How hesitant would you say you are to talk about hell? Why is it important that we do talk about the reality of hell?

Is it possible to express both the beauty of God's grace and the sobering reality of hell to someone? How? (See Galatians 3:13 for help.)

Read Matthew 13:41-42. What additional information about hell did Jesus give in this passage? How does a right understanding of hell impact your application of last week's lesson—we are to think and make earthly decisions with eternity in mind?

What was Jesus's intent in teaching the realities of hell?

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 ETERNAL CONSEQUENCE

DAY 1—READ 2 THESSALONIANS 1:7-9

⁷ And to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

How does the picture of Jesus, with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who choose idolatry hit you? The eternal destruction of hell is an uncomfortable reality that brings internal tension. It's important to find ourselves in that tension, though. Why we worship God determines how we relate to Him—whether out of love and awe or duty and fear. Only the former endures.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, but He will return one day. The God who first came to us as a baby returns to us as a warrior King flanked by raging fire and angels. Jesus has unique power and authority, and He is worthy of all worship.

The fire of God will be destruction, not deliverance, for those who reject Jesus and choose to trust in the shaky kingdom of this world instead. If you trust Him as the warrior King who will one day return to right the injustices at the center of your sorrow, the fire of God refines you, not in fear but in hope. And He will empower you to face every trial and worship Him as you do.

What can we learn about hell from 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9?

How would you answer someone who asks why you worship God?

What might be some signs you're relating to God out of fear or duty rather than love and awe?

Praise Jesus for His all-consuming power. Ask Him to help you see Him with wonder and amazement, not in fear but with the certain hope that He is your deliverance.

DAY 2—READ ROMANS 2:6-8

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Some people wonder, “If God is real, why is the world so messed up?” They look around and all they see is heartache. But if we look closely, we can see evidences of God and His love all around us. He gives good gifts to all people, regardless of their actions (Romans 2:4). And to those who trust in Jesus, He gives even more.

In God’s kindness, He shows restraint—that is, He allows for possible repentance, but only for a time. God does not abolish punishment all together, but He will suspend it temporarily out of His longing to see people come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). While God shows the riches of His kindness in that He holds back our deserved judgment—which is hell—it is the height of conceit that people sin all the more blatantly, rather than turn to Him in repentance.

All works are the actions of people responding to one of two opposing sources: the domain of darkness or the kingdom of the Son (Colossians 1:13). Every deed has a signature that links it unmistakably to either the work of self or the work of God, and there is an unmistakable, undeniable end for each of those two paths. To those who eagerly await Christ, He will return for them, but for those who do not, there is a time to die and then the ultimate judgment of hell.

Paul was not teaching how to be made right with God but about how God evaluates whether faith in Him is real. What kind of behavior characterizes those with eternal life?

What kind of behavior characterizes those with eternal death?

What would it look like for you to patiently do what is good this week? How does this passage help you understand what patience really means for those who are in Christ?

Thank God for the kindness and patience He has shown you through His offer of salvation and His promise of eternal life. Ask Him to give you wisdom and courage to share the gospel with those who have not yet turned to Him in repentance.

DAY 3—READ REVELATION 14:11

11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.

When you read the phrase, “worshipers of the beast and its image,” no one you know may come to mind. That’s often how we think about hell—a horrible place where some nebulous type of person goes when they die. Any other perspective, especially one that’s more personal, would surely wreck us.

But God wants us to know and understand the reality of hell. In Revelation 14, He gave John a vision of eternity to help accomplish that goal. In that vision, three angels delivered messages to the people of the earth, proclaiming the arrival of judgment and the fall of “Babylon the great,” while the Spirit promised everlasting rest to the believers who died.

Christ will return for His followers. Just like a harvest takes place when the crop is ready, Christ will return when the time is right (vv. 14-15). The return of Christ will also usher in God’s wrath on those who reject Christ. Those who reject Christ will experience the full force of God’s wrath.

Hell is not an undefinable outcome for an undefined group of people. The reality is anyone who does not worship Jesus carries the mark of everlasting torment, the absence of any rest, and the idolatry of self, which is, in effect, the worship of Satan himself.

There are people you know whose future reality is described in Revelation 14:11. Will you share the love of Jesus with them?

What can we learn about hell from Revelation 14:11?

What are you doing to help others understand the gospel and the consequences of rejecting Christ?

How does your view of eternity influence the way you live today? What needs to change in your life so that you more fully demonstrate godliness?

Thank the Lord for providing salvation to all who place their faith in His Son, the Lamb. Ask the Lord to help you remain faithful to Him, encourage other believers, and boldly share the gospel with all people as you await Christ's glorious and beautiful return.

DAY 4—READ MATTHEW 13:41-42

⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It's always helpful to look at the context of a verse to better understand what it teaches. Here in Matthew 13, Jesus taught about the eternal consequence of hell by way of story—a story about a field of wheat and weeds intermingled throughout.

Verses 41-42 are a picture of what happens to the “weeds.” Jesus leaves the weeds in the field until harvest time. As these weeds remain, they steal water and nutrients from the wheat until the two can be separated. It is difficult for genuine believers to exist among inauthentic pretenders. However, it is not our job to bring final judgment on nonbelievers; we are to leave judgment in the hands of God. Our job as followers of Christ is not to tear out the weeds, but to plant more wheat. Rather than looking down on nonbelievers, whose eventual outcome is hell (v. 42), we must seek to grow in relationship with Christ so we might help them turn from sin and also trust Him as Lord and Savior.

To know there are people among us who are headed for hell and do nothing to warn them would be unloving and contradict Jesus's teaching (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus told this story so that we would refuse to cast final judgment on unbelievers. Believers must not think themselves capable of rendering final judgment to anyone but should hold out the hope of salvation for all until the Lord of the harvest returns to bring final judgment.

What can we learn about hell from these verses?

What might it look like for you to stop trying to “pull weeds” and instead be used by God in the planting of “wheat”?

How should this coming reality influence the way we view our relationship with the Lord?

Pray that God would help you to faithfully point nonbelievers in your life toward Christ and the hope found in Him.

DAY 5—READ GALATIANS 3:13

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

False teachers were trying to convince the church at Galatia that good works were necessary for salvation. So Paul sought to make clear what happens to those who think that they can earn God's approval through human effort.

Quoting the Old Testament, Paul reminded us we are cursed (v. 10). In fact, in just four verses (vv. 10-13), Paul used the words "curse/cursed" five times! Because of sin, we're cursed, deserving eternal death. We possess a cursed nature, made evident in the brokenness of this world and our inability to keep God's entire law. Thankfully, verse 13 approaches that curse with better news—the best news, in fact!

Sin's curse has its final judgment in death, separated from God in the eternal consequence of hell. Jesus took that curse on Himself at the cross. He became a curse to redeem us from sin's curse. Whoever trusts in Him is justified before God—righteous because Christ took the curse on their behalf.

Justification is granted by God on the basis of His grace, not human effort. When God justifies us, He pardons all our sins, removing the separation our sins have caused between us and Him. No longer bound for hell, the justified are given the gift of eternal communion with God in heaven.

We should never consider sin's ultimate consequence of eternal separation from God in hell disconnected from the grace of Jesus at the cross. Hell is a reality we should all understand, but our understanding doesn't end there. Jesus made the way for all of us, those who are redeemed and those yet to be redeemed, to live with Him forever. None of us can do enough to overcome sin's curse. But Jesus Christ did, redeeming us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Whom will you tell?

**What do you deserve from God as a result of your sin?
Why can't works set you free from sin's curse?**

**How does Jesus solve the problem that no one can
earn right standing with God?**

**How does knowing Jesus "offered for all time a single
sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:12) affect the way you
view the reality of hell? What is God leading you to do
as a result of this week's study?**

**Thank God for sending Christ on your behalf, freeing
you from sin's curse. Thank Him for the opportunity to
share the good news of the gospel with others who
may be trying to earn their salvation.**



Week 3

WEEK 3: THE ETERNAL REWARD

WEEK 3: THE ETERNAL REWARD

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 consider the discussion questions together.

How do you typically feel when vacations come to an end? The video teaching related those feelings to the Christian life. Has your walk with the Lord taken you out of your routine? How so? In what ways has your walk with the Lord been invigorating? Exhausting?

What is your understanding of the blessings that come to those who walk with the Lord?

This statement was made in the video teaching: "What we anticipate about eternity impacts our daily lives." Read Revelation 22:1-5. Name an eternal truth you can anticipate. How should that impact your daily life?

Read Revelation 22:7. In what sense should all believers live with urgency? What would change if you were to live like Jesus is truly coming soon?

Read Revelation 22:8-16. What contrast does Jesus point out in these verses? Why?

Read verse 17. Are you ready for Jesus to come? How do you know?

Why are we tempted to live for this world instead of the eternal life Jesus promises those who follow Him?

Read Revelation 22:6,18-19. What choice do each of us have in regard to truth? What potential effects do each of those choices have?

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 ETERNAL REWARD

DAY 1—READ REVELATION 22:1-5

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Have you ever read all the way through a book, only to be disappointed at the ending? The Bible isn't like that. The Bible sticks the landing, and because it's a true story, it has us longing for more. Revelation 22 is the end of the Bible, but it's not the end of the story—the story of reward will continue throughout eternity.

What are those rewards? Revelation 22 answers that question in a description of the setting. There is a river flowing through the city, filled with the water of life that will quench every longing as Jesus promised (John 4:14). Reward is found also in the Tree of Life, the same tree in the garden of Eden at the beginning of human history. But when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, we were banned from the Tree of Life. But in the new heaven and new earth, we have access again. The tree's fruit is sufficient to supply all our needs; its leaves will heal every disorder.

And in this perfect paradise, we will continue to worship and serve the Lord and each other with great joy and without any limitations or darkness—forever. The new heaven and new earth is a place of eternal satisfaction.

What stands out to you most about how heaven is described in these verses?

Look back at Genesis 2:9,15-17. Why do you think Revelation ends with a return to a garden scene with the Tree of Life on display?

Life can be exhausting. What are some practical ways you can remind yourself that the best is yet to come? What are some practical ways you can remind other people that the best is yet to come?

Thank God for the promise of heaven and a new earth. Ask God to strengthen you with His Spirit and to fill you with an urgency to live on mission until that time.

DAY 2—READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-4

¹ For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Our current series, “Limitless,” is helping us live our lives with eternity in mind. That’s because what we do in the present matters for eternity. All human souls last forever, and how we live now determines where we will spend eternity. But why do we need to be reminded of this?

In one sense, we don’t last forever. We have one life on earth in our bodies, or our “tent” as Paul called it. The problem with these earthly tents is that they can become a false end of a false horizon in our lives. We get so interested in the here and now that we forget there is eternity ahead of us.

A better way to think about life here is how it relates to our eternity. We live in tents now, but we will some day move into a building, an eternal house (v. 1). And on some level, all of us know this—even those who haven’t believed the gospel.

God has placed eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Instinctively we all know there is something better out there. Once this truth takes root, it changes the way we live in the here and now. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that makes eternity ours changes everything about the way we live. We may live in tents, but we are continuously preparing for the building God is making for us in heaven.

Name a choice you've made that you thought differently about because of eternity.

If you only think about your life as a "one and done" endeavor, how does that change the way you make decisions?

Who in your life is not prepared to face eternity? What could you do to help them see where they stand?

Thank God for His promise of an eternal home with Him in the heavens. Ask Him to help you fix your eyes on Him as a way of living well here on earth until the moment your mortality is swallowed up by the fullest possible life.

DAY 3—READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:5-8

⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. ⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

To walk by faith with eyes fixed on the reward of eternity requires tremendous strength and courage. You must be willing to give up any semblance of control over your life. You must be willing to be misunderstood and possibly even abandoned. You must be willing to be ridiculed. You must be willing to look like a complete fool at times, being misinterpreted and often unappreciated by others. Living a godly life in the world, while preferring to be at home with the Lord, is outside the norm.

But the life of faith reaps blessing that surpasses any trial. A surrendered life enables you to see and experience God in all of His fullness and grace. This happens as we put our faith in who He is and the promises He has made over what we see in front of us.

Think about all the saints who have gone before you who walked by faith: Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, Esther, Noah, Moses, and Joshua, just to name a few (see Hebrews 11). Will your name be included in this list? Trust Him so that He can do something bigger and better than you ever dreamed possible. Let God take your life, your pain, your loss, whatever it is you are going through, and use it for His glory. Walk by faith, and not only by what you see.

What purposes did Paul give for God's gift of His Spirit in our lives?

When are you most likely to struggle with faith?

How might you submit these areas to God so that you might not just walk according to what you see?

Ask God to help you live abandoned for Him. Ask Him to do an amazing work in and through you.

DAY 4— READ HEBREWS 11:14-16

¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Have you ever lived in a place you knew was temporary? Maybe you were a college student living in a dorm room. Or you rented an apartment until you were able to buy a house. When you know a place is temporary, it changes things. You don't set up a dorm room as a permanent dwelling—because it's not one. You don't hang pictures on the walls of an apartment you'll only be in for three to six months—your time is better used planning for the house you'll situate your things in after its completion.

That's the point of Hebrews 11. The author provided examples of people in the Old Testament who exercised faith, focusing most heavily on Abraham and Moses. God's promises to them pointed to future blessings, many of which they would never see on earth. They knew their home was temporary. They knew God was preparing them a permanent home with Him in heaven.

Believing that promise required that they act in ways other people didn't understand. Yet, Abraham, Moses and a whole host of other men and women kept putting one faithful foot in front of the other—for life.

They didn't turn back, because they "[desired] a better country" (v. 16). What about you? Are you seeking your eternal home each day or are you looking to find contentment and satisfaction in earthly realities?

God loves you like He loved those faithful saints of old who hadn't seen God's promise of salvation brought near in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Still, they kept looking ahead. Will you?

Name one reason you have to “desire a better country”—your heavenly dwelling place.

Are you clearly seeking a heavenly homeland or are you living in a way that seeks satisfaction in the things of earth? Why?

In what situation do you need to put one faithful foot in front of the other, believing like the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 that the “better country” of eternal life awaits?

Confess the tendency of your heart to “return” to your temporary dwelling, ignoring God’s promise of eternal life. Ask God to help you live thinking forward about the heavenly city He has prepared for you.

DAY 5—READ PSALM 16:11

*11 You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

We all want to know the right path. Followers of Jesus want to be obedient to His leading. But knowing which way is right can often feel like guesswork. David, in all his turmoil and angst, serves as our example. Through it all, he had complete trust in the fact that God would make known every step He needed to take. He would not be abandoned by God, even in death (16:10).

With Jesus, we are where we should be. With Jesus, joy is possible regardless of our circumstances. With Jesus, death will never have the final word. Whether you know the exact path He is taking you on or are still discerning which way to go, joy is available in the process. We can take heart, knowing we don't have to wait until we have "arrived" or until we have figured everything out to be satisfied. Being in the presence of Jesus is the only way to experience true and complete joy.

When we find ourselves facing the enemy—with all his lies and obstacles—we can continue to trust that we have a God who provides what we need (Psalm 23:5) and shows us the way to go. The good news is, God isn't trying to keep secret the way He wants us to go. But He does want us to be so near to Him that we aren't worried about seeing ten steps ahead.

Joy won't come from reaching the finish line or finding the right answers. Joy is found in God's presence regardless of where we are in life. At His right hand are endless pleasures far beyond what the world offers as a cheap substitute.

**What three realities had God made known to David?
What has God made known to you that you need to
remember in questionable moments?**

**Do you struggle to know the path God has for you? How
can you experience His joy even in the “in-between”?**

**When have you experienced the fullness of joy that
comes in Christ? How can you remember and live in that
joy now?**

**Pray for the Lord to draw you near, in whatever
circumstances you find yourself. Ask Him to give you a
joy that comes only from Him.**



Week 4

WEEK 4: **THE CHOICE TO MAKE**

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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 consider the discussion questions together.

When is the last time you initiated some sort of change in your life (taking a new job, dieting, cutting back on internet usage, etc.)? What about a change another person initiated in your life (your boss gave you a promotion, your toddler successfully potty trained, etc.)? How have you responded to those changes?

Name a change that this study about eternity should prompt in our lives.

What do those kind of changes have to do with a person's salvation?

Read Ephesians 2:1-3. What change do all people need? How desperate is every person's condition apart from Christ?

Read Ephesians 2:4-7. How would you explain the change that takes place when a person becomes a Christian? How does that change take place?

Read Ephesians 2:8-10. In your own words, what point was Paul making in verses 8-9?

What kind of ongoing changes should take place in the life of every believer in Christ?

Why do you think God wants us to know we are His workmanship? Is it difficult for you to believe this about yourself? Why or why not?

Looking Forward: Thank God for changing you positionally, from death to life. Ask Him to continue changing you to show the incomparable riches of His grace.

WEEK 4: THE CHOICE TO MAKE

DAY 1—READ JOHN 3:16-18

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

This is it, the essence of the gospel in a very familiar passage. These words are so familiar that perhaps we don't slow down to think about all they contain. Even a professional religious person like Nicodemus needed to hear this. And regardless of how many hours we have or haven't sat in a church building in our lifetime, the same gospel truth demands our response.

God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die the death we deserved. He died so we could live forever with Him. He didn't come so we could be better. He didn't come so we could be happier. He didn't come so we could be comfortable. He came so that we might truly live.

Religion is a poor substitute for eternal life. But Jesus always stands ready to receive the one who is eager for the truth. He is ready and willing to save those who seek Him in faith.

Only the love of God transforming us individually will lead to eternal life. And this gospel truth is for everyone—from the person who has never set foot in a church building to the person who hasn't missed a Sunday in sixty years. This isn't a gospel that we move past or advance beyond. This truth of God—coming to us in the person of Jesus so we might live with Him forever—is the heart of our Christian faith.

Reread these verses a few times. Does anything new stand out to you, even in these familiar verses?

What words from this passage help us understand the manner of God's love for us?

Where do you need the reminder of this foundational gospel truth? How have you tried to move past it or overcomplicate it?

Thank God for saving you in Christ. Thank Him for sending His Son to die on your behalf. Ask Him to keep that at the forefront of your heart and mind this week.

DAY 2—READ JOHN 3:19-21

¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

Even as Jesus—the true Light of the world—came among us, He came to a people who preferred the darkness. After all, that is the story of humanity and the fall. When offered life with God, we chose ourselves. We chose self-gratification and provision by our own hands. We chose the darkness over the light. And ever since then, we have been inclined toward the darkness. After all, the light exposes too much of what we would prefer to stay hidden.

Of course, most of us aren't hiding our whole lives, but maybe there are a few rooms to which we have pulled the door shut. We've said, "Lord, I'll give you everything else, but don't go there." However, we don't get to cordon off areas of our lives to be left in darkness.

If God has spoken light into the darkness, it becomes itself a source of light (Ephesians 5:8,13). That means the very parts of our stories we want to erase—those things we want to shove in a corner and never talk about again—actually have the power to become a source of light if we expose them to the true Light. That season of doubt and depression. That lost relationship. That past failure. That grief over losing someone. That addiction and shame. If we actually open the door to those areas, God can transform the darkest of circumstances to become sources of light and new life.

What contrasting realities does Jesus call to our attention in these verses?

Where have you loved the darkness more than the light? If you're honest, where are you inclined to choose the world or your own flesh over Christ?

What have you relegated to the darkness in your life? Where do you need the light of Christ to expose certain dark corners, even if that process is painful?

Confess the areas of your heart and life that you would prefer to remain in darkness. Ask God to shine a light there and turn what was intended for evil into a source of light.

DAY 3—READ ROMANS 10:9

⁹ If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The things we say reveal the things we believe (Luke 6:45). They reflect what is happening on the inside. If our hearts are sad or bitter or angry, it will come out in the way we speak and interact with others. The same is true if Christ has given us a new heart. If He has convicted us inwardly and transformed us, we must give voice to that reality. This is what Paul meant when He called us to confess that Jesus is Lord.

As we confess that we are unworthy, He makes us worthy. We say in confession that Jesus has ultimate control and lordship over all things and we do not. We say we were dead and had no means of restoring ourselves to life. Of course, it isn't the act of confessing that has power but trusting Him in faith.

The resurrection is at the heart of the Christian faith. We needed Jesus to be the perfect, atoning sacrifice. We needed Him to die on our behalf. But more than that, we needed Him to rise again. A god who only dies on our behalf can't give us life. But Christ didn't just die for us, He was raised! And because He was raised, we are also raised with Him. To believe in Christ and trust Him for salvation means we believe and proclaim His resurrection. Without the resurrection, there is no salvation (1 Corinthians 15:13-14).

How is Jesus Lord of your life? How has He raised new life in you?

What areas of life have you held back from submitting completely to the lordship of Jesus? What needs to change?

How should Christ's resurrection change how we live?

Thank God that Jesus got up from the grave. Thank Him for also resurrecting you from your own death in sin. Ask Him to empower you to walk daily in light of His resurrection.

DAY 4—READ 1 TIMOTHY 2:5-6

⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

That there is only one God is emphasized throughout all of Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:4). Timothy knew it. The believers under Timothy's teaching knew it. No genuine Christ follower would have wasted breath debating Paul's statement that "there is one God." God's people know, understand, and declare this fundamental doctrine.

But knowing and showing are two different things. We've seen it throughout church history. The Roman Catholic Church taught that Christ alone was sufficient for salvation, but the Church didn't live out this doctrine in its teaching on works and the authority of the pope. Christians today struggle with the same inconsistency, saying we believe Christ alone can save but often relying on ourselves or others instead.

Paul wanted Timothy, and all believers, to understand one of the ways we show what we say we know—that there is one God and one Savior, Jesus Christ—is in the way we approach God in prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-4). In the Old Testament system, God ordained priests to act as mediators. We needed representation before God because of our sin. The priests were able to go directly to God. Everyone else had to go through a priest. Still, those priests were imperfect representatives, unable to fully and finally settle the matter of sin on our behalf because they were sinful and needed representation too (Hebrews 5:2-3). So when the time came, God appointed His Son, Jesus, as the ultimate High Priest when He laid down His life as a full and final sacrifice for all.

Jesus's death removed any and all need for another mediator between you and God. Christ alone can save you, and He tore down the barrier between you and God, giving you direct access to Him. Show what you know!

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4. What kinds of prayers did Paul say we should pray? For whom were the prayers to be offered? Why (v. 4)?

Why can't a priest or other godly person say a special prayer to save you?

How should it impact your prayer life to know that Jesus stands as Mediator between you and the Father?

Thank God for all He gives you through Christ. Ask Him to help you understand it is through Christ that you're loved and accepted into God's forever family. Ask Him to let this realization spark a fire in you to pray with greater expectancy and confidence.

DAY 5—READ EPHESIANS 2:4-5

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

With the wonderful words “But God,” Paul turned from diagnosing our spiritual death (vv. 1-3) to describing our new life in Christ (v. 5). As we consider the limitlessness of eternity with Him in heaven, we should also recognize we owe everything about that glorious reality to God’s character. God’s mercy is His tenderhearted, loving compassion toward the needy. God’s grace is displayed through showing undeserved favor toward all who have sinned against Him.

Mercy means God has forgiven us our just and due penalty. “We were dead in our trespasses” (v. 5), Paul wrote. Individually and together, we have all turned aside from God and His rule. The price for this rebellion is death; it is the natural consequence of disobeying God. But God did not exact the penalty He was owed. Instead, God gave us life when we deserved death, and that is the perfect picture of mercy.

We were suffering in our sin and sorrow and were not even aware that a better alternative existed. When God came to us in the person of Jesus, we were defenseless and helpless—in fact, we were dead (v. 5). That is why “But God” is one of the sweetest phrases in all of Scripture. We were lost, but God sought us. We were dead, but God brought us back to life. We were desperate, but God richly blessed us. When we realize the depth of what God has done for us, we will become determined to share those blessings with others.

How does God's plan for fallen human nature display His mercy?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Why is important to know that God didn't just save us from something, but to something?

What kind of suffering are people you know walking through right now? How can you model the mercy of God before them?

Praise God for stepping in when you were unable to help yourself.

A black and white collage-style image. The top half features a sky filled with soft, textured clouds. The bottom half shows a dark, rocky landscape with some sparse, spiky vegetation. The image is composed of several overlapping, semi-transparent rectangular panels that create a layered, geometric effect. The text 'Week 5' is centered in the middle of the image, overlaid on the sky section.

Week 5

WEEK 5: **THE ULTIMATE AIM**

WEEK 5: THE ULTIMATE AIM

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 consider the discussion questions together.

Thinking back over your life, what is something you've possessed or wanted to possess? For what purpose?

God defines being "rich" differently than people do. How would you explain to a teenager about to graduate high school and launch out into the world what it means to be truly and eternally rich?

Read Matthew 6:19-33. Why did Jesus contrast material possessions on earth and spiritual treasures in heaven as though a person cannot pursue both (vv. 19-21)?

Think again about a hypothetical conversation with a graduating senior. Based on Jesus's words in Matthew 6, how would you explain a person's purpose in life?

What personal example could you offer as an illustration (good or bad) about the advice to store up riches in heaven and pursue God's kingdom purposes and righteousness?

In the video, we heard: "If we aren't storing up eternal treasure, we are being disobedient. If we are storing up treasure for ourselves on earth, we are breaking the commands of Christ." How does this truth speak to you?

Does it seem stifling or constrictive to you that Christians are not free to work toward whatever end we desire? Why or why not?

In the video teaching, we were encouraged to talk to each other about the ways Jesus's words in Matthew 6:19-33 confront the lifestyles we have adopted. Looking back over the passage, what words of Jesus do you need to spend more time reflecting on?

Looking Forward: Thank God for His promise of eternal blessing for those who seek Him above anything the world has to offer. Ask Him to help you discover areas where you might be seeking your own kingdom on earth instead of His.

WEEK 5: THE ULTIMATE AIM

DAY 1—READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-15,17

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. . . .¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

The gospel is a story of selfless sacrifice—and that reality changes everything.

Because of Jesus's sacrifice and the acceptance and standing He earned for us before God, we live for Him. Paul wrote "the love of Christ controls us." In the original language of the New Testament, the word for *control* means, "to provide an impulse for activity." What Paul is saying is that because Christ loves us, we live differently. Our life is not the same because we have been given a love that transforms us.

So, if being loved by Christ requires a change in our life, what type of change is required? Paul goes on to tell us in the next verse. Because the love of Christ controls us, Christ controls our lives. His will, not our own will, now drives our decisions. We now listen to His Spirit and live for Him. The way we were is not the way we are now. We're new creations.

What does that look like? It looks like relinquishing our rights as the primary decision maker. That spot is now filled by God's Word. We think about what would please Jesus more than what would please us. The Christ-centered life is a selfless life—the life whose new aim is Jesus.

What is your gut reaction to verse 14a: "The love of Christ controls us"?

How does this passage help you understand the depth of love God has for you?

How should that reality change your aim in life?

Praise God for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank Him for making you a new creation. Ask Him to help you walk in His eternal purposes.

DAY 2—READ MATTHEW 16:27

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Jesus's kingdom seems like an upside-down one. In the verses right before this one, Jesus taught that to gain your life is to lose your life and deny yourself (vv. 24-26). From a human perspective, this is counterintuitive. And it brings great blessing.

In verse 27, Jesus gave a reminder of what His future held and who holds the future. He alluded to the second coming and the rewards that will be given to His faithful followers. The return of Jesus is another motivator to help His disciples see the benefit of living as He calls.

This life is not all there is and eternity is affected by the choices we make today. Understanding this gives us perspective and encourages right living because those rewards are based on the works that flow from faith.

The truth that how we live today determines the rewards we may or may not receive in eternity can be a positive influence on the choices we make and keep us from losing our souls as Jesus warned. When we choose to follow Jesus, we will not always have it easy. However, the rewards far outweigh the cost when we choose to live as true disciples of Jesus Christ.

Though following Jesus can be difficult, the reward is exponential. As we follow Jesus and give Him our resources and ourselves, we are able to experience more of His grace and the life He died to give us.

What motivates you to make right choices today in obeying the commands of Jesus?

How does knowing rewards are coming, according to our works, help you make godly choices?

Name some benefits that come from keeping an eternal perspective.

Thank Jesus for giving clear instruction on what it takes to be a true disciple of His, with the ultimate aim in mind. Ask for strength and wisdom to live like Jesus in all things.

DAY 3—READ MATTHEW 6:19-21

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In Jewish society in Jesus’s day, wealth was generally understood as a sign of God’s blessing. To have abundance in this life often instilled hope for the life to come. So, these words from Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount were especially astounding to His Jewish followers.

Storing up treasure on earth is one of the greatest threats to our lives in the kingdom of God because this world is not our home. Jesus talked often about money and stewardship because He knows our hearts are easily inclined to make money and possessions idols—regardless of how much we have. Through means of power, pleasure, and perception, we are robbed of the godliness and contentment available in Christ. We comfort ourselves with the things we can see and touch, thinking they will be enough to make us happy.

Having money and possessions is not a sin. The problem comes when they get in the way of trusting God to provide everything we need. If our lives are spent only making investments in the temporal, we’ll be left with rusted and worn-out treasures that won’t last beyond this world.

Jesus knows how easy it would be for us to turn to the things of the world to define who we are. He knows we might even be tempted to determine His blessing by our possessions. He knows how this divides our devotion. He knows how earthly treasure can rob us of godliness and contentment in Him. He knows all of this, so He reminds us of what really matters. By His words we are challenged to examine our own hearts to see what we truly value—the fading worth of earthly treasures or the eternal reward of heavenly ones.

What does Jesus indicate in Matthew 6:19-21 as our ultimate aim?

How are you most tempted by earthly goods, treasures, money, and security? Power, pleasure, and perception?

How is your relationship with the Lord threatened by the things you value on earth?

Spend time in prayer reflecting on the things you treasure most. Think about where you spend your time, energy, and resources. Ask the Lord to give you a deeper love and value for the eternal over the temporary.

DAY 4—READ MATTHEW 6:24

²⁴ *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."*

Sex, food, relationships, family, work, entertainment, education, service—all of these are good things and can add to the happiness of a person. Yet when an object becomes the sole source of your happiness, the superior treasure, that object becomes an idol. In other words, any good thing can become a bad thing when it becomes the most important thing. And Jesus says you can't have two things in your life that share that position.

We place our affections and life aim where we focus—either on God or on substitutes for Him. If God is at the center of our lives, anything on the above list can be a gift that helps us enjoy happiness in Him. The problem with idols isn't that they're intrinsically wrong. God created all things we rightly value. The problem is when fallen human hearts worship these false gods instead of God.

Both the world and the Lord demand ownership of our lives. Jesus sharply declared that such dual loyalty is unachievable. Eternal values and temporal values are mutually exclusive; one cancels the power of the other. In other words, you can't have more than one ultimate aim.

If we're going to collect the right kind of treasure, we need to serve the right Master. We must choose where our loyalty, treasure, and aim will lie.

What do Jesus's words in Matthew 6:24 warn you about? Do you recognize your need for that warning? Why?

What in your life tends to pull your attention away from God most easily?

How can you counteract that tendency?

Praise God for being valuable and precious, far more than the treasures of the world. Ask Him to help correct your focus so you might trust and treasure Him above all else.

DAY 5—READ MATTHEW 6:33

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

If you had to nail it down to one thing, what are you seeking first in life? Happiness? Wealth? Success? Friendship?

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us what our “one thing” should be—His eternal kingdom. Life in Christ is to be our ultimate aim. Those who seek Him in that way are the most blessed.

Those blessings may not look like you imagine in the short term. But that reality makes His blessings no less real. Realizing it is an exercise in trust.

Jesus encourages us to rest in our positions in God’s kingdom instead of being consumed by worry and fear (vv. 31-34). First, remember that God loves as a Father. We should not think of God as far away and unapproachable, or even as a king who is inaccessible. As our Father, God loves and cares for us. Second, God is personal; we have a personal relationship with Him. Finally, as both God and Father, He knows our basic needs in life.

In Christ, we never have to worry about whether God knows or cares about our needs. Instead of worrying, we can seek the kingdom of God and trust Him. We can focus on living out His mission. If His will is our priority, we will be less concerned about material matters and more committed to eternal relationships.

Seek God’s kingdom priorities first in life. Seek God’s righteousness in relationship with Jesus Christ. When you do, your aim will be centered and your experience will bring contentment, regardless of the circumstances that come along the way.

Read the verses that precede this one, Matthew 6:25-32. What are some of the “things” Jesus alluded to in verse 33?

What are you not trusting God for right now?

How is your desire for control keeping you from living out the ultimate aim of God’s kingdom and righteousness?

Pray that God’s Spirit would teach you to desire the kingdom of God above all else.

A black and white collage-style image. The top half features a sky filled with soft, textured clouds. The bottom half shows a dark, rocky landscape with some sparse, spiky vegetation. The image is composed of several overlapping, semi-transparent rectangular panels that create a layered, geometric effect. The text 'Week 6' is centered in the middle of the image, overlaid on the sky section.

Week 6

WEEK 6:
THE WAY TO
FINISH STRONG

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 6: THE WAY TO FINISH STRONG

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 consider the discussion questions together.

If you could go back to your senior year of high school and write a quote for your yearbook today, what would you want to communicate?

What messages have been passed on to you about retirement and/or inheritance?

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2. What does Paul's use of the word "child" (v. 1) indicate about the relationship between him and Timothy? Who in your life do you recognize as recipients of whatever legacy you leave when your life on earth is over?

What "inheritance" did Paul want to leave Timothy?

What have you given more thought to: leaving a financial legacy or a spiritual legacy? Why?

Read 2 Timothy 2:3-7. Describe the life Paul suggested believers should live. What are a few reasons we get sidetracked from living that way?

Now read 2 Timothy 2:8-10. What did Paul mean by saying Timothy should remember Jesus?

Based on 2 Timothy 2:1-10, what changes need to take place in your life so you finish strong?

Looking Forward: Spend time remembering Jesus's sacrificial gift that grants you life. Confess the ways you get off target in remembering what's most important. Ask God to show you what you need to do to leave a spiritual legacy.

WEEK 6: THE WAY TO FINISH STRONG

DAY 1—READ PSALM 145:4

⁴ One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

Have you ever had a child mimic something you did not intend them to replicate? There are moments those things make us proud, but there are others that make us feel ashamed. We have things we want others to learn from us, but, more than words, our actions show the way we believe we should interact with the world.

Even if you don't have children of your own, consider what it would look like if the next generation replicated everything you did in a given day. What would be the outcome? What would they take away about what is most important in life? They might learn how to care for others or how to work hard, but if others miss us glorifying God, there would be a huge void in our teaching. God has created us to praise Him. We live and breathe to declare His greatness. First Corinthians 10:31 says, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

This week, we have looked at some ways Paul wanted to impact Timothy's life so he would glorify God for the benefit of generations to come. We also can leave a legacy that glorifies God in all we do. It's not about making the most money; it's about making the most of every opportunity we're given here on earth. With everything we have, we can glorify God. No moment is too small to thank God for His daily grace and proclaim it with our lives. This is the legacy to pass on because this is our purpose as humans. We are made to worship Him and tell of His goodness to every generation.

What do you find it easy to glorify God by doing?

What are some things you find it difficult to glorify God in?

How can you encourage others toward glorifying God as well?

Pray and ask God to help you remember your purpose to glorify Him and to display this with your life.

DAY 2—READ MATTHEW 6:33-34

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Have you ever worried that you might outlive your retirement savings? It's good and right to steward money well, retire in the fruit of that stewardship, and leave an inheritance for your family. And yet, worrying about that has no return for your life. It can't add anything; it only takes away.

In an effort to exert control over the inheritance and legacy we leave, it's easy to let our thoughts and emotions turn to anxiety and fear. It can be frightening when we become aware of our lack of control. However, anxiety doesn't help us gain any more control.

Jesus reminds us, with imagery from creation, to put our lives in the right perspective. While we worry about issues like finances, retirement, inheritance, and legacy, Jesus takes care of everything—even the grass of the field. And if God cares to give such detail to what grows from the ground—something here today and gone tomorrow—how much more does He care to tend to the needs of His children?

Should you take wise steps to steward your finances well? Absolutely! At the same time, Jesus says don't worry about it. Instead, seek His kingdom first. When you seek Jesus above everything else, He provides everything you, your family, and friends will ever need.

What external factors of life cause you the most worry (physical provisions, finances, your home, your appearance, etc.)? What does that worry demonstrate to those you are meant to influence?

How can you seek Jesus first in those areas, even amid uncertainty?

What is God teaching you in Matthew 6:33-34 in terms of leaving a spiritual and financial legacy?

Take some time to confess your worries. Ask the Lord to reorient your thoughts toward Him and His kingdom.

DAY 3—READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:2

² And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

When have you received words of spiritual wisdom from another person? Have you passed that same wisdom along to others? That's how spiritual legacy works. It's how you live in Christ and finish strong.

Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The moment Jesus spoke those words, a chain reaction started. As Christians lived as His witnesses, others learned about His truth and shared it with someone else. Even in 2023, thousands of years after that moment, we have received the truth of the gospel because of that chain reaction. Someone shared and another received, over and over throughout history.

The gospel is the most precious treasure. We have the honor of being recipients of God's grace and participants in the disciple-making process. No matter our resume, relationship status, culture, or experience, when we come to know Jesus, we are called to share this hope with others and leave an inheritance of faith.

Where would you be if someone had not shared the hope of the gospel with you? And now God gives you those same opportunities. Recall the words of wisdom you have received and share them with others.

What did Paul tell Timothy to do? Is that instruction also for you? To what end?

Who first shared the hope of the gospel with you?

When have you needed to be reminded of the truth of the gospel?

Thank God for those who first passed a spiritual inheritance on to you. Ask Him to give you opportunity and boldness to share the message you have received with others.

DAY 4—READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:3-6

³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. ⁵ An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

Paul laid out three basic illustrations that help grasp the scope of what it means to make disciples and leave an inheritance that lasts. First, he compared discipleship to being a soldier. Making disciples is often not easy. When you get entangled in people's lives, you have to deal with their mess. You see the ways sin has affected them. Suffering comes along as part of the deal: we face rejection and may be made fun of, threatened, or even physically harmed for simply sharing our faith.

But, like soldiers who represent their governments, disciples represent a heavenly kingdom. This changes our sense of priority. Our will is not our own. Rather, we follow the will of our sovereign King, the Lord Jesus Christ. The process of disciple making and leaving a spiritual legacy only makes sense if you realize whose commands you follow.

Paul also compared discipleship to competing as an athlete. For an athlete to win, he or she must play by the rules. We don't obey rules to earn favor with God but grow in discipleship through discipline.

The farmer offers a third picture. Discipleship is hard, thankless work. Unlike a soldier or an athlete, no one applauds or celebrates a farmer for doing his or her work. Instead, the farmer works hard day in and day out to reap a reward. The work we do of making disciples will not be noticed by most and will be derided by some. However, our labor produces fruit that is worth eternal value. God notices our work, and our reward is with Him.

Should everyone who wants to leave a spiritual inheritance with others expect suffering? Why or why not?

Which of the illustrations—soldier, athlete, or farmer—resonate most with you? Why?

How are you laboring to leave a spiritual inheritance?

Pray that you would give yourself wholeheartedly to the process of disciple making and leaving a spiritual legacy.

DAY 5—READ 1 TIMOTHY 5:8

⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

All week, we have considered what it means to leave a legacy for those who come behind you. It is loving to lay aside your own interests for the ongoing spiritual and practical benefit of others. Perhaps the first and best place to put this command into practice is in our own families, though for some, this might be the most difficult place to practice humility and selflessness.

We live in close proximity and contact with our families. Because of that proximity, they are among the first people for whom we have the opportunity to lay aside our own interests—to leave an inheritance of both financial resources and spiritual health in Christ.

Consider your familial relationships. Are you a parent, child, sibling, spouse, or even all of the above? Whom do these relationships give you a chance to serve? Think of several concrete ways you can serve your spouse, your children, or your parents.

Christian families should be a light of Christ to the world. When your unbelieving friends look at your family, what do they see? Do they see people looking to die to themselves and serve each other, or do they see selfishness and infighting? The call to lay down our interests begins in the home. Families that serve one another aren't common—they're unique. Take the chance to be unique today.

What did Paul say about those who do not provide an inheritance for his or her relatives? How is it a denial of faith, “worse than an unbeliever” (v. 8) to fail in that area?

Read Matthew 6:19-21 and Luke 12:15. In light of these commands, how should you understand 1 Timothy 5:8?

What have you learned this week about loving others?

Pray your family would be a beacon of selflessness, leaving a lasting spiritual legacy to those around you.

COMMENTARY

WEEK 1

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

4:16 The words we do not give up are repeated from v. 1. Between these two statements Paul explains why he was not defeated even in extremely negative circumstances. The apostle is the ideal for all believers.

4:17-18 These verses contrast the experiences of frail humanity with the evidences of God's power. They also remind all believers that our focus must remain on the eternal.

Colossians 3:1-4

3:1-2 So if resumes the implications of believers' identification with Christ begun in 2:20. It signals a shift in the epistle from doctrinal instruction (chaps. 1-2) to practical application (3:1-4:6). The objects of believers' efforts and thoughts are Christ and things above rather than earthly things. These commands contrast true spiritual living with the false spirituality promoted by earthly "philosophy."

3:3 The basis for the commands (vv. 1-2) lies in believers' union with Christ. Hidden connotes that God fully completed the action in the past with permanent results.

3:4 At present Christ dwells at God's right hand in heaven and is hidden from the view of those living on earth. At some future point he will appear in the fullness of his glory. When this occurs, believers will also appear with Christ in glory.

Matthew 16:21-23

16:21-22 Jesus referred to his death and resurrection earlier (12:40), but this is the first of three major predictions from this point on (see 17:22; 20:17-19). Peter could not accept the warning because his messianic expectations did not include a suffering, executed Messiah.

16:23 The cross was central to Jesus's purposes on earth. Because Peter's statement essentially tempted Jesus to evade the cross, he unwittingly became a spokesman for Satan.

Colossians 4:5

4:5–6 Paul's final exhortation to the Colossians was that they would use wisdom in their interaction with unbelievers (1:9–10). The phrase making the most comes from a verb meaning "to buy up," as if finding a bargain. Here it conveys the idea of making the most of one's time spent with unbelievers.

Ephesians 5:15-17

5:15–16 These words provide a solemn warning that Christians should be wise and careful in all things, including their use of time. Our use of time is not neutral; it can be evil if it is not invested for good (Ps 90).

5:17 Understand what the Lord's will is summarizes the two philosophies of life described in vv. 1–17. The world's lifestyle is characterized by moral and spiritual darkness. The philosophy for godly living is characterized by moral and spiritual light, and its goal is to imitate God and his love.

WEEK 2

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

1:6–7 God will reward his people with rest and repay those who oppose him at the future revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven. Until then the believer must trust that God in his time will handle current situations that are unjust. Angels are often presented as participating in executing God's awesome judgments and thus are described as powerful (cp. Mt 25:31; Mk 8:38).

1:8 The phrase those who don't know God is a reference to unbelieving Gentiles (1Th 4:5). Those who don't obey the gospel is probably a reference to many Jews who had rejected the witness of the apostles to Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

1:9 The penalty of eternal destruction is described as being away from the Lord's presence. The word destruction does not imply ceasing to exist or annihilation but separation from God in a miserable state. This is why it is described as eternal. There will be a time when God throws all his enemies into the lake of fire to be eternally judged (Rv 20:11–15).

Romans 2:6-8

2:6–10 This is a controversial passage. The most likely interpretation is that works are the outcome of a person's faith. Christians are declared righteous by faith. At the moment of that declaration, the person is joined to Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, becoming a new creation (2Co 5:17) created for good works (Eph 2:10). As Paul wrote, "what matters is faith working through love" (Gl 5:6). Thus the person of faith who seeks glory, honor, and immortality and continues to do good demonstrates that he is truly regenerate and thus is assured of eternal life. To the person who obeys unrighteousness and disobeys truth, however, wrath is his destiny.

Revelation 14:11

14:8–11 The fall of Babylon and God's wrath will be expanded in 16:17–21 and 18:1–19:3. The mention of sexual immorality recalls the same problem in the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira (2:14, 20–21). While those who die in the Lord will find "rest" (14:13), there will be no rest day or night for anyone who worships the beast and receives its mark.

Matthew 13:41-42

13:36–43 This parable is frequently interpreted as if the wheat represents true disciples and the weeds false disciples. But Jesus’s interpretation shows that the subject is not the mixture of true and false disciples in the church but rather the presence of both good and evil people in the broader world. Many Jews expected Messiah to immediately destroy evildoers and vindicate the righteous. Thus they were puzzled as to why Jesus didn’t do this if he truly were the Son of Man (see Dn 7:13–14). In this parable Jesus demonstrated (1) that he is not the source of evil (13:27–28, 36–39); (2) the entire world belongs to the Son of Man, and the devil had no right to bring evil into it; and (3) the Son of Man would assert his kingship over the world by punishing the wicked and blessing the righteous at an appropriate future time.

Galatians 3:13

3:13 Since Paul’s readers were trying to be justified by the “works of the law” (2:16), they were already under its curse (see note at 3:10). Fortunately, Christ had redeemed those under such a curse by his crucifixion. Paul quoted Dt 21:23 to show that, by his being hung on a tree (the cross), Jesus was cursed in our place.

WEEK 3

Revelation 22:1-5

22:1–5 The river of the water of life looks back to Ezk 47, as well as to Jesus’s promise about the Holy Spirit flowing as “streams of living water” (Jn 7:37–39) from those who believe in him. The tree of life was in the center of the garden of Eden (Gn 2:9; 3:3). After the fall of mankind into sin, God denied humanity access to the tree (Gn 3:24). Ezk 47:12 speaks of trees that bear fruit with medicinal value. The wording here pictures the new Jerusalem as the new and permanent “Eden,” where there will no longer be any curse (see Gn 3:14–19). As Adam and Eve enjoyed unbroken fellowship with the Lord in the garden prior to the fall (Gn 3:8), how much more will God’s servants enjoy his constant presence in the new “Eden.” All inhabitants will have his name on their foreheads, as was the case with the 144,000 (14:1). On night will be no more, see note at 21:22–27.

2 Corinthians 5:1-4

5:1 Paul compared our bodily existence to living in an earthly tent, and the resurrection body to a palace or other grand building. The author of the letter to the Hebrews also compared heaven to “the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10).

5:2 On we groan, see 1:8 and 4:8–9 for examples from Paul’s experience. The resurrection will be something like putting on new clothes (put on our heavenly dwelling).

5:3 The word naked is a reference to being disembodied. A human soul or spirit apart from bodily existence—thought of as a desired state in some religious systems—was never considered desirable in the Scriptures. Paul shared this view.

5:4 Paul’s preference was for the final state of the resurrection body rather than the intermediate and apparently bodiless situation of the Christian dead.

2 Corinthians 5:5-8

5:5 Life in the resurrection is impossible without the proper preparation. This verse emphasizes God’s sovereignty. On the Spirit as a down payment, see 1:22 and Eph 1:14 for the other NT instances of “down payment,” always connected with the Spirit. The beginning of salvation is receiving God’s person (the Spirit); the goal of salvation is enjoying God’s person fully and forever (Rv 22:4).

5:6–8 Paul drew three contrasts between this life and the intermediate state: at home in the body/out of the body; by faith/by sight; and away from the Lord/at home with the Lord. As long as the saints still live in the body, they perceive Christ only by faith. Paul's pattern is to refer to living believers as "in" Christ or the Lord but to dead believers as "with" Christ or the Lord, when faith becomes sight in conscious fellowship with the Lord.

Hebrews 11:14-16

11:1–40 This chapter compares the faith of the OT fathers with the faith exercised by Christian believers. Faith is defined as the reality of what is hoped for and the proof of what is not seen. The Greek word for "reality" is *hupostasis*. It has been used previously to describe the relationship of Christ to God (1:3) and the firm confidence that believers possess (3:14). Faith is not fleeting but substantial enough to generate confidence. The Greek word for "proof" indicates an inner conviction that is not based on visible matters. To please God requires faith. One must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. He is there and he responds.

Divine approval is the primary consequence of faith. Other results of faith are: (1) the declaration of righteousness; (2) the ability to look forward to the heavenly city of God; (3) the recognition that sin is a short-lived pleasure; (4) the ability to understand that faith is possible only because God is faithful; (5) the ability to accomplish great things in the world; and (6) the ability to see that even when believers are persecuted and murdered, beyond this world is a better resurrection.

Psalm 16:11

16:9–11 Along with v. 8, these verses are quoted (from the LXX) in the NT and explained as referring to Jesus's resurrection (Ac 2:25–31). Though in its original context it is possible to understand the terminology as meaning deliverance from death, it can also be used to describe resurrection from the dead. The language is sufficiently ambiguous to allow for both possibilities. The NT usage is within the range of meaning and is, according to Peter, the meaning that God ultimately intended in reference to Christ. Confidence is expressed in the fact of one who rests securely. As in the case of the imagery in vv. 5–6, this language usually relates to the land (Dt 33:12, 28; Jr 23:6; 33:16). The path of life usually means the way to life in OT Wisdom literature (Pr 5:6).

WEEK 4

John 3:16-18

3:16–18 God, out of love, gave his one and only Son (cp. 1:14, 18), so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life (see notes at 5:26; 14:4–6). John’s favorite designation for Jesus is the Son sent by the Father (3:34–36; 5:19–26; 6:40; 8:35–36; 14:13; 17:1), imagery taken from the Jewish concept of the shaliach (messenger), according to which the sent one is like the sender himself and faithfully pursues the sender’s interests (13:16, 20). Jesus is that “sent one” par excellence (9:7), and he in turn sends his disciples (see 20:21–22). Being sent implies that the commission, charge, and message are issued by the sender rather than originating with the ones sent. The messengers’ role is to fulfill their commission according to their sender’s will.

John 3:19-21

3:19–21 On Jesus as the light, see John 8:12.

Romans 10:9

10:9–10 Jesus is Lord is a confession of faith. “Lord” is the translation of the Greek word kurios. This is the regular way of translating the Hebrew name for God (Yahweh) in the Greek OT (the LXX). Jesus is not only the Messiah (Gk Christ = Hb Messiah), but he is also Lord (1Co 8:6). Not only do we believe that the man Jesus was raised ... from the dead, but we also believe that he shares the same nature with God. This is the start of the understanding of Christ’s two natures, as articulated at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). Jesus is fully human and fully God. Christians by definition believe and confess this truth.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

2:5–6 These verses provide the theological basis for the preceding statement that God wants people to be saved.

Ephesians 2:4-5

2:4 But God: Over against the human rejection of God, Paul painted a picture of the new life manifested in God's gracious acceptance of sinners because of Christ. The strong contrast points to God's answer to people's dreadful situation. Rich in mercy: "Mercy" is God's compassion for the helpless that relieves their situation. While grace involves God giving believers what they do not deserve, mercy means that God does not give what is deserved.

2:5 Made us alive ... even though we were dead is Paul's extension of his thoughts in v. 1, which are viewed in retrospect from the vantage point of redemptive history. Because of God's great love, he "made us alive" with Christ.

WEEK 5

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

5:13–14 Paul's opponents probably had suggested that he was religiously unbalanced (see Ac 26:24). He was "insane" in that the love of Christ compelled him into vigorous apostolic ministry. On the other hand, his ministry among the Corinthians had never been that of a madman (1Co 2:1–5). Indeed, he had kept his "third heaven" vision private for fourteen years until he mentioned it later in this letter (12:1–10). The heart of Paul's message was that the Jewish Messiah had died on behalf of all kinds of sinners (1Co 15:3). Jews as well as Gentiles were included in Jesus's substitutionary death (Rv 7:9). In union with Christ, sinners who believe the gospel have died to sin and have been raised to walk in a new way of life.

5:15 The phrase *those who live* refers to believers who are now spiritually alive (Eph 2:4–6). Christ's death and resurrection ministry have become the pattern for the believer's death and new-life ministry. Paul personally modeled this as well.

5:16 The phrase *from a worldly perspective* is a good rendering of the Greek text (lit "according to the flesh"). There are always two conflicting perspectives on a situation: the worldly versus the divine. A worldly view of Christ led to his crucifixion and to Paul's persecution of Christ-followers. After the light of divine revelation broke in on Paul on the Damascus road, he could no longer know him in this way (Ac 9).

5:17–18 The words *in Christ* refer to being in union with him. Genuine conversion begins life transformation, but not by reforming the old nature. The indwelling Spirit creates divine life in believers (Rm 8:8–10), so that the new has come. Other NT passages communicate this truth by using language such as "born again" or "regeneration" (Jn 3:3–8; Ti 3:5; 1Pt 1:23). Those who were enemies of God have now become friends by being reconciled to him. God's wrath against sin was satisfied in the death of his Son. Sinners—who formerly put self-interest above God's glory (Rm 1:21; 3:23)—have been brought to cherish God as their highest treasure (2Co 4:6). The ministry of reconciliation—being an agent of this good news—was Paul's special responsibility, but the task belongs to all who have received this ministry.

Matthew 16:27

16:27 Jesus applied to himself Ps 62:12 and Zch 14:5, statements which referred to the Lord. On the title Son of Man, see 8:18–20.

Matthew 6:19-21

6:19–20 Jesus emphasized the fleeting value of worldly wealth. The larvae of the moth could quickly destroy valuable fabrics that were treasured by the ancients. The word rust is literally “eating.” It can refer to the pitting of metal coins or to vermin that ruin valuable food stores.

6:21 Jesus taught that one’s heart truly belongs to what it most treasures. Since a disciple is to love God with all one’s heart (22:37; Dt 6:4), love for material possessions and riches is a subtle form of idolatry (Col 3:5).

Matthew 6:24

6:24 People have a sinful tendency to make an idol of money, which then competes with God for their allegiance.

Matthew 6:33

6:33 Disciples who value the reign of God over their lives and who diligently pursue righteous living can trust God to satisfy their needs.

WEEK 6

Psalm 145:4

145:4 One generation . . . to the next is literally “generation to generation.” The construction resembles “day after day” and “night after night” in 19:2. Both passages emphasize continuous praise of the Lord.

Matthew 6:33-34

6:33 Disciples who value the reign of God over their lives and who diligently pursue righteous living can trust God to satisfy their needs.

6:34 Jesus did not prohibit planning for the future, but he did prohibit worrying about it. He urged his disciples instead to focus on the challenges of the present.

2 Timothy 2:2

2:2 The many witnesses could testify to the soundness of the teaching as truth from God. Those who receive the gospel have a responsibility to faithfully pass it on to others, who pass it on to still others.

2 Timothy 2:3-6

2:3–6 In these three analogies, Paul expounded the call to service and suffering. Verse 4 calls for single-minded desire to please God. Verse 5 declares that a person must obey God’s rules in order to succeed. Verse 6 encourages hard work by holding out the promise of blessing.

1 Timothy 5:8

5:8 The strong language in this verse indicates that provision for one’s own household is a spiritual responsibility.