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INTRODUCTION

A JOURNAL

You are holding in your hands a simple journal. For some, this is your first time to consider a journey like this. For others, you've worked through many Bible studies or journals. Regardless of your past experiences, the opportunity this journal provides for each of us could be life-changing. We'll give you an outline of the journal below, which will help you understand how it might be transformational. Using this journal is a sacred rhythm, a practiced habit, that could open a conduit between us and God.

DISCIPLESHIP

One of the mandates of Christ was that His disciples (core group of followers) would go and make more disciples. Those disciples would also go and make more disciples. This would become a multiplying movement of people who are living differently in this world, built around their response to the love and grace of God. If you claim to be a follower of Jesus, if you've made a decision to let Christ take the lead in your life, you're a disciple. The behavior of disciples naturally changes as they become more aware of and respond to the work of the Holy Spirit (God's very own Spirit).

COMMUNITY

The best way to journey with Jesus is in community. Don't do this alone. Gather in a church community on Sunday for worship—a great way to begin each week. Then, gather with small group of others who are on this same journey. Even if you can't join a group, find a way to have these conversations with one or two other people you know. Your perspective and understanding will grow by having open, honest dialogue within the context of a group.

JESUS

At the center of discipleship is Jesus. This journal is just a tool to help you better know and follow Jesus each day. The pursuit is not the completion of the journal—the pursuit is transformation, becoming more like Jesus. We're excited for the journey ahead and trust God's Spirit will work in and through us as we continue to follow Jesus. Grace. Peace. Love.



HOW TO USE THIS JOURNAL

SERMON NOTES

Each week, you'll find a space to take sermon notes. If you miss the sermon on Sunday, you can catch it online later in the week—[youtube.com/mcdowellchurch](https://www.youtube.com/mcdowellchurch).

TABLE CONVERSATIONS

You'll also find a page of questions connected to the section of scripture we've been in together. Use this as a guide for your family or group—but feel free to deviate from these questions if something else jumps out to you from the week's scripture/sermon/themes.

CHAIR TIME

Each weekday, you'll work through a passage of scripture. You'll find questions and thoughts to consider. As you do this daily, say a simple prayer asking God's Spirit to guide you and give you wisdom.





YOU LOST ME AT

FINDING OURSELVES IN THE BEGINNING

GENESIS.

In the beginning, God created a world that was good. He created humans to rule over and steward that good world. But again and again and again, humans turned away from God to do things on their own (rebellion). Genesis is the story that lays the groundwork for God's continued pursuit and restoration of the people He loves (all of us) and the world He created. If we pay attention, we can find ourselves throughout this ancient story.

Tap below for a summary of Genesis created by the *The Bible Project*.

TABLE CONVERSATIONS

APPETIZER

- What would your favorite medium be for creating a piece of art, and why? Painting, sculpting, music, film, writing, spreadsheets, a Pinterest board, or performance in a sport?
- What is something from this week's sermon that stood out to you?

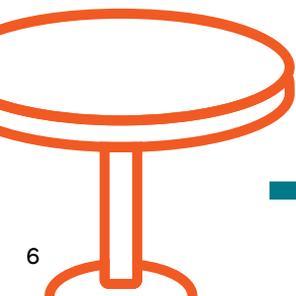
MAIN COURSE

- Share something you find amazing about our planet or natural world.
- Read Genesis 1:1-31 together as a Group. What one or two things stand out most to you in this passage?
- The account of creation is rich in symbolism. What are some of the concepts or contrasts you notice? (i.e., chaos, order, darkness, light, Spirit, God speaking).
- How has nature or creation helped you encounter God? What in the natural world helps you see God's goodness?
- What does it mean to be created in God's 'image' (Genesis 1:26)?

DESSERT

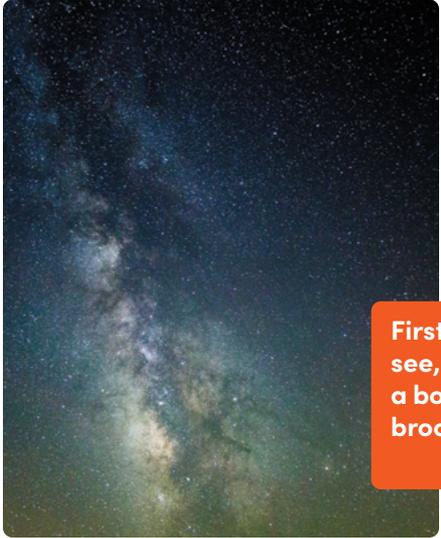
- What is something you can put into practice this week to align more with God's creation or His image?
- How can your Group be praying for you?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



SERMON NOTES

Grid of dots for sermon notes.



First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.
— Genesis 1:1-2 MSG

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE



Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

– Genesis 1:26-27

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

– Psalm 139:13-14

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

– Ephesians 2:10

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.

So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

– 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.

– Colossians 1:15-16

CHAIR TIME

As Christians, we believe that behind all creation there is a Creator. Scripture isn't so much a scientific exploration of HOW creation happened, but rather a specific revelation of the WHO that is behind creation. What does the author of 2 Corinthians 5 say is a gift? Who provided that gift?

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As you read through these passages, what do they reveal: about God; about humanity; about the world; and/or about you personally?

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Based on these passages, how do you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you to think, speak, or act differently? Try to be as specific as you can.

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PRAYER

Creator God, thank You for the incredible gifts of all Your creation. Thank You for creating me. I feel especially thankful today for _____. May You direct my thoughts, heart, and actions toward things that bless those around me and honor You. Amen.



TABLE CONVERSATIONS

APPETIZER

- If you could have a one-hour phone call with anyone living in the world, who would it be? What would you ask?
- What is something from this week's sermon that stood out to you?

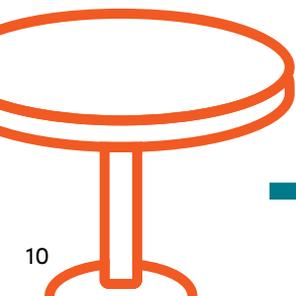
MAIN COURSE

- Have you ever felt 'called' to do something? What was it? How did you know?
- Read Genesis 12:1-9 together as a Group. What stands out to you?
- Based on this passage, what would you say is the meaning behind an 'altar'? Have you ever felt the need to build a physical or symbolic altar in your life?
- After the creation story, humanity spirals downward. But then God chooses Abram and his family as the rescue plan for humanity. God is continuing to use Abram's family (including you) to bring about His blessings in the world. How does that make you feel? In what ways do you sense God has been using you or wanting to use you as a blessing?
- All of God's promises to Abraham came true. What can that teach us about God's character?

DESSERT

- What is something you can do this week that would be a blessing to someone else?
- How can your Group be praying for you?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



WEEKLY SCRIPTURE



And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.

– Hebrews 11:6,8

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

– Matthew 6:33-34, Jesus

Let me hear of your unflinching love each morning, for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk, for I give myself to you.

– Psalm 143:8

In the same way, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.

So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

– Galatians 3:6,7,9

The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

– Genesis 12:1-3

CHAIR TIME

God’s mission to redeem and restore the world continues through specific people, as they trust and follow Him. As we read about Abraham, we see God calling him and his family—which required faith and obedience. Circle the word ‘faith’ in each of the passages. Why do you think faith plays such an important role in God’s story?

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Do you believe God calls you to take part in His redemption and restoration in the world today? Why or why not?

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As you read through these passages, what do they reveal: about God; about humanity; about the world; and/or about you personally?

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Based on these passages, how do you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you to think, speak, or act differently? Try to be as specific as you can.

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PRAYER

How do these passages lead you to pray today? Thank God for inviting you into His story and ask Him for the courage to trust Him in all things.



TABLE CONVERSATIONS

APPETIZER

- Which family from a movie, TV sitcom, or reality show is your favorite? Why?
- What is something from this week's sermon that stood out to you?

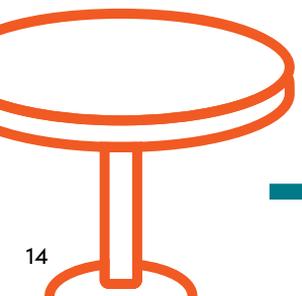
MAIN COURSE

- Share a little about your family growing up. What was good? What do you wish had been better?
- Read Genesis 15:1-6 and 16:1-15 together as a Group. What stands out to you in these passages?
- We are all broken and dysfunctional. We see that exemplified in Abram, Sarai, Hagar, and their family throughout much of Genesis. Despite that, God has compassion, love, and patience. What does that tell us about God? Do you find that to be true in your own experience?
- This phrase appears three times in the New Testament: "Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith" (Romans 4, Galatians 3, Hebrews 11). What about this phrase is so important?
- What does the word 'faith' look like in action?

DESSERT

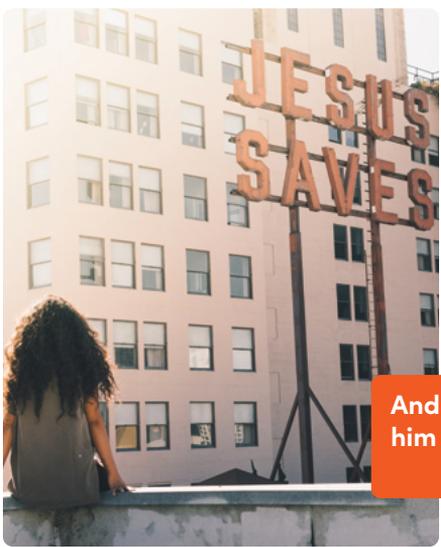
- What is something you are believing the Lord for? How can you put that belief in action this week?
- How can your Group be praying for you?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



SERMON NOTES

Grid of dots for sermon notes.



And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.
– Genesis 15:6

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE



Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.
 – Colossians 3:12-13

Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the heavens; your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the ocean depths. You care for people and animals alike, O Lord.
 – Psalm 36:5-6

I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.
 – Exodus 34:6b

“Have mercy on us and help us, if you can.”

“What do you mean, ‘If I can’?” Jesus asked. “Anything is possible if a person believes.”

The father instantly cried out, “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!”
 – Mark 9:22-24

If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is.
 – 2 Timothy 2:13

CHAIR TIME

Throughout the stories of Scripture, we find that God is faithful and full of grace even when people turn and go their own way. As you read these Scripture verses, what specific language do you see repeated again and again? What emotion does this spark in you?

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As you read through these passages, what do they reveal: about God; about humanity; about the world; and/or about you personally?

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Based on these passages, how do you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you to think, speak, or act differently? Try to be as specific as you can.

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PRAYER

Father, I confess that at times my faith has waived. Please forgive me for those moments. Stir in my heart today a renewed faithfulness in my pursuit of You. I am grateful for Your grace, love, and enduring commitment to me and all of humanity. You are so good! Amen.



TABLE CONVERSATIONS

APPETIZER

- What is your favorite way to celebrate the arrival of fall? A pumpkin-flavored drink, watching football, decorating your home, or eating a baked treat?
- What is something from this week's sermon that stood out to you?

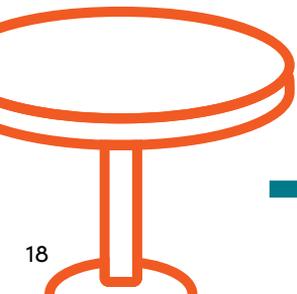
MAIN COURSE

- Have you ever felt like a target by other people who didn't want you to succeed or be good at something?
- Read Genesis 37:12-34 together as a Group. Are you familiar with this story? If not, the synopsis is that Joseph experiences temptation and prison, but goes on to become second in command for all of Egypt and eventually has to confront his brothers. What about Joseph's story is encouraging or inspiring to you?
- Read Genesis 50:20 together. What does this reveal to us about God's character?
- Have someone in the Group look up the definition of 'resiliency.' Do you feel like that describes you? Can you share any examples?
- How do we grow resiliency in life? What role does God's grace play in this process?

DESSERT

- What is an area of your life you need more resiliency, faith, and/or God's grace? What can you do in the coming weeks to grow in that area?
- How can your Group be praying for you?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



SERMON NOTES



You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

– Genesis 50:20

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE



You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! I can never escape from your Spirit!

I can never get away from your presence!
– Psalm 139:5-7

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

– Galatians 5:22-23

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

– Acts 1:8

“But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”
– John 14:6-27, Jesus

The Lord was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. Potiphar noticed this and realized that the Lord was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did.

– Genesis 39:2-3

CHAIR TIME

In Joseph’s story, we find this phrase repeated many times: “but the Lord was with Joseph.” It seems as though God’s presence empowered and encouraged Joseph to remain faithful. In the New Testament, we’re promised the Spirit of God. God is with us through His Spirit. How might your conversations and interactions change today if you were absolutely certain that God was walking next to you?

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As you read through these passages, what do they reveal: about God; about humanity; about the world; and/or about you personally?

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Based on these passages, how do you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you to think, speak, or act differently? Try to be as specific as you can.

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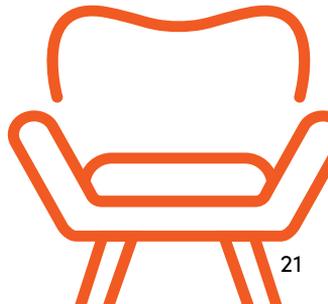
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PRAYER

How do these passages lead you to pray today? Spend some time inviting God into all the interactions you think will take place today.



THAT'S A WRAP

My favorite verse from this series:

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My biggest takeaway from this series:

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New habits or commitments I've made:

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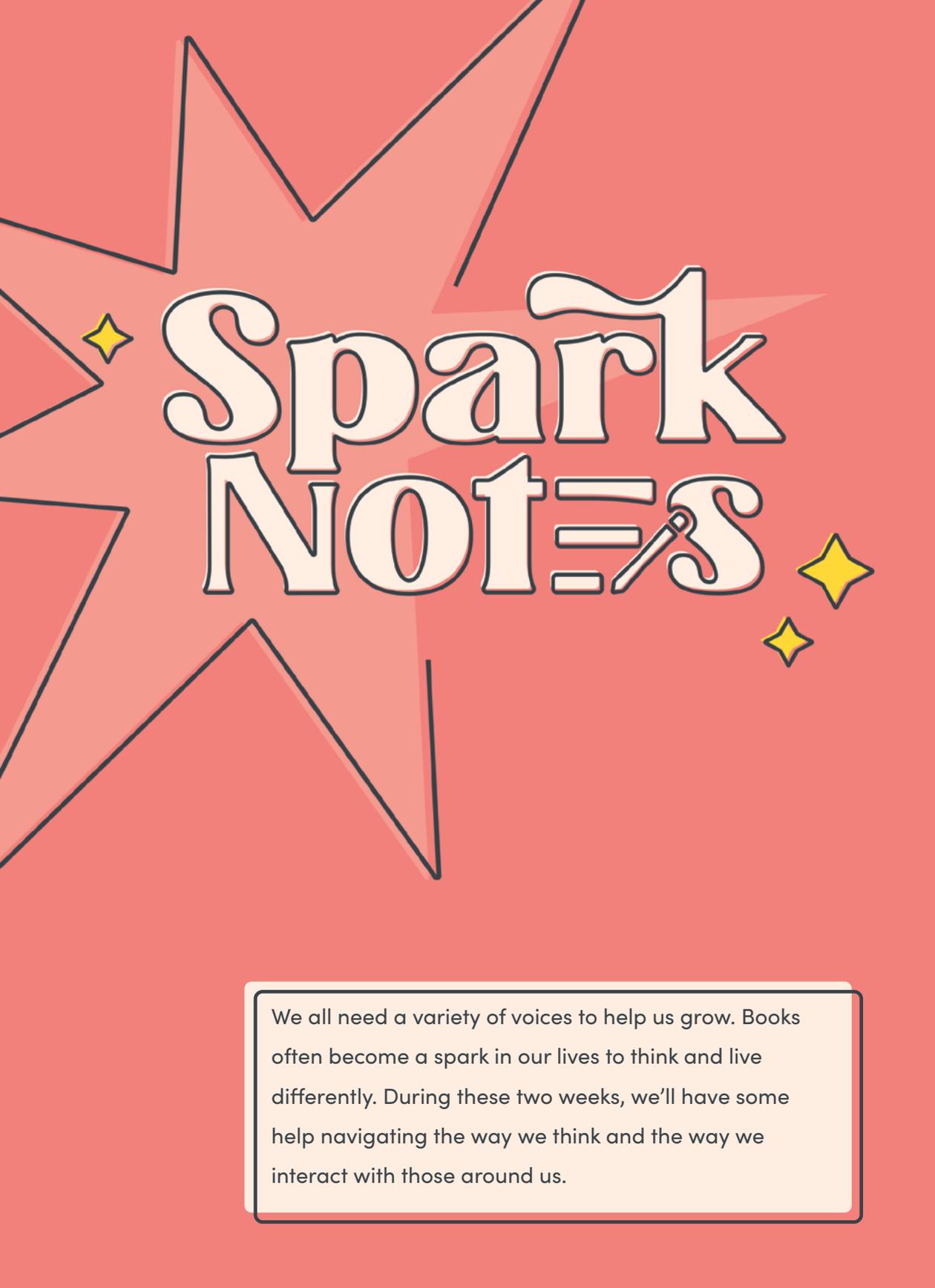
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Spark Notes

We all need a variety of voices to help us grow. Books often become a spark in our lives to think and live differently. During these two weeks, we'll have some help navigating the way we think and the way we interact with those around us.



Get Out of Your Head

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

– Romans 12:2

Sermon Notes

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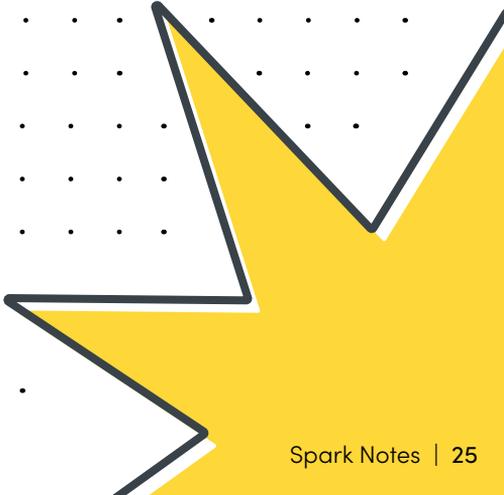


Table Conversations

APPETIZER

- What is one of your favorite quotes from a book or a movie? Why?
- What is something from this week's sermon that stood out to you?

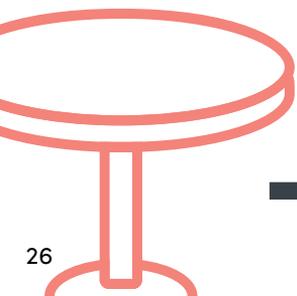
MAIN COURSE

- In the book, 'Get Out of Your Head', by Jennie Allen, she says, "The greatest spiritual battle of our generation is being fought between our ears." Do you agree? Why or why not?
- What would you say are some of the biggest battles that are being fought in our culture? How might those be related to the way people are thinking?
- Read Romans 8:6 and Romans 12:2 together as a Group. How can negative and/or positive thinking 'control' our own lives and future? Can you share an example?
- Why is it that the things we most need, and are fairly simple in practice, are extremely difficult to commit to on a consistent basis?
- Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 together as a Group. What is Paul saying is one of the best ways to fight temptations and strongholds that exist in our life?

DESSERT

- What might that look like in a practical way for you this week? How do you plan to direct your thoughts toward Christ?
- How can your Group be praying for you?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



Chair Time

“Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.”

– Psalm 46:10

So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

– Romans 8:6

“One God-honoring thought has the potential to change the trajectory of both history and eternity. Just as one uninterrupted lie in my head has the potential to bring about unimaginable destruction in the world around me.” – Jennie Allen

■ **Why is it that the things we most need, and are fairly simple in practice, are extremely difficult to consistently commit to?**

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Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

– James 4:8

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

– Galatians 4:4-7

■ **We have moved from being a slave to our sinful/fearful/destructive thoughts to being children of God, adopted into His family. And we are gifted the Spirit—in order to reset our minds. We must now participate with that Spirit’s work within our hearts, minds, and activity in the world. Just as one thought can have destructive consequences in our lives, the opposite is true. One Spirit-driven thought could reset our entire day.**



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Chair Time

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

– Philippians 4:6-8

“Press on... ‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that...you may discern what is the will of God.’ Why? Why would that matter so much--to discern the will of God? Because He isn't just after your freedom. He prepared good works in advance for you so that a whole lot of other people could be set free. When we take every thought captive and reclaim our thinking patterns from the lies of the enemy, we are set free to set others free. May we steward our freedom well.”

– Jennie Allen

- **Is God's Spirit nudging you to pay more attention to how the enemy is working to feed you lies? What are the lies that you often believe as truths? Ask God to help you replace the lies with His truth today.**
- **Is God's Spirit nudging you toward some good works that might help others discover freedom in their lives? If so, will you commit yourself to that work?**

A large grid of 20 rows and 25 columns of small black dots, intended for handwritten notes.





A Gentle Answer

A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.
– Proverbs 15:1

Sermon Notes

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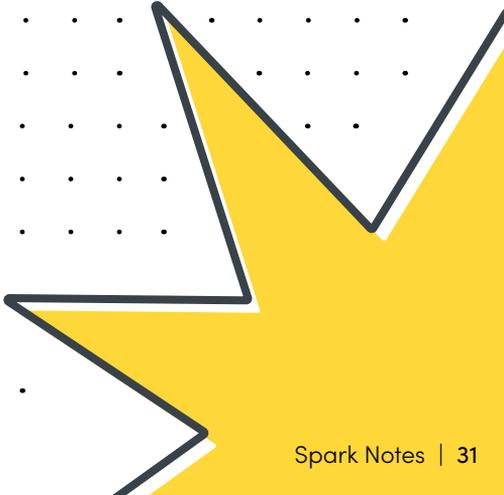


Table Conversations

APPETIZER

- How many books do you own? Which one is your favorite?
- What is something from this week's sermon that stood out to you?

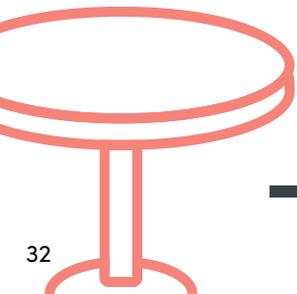
MAIN COURSE

- What are some topics in our society that tend to stir up conflict and dissension? Why do you think those topics in particular lead to conflict?
- In the book, 'A Gentle Answer', Scott Sauls says: "In our current cultural moment, outrage has become more expected than surprising, more normative than odd, more encouraged than discouraged, more rewarded than rejected... On some level, we are all engaged in the seemingly insatiable, ubiquitous theme of us-against-them." Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Read Ephesians 4:15-29 together as a Group. In this passage, Paul is giving some practical advice on living together in Christian community. What stands out to you?
- How does this passage contrast with the picture Scott Sauls paints of our current culture in the quote above?
- Paul ties Christian maturity to this phrase: "speaking the truth in love" (verse 15). Why do you think he makes such a strong link between these two concepts?
- How does our Christian witness in the world depend on our ability to navigate challenging conversations with others?

DESSERT

- What are a few ways you as a Group can endeavor to use a gentle answer or speak truth in love in the days/weeks/months ahead?
- How can this Group be praying for you?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



Chair Time

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

- Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus

And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

- James 4:6

- **Humility. Gentleness. Not quite the direction we're taught to go in our world today. In reading these Scriptures, do you sense God nudging you toward any growth or change? If so, be specific. If not, don't give up yet.**

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"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

- Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus

- **So often, we're fighting to win the argument, to convince others that we're right and they are wrong. But the way of Jesus is one paved with self-giving love. Jesus let His enemies crucify Him. He humbled Himself. Have we missed the mark in the ways we interact with those who disagree, or simply hold other perspectives?**

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That's a Wrap

My favorite verse from this series:

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My biggest takeaway from this series:

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New habits or commitments I've made:

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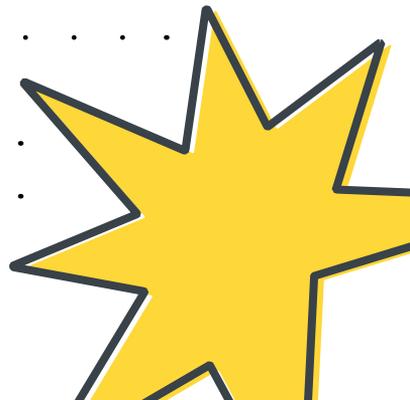
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Your Best Life Now

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

We often buy into the idea that our best life is somewhere out there, in the future. The reality is that the present is the best time to live our best life. In fact, it's the only life we have. The past is behind us. The future isn't guaranteed. We can find contentment and joy no matter the circumstances we're experiencing. That's what Philippians is all about.

Tap below for a summary of Philippians created by the The Bible Project.

Table Conversations

APPETIZER

- If you could choose only one food item to have for the rest of your life, and you would never get tired of it, what would it be?
- What is something from this week's sermon that stood out to you?

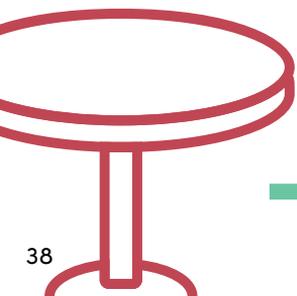
MAIN COURSE

- What are some things in life that bring you the most joy? Why?
- Read Philippians 1:3-14 together as a Group. What one or two things stand out most to you in this passage?
- Paul has this sense of clarity about the imprisonment and challenges he is going through, and how that is furthering God's mission in his life. What challenges have you gone through recently that God might be using to help you grow?
- Has fear kept you from doing things in your life that you wish you could go back and do differently? Can you share an example?
- Re-read Paul's prayer for the church in Philippi (verse 9-11). Do you feel like you are experiencing this kind of overflow in your relationship with Christ? Why or why not?

DESSERT

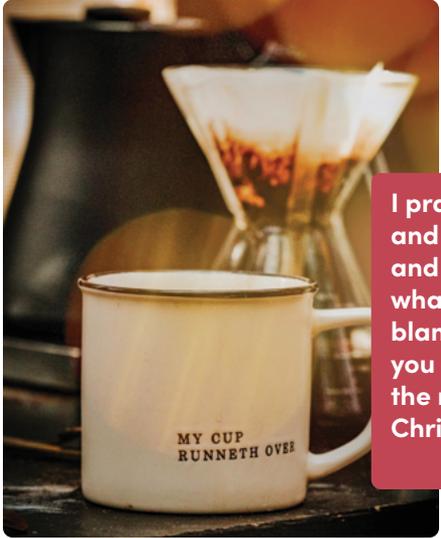
- Paul ultimately wants the community in Philippi to overflow in love so that God gets the credit. What is something practical you could do this week that would show someone love, and allow God to get the credit?
- How can the Group be praying for you?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



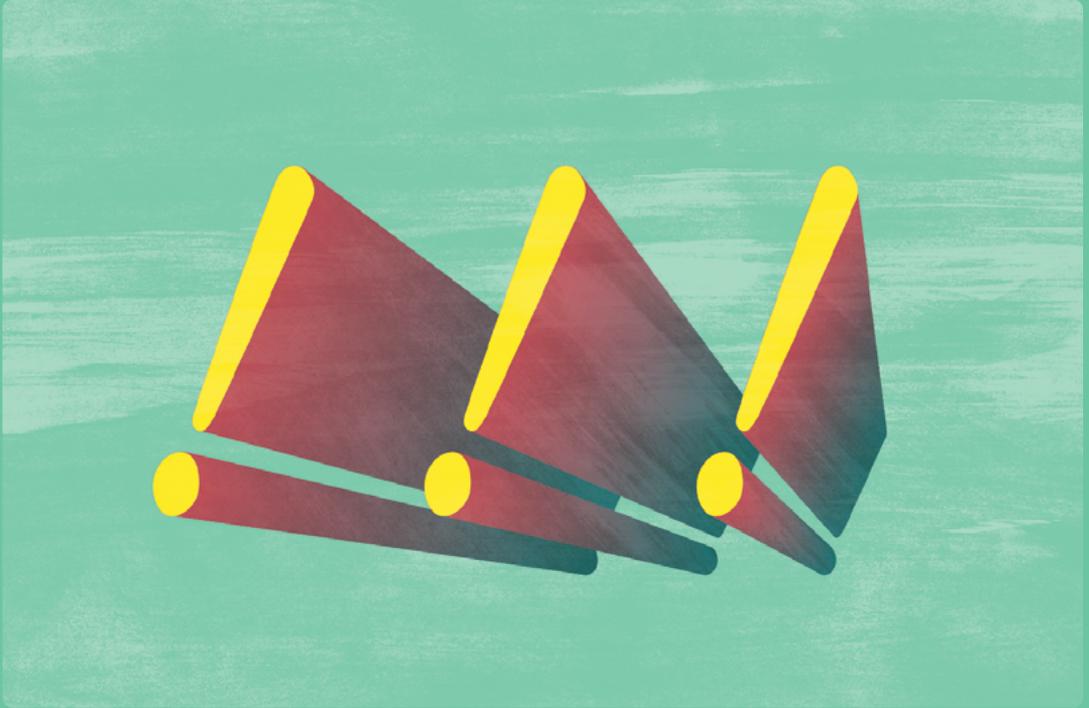
Sermon Notes

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I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.
– Philippians 1:9-11

Weekly Scripture



And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

– Philippians 1:6

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

– Philippians 1:2

For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

– Philippians 1:21

May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

– Philippians 1:11

Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ.

– Philippians 1:27

Chair Time

Many scholars see verse 6 as a primary theme for Philippians. Who does Paul suggest began and will continue the good work in us? What do you think our role is in this good work?

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As you read through these passages, what do they reveal: about God; about humanity; about the world; and/or about you personally?

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Based on these passages, how do you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you to think, speak, or act differently? Try to be as specific as you can.

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PRAYER

Paul is praying for the Philippian church in verse 11. Pray this prayer replacing the words 'you/your' with 'I/my'. Now think of someone else you can insert into those spaces and pray for them today as well.



Table Conversations

APPETIZER

- What is something in your home you wish you could declutter or have less of? Could someone else benefit from those items?
- What is something from this week's sermon that stood out to you?

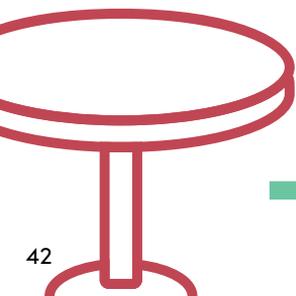
MAIN COURSE

- Do you feel that our current culture is becoming more or less self-centered? Why?
- What makes the pursuit of 'self' so intriguing?
- Read Philippians 2:1-11 as a Group. What practical advice does Paul give in the pursuit of humility? Why do you think this is so difficult to put into practice?
- Is it possible to attain humility without losing a strong sense of identity?
- How can Christ be an example and inspiration in the pursuit of greater humility?
- Read Philippians 2:12-18. What does Paul say will help us shine brightly in the world? Do you agree?

DESSERT

- What is one practical thing you can do this week to help you in the pursuit of humility?
- How can the Group be praying for you?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



Sermon Notes

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Grid of dotted lines for taking notes.

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

– Philippians 2:3-5

Weekly Scripture



Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

– Philippians 2:1-2

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

– Philippians 2:9-11

Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.

– Philippians 2:14-15

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

–Philippians 2:6-8

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

– Philippians 2:12-13

Chair Time

For Paul, Jesus was everything. And understanding the path of Jesus should change everything about how we live, work, speak, and think. In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul mentions an interesting dynamic of following Jesus. Read these verses again. What is God doing in us? And what are we to do?

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As you read through these passages, what do they reveal: about God; about humanity; about the world; and/or about you personally?

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Based on these passages, how do you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you to think, speak, or act differently? Try to be as specific as you can.

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PRAYER

What prayers do these passages evoke in you? Prayers of thanksgiving? Courage? Inspiring you to action? Tell God today, asking for His desires and power to work in you as you pursue what pleases Him.

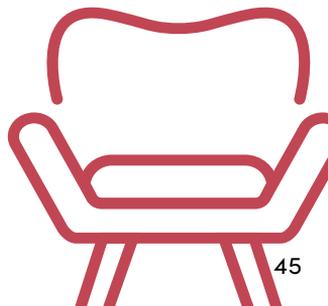


Table Conversations

APPETIZER

- Share a moment in your life you felt embarrassed. Did you learn anything from that experience?
- What is something from this week's sermon that stood out to you?

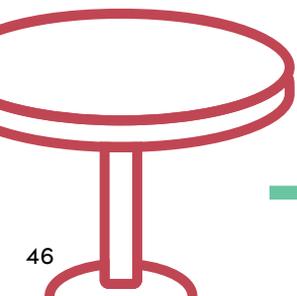
MAIN COURSE

- Do you tend to have grace for yourself when things don't go as planned? Why or why not?
- What about for others - do you tend to have too high of expectations or too low of expectations? Why?
- Read Philippians 3:7-14 together as a Group. What is something that stood out to you in this passage?
- What is the thing that Paul says puts everything else into perspective for him (verse 7-8)?
- Share something in your life you are really striving and working hard for. What keeps you motivated in that pursuit?
- How can you apply a similar approach to your pursuit of Jesus this week?

DESSERT

- When you fail or disappoint yourself (we all fail and fall short in some way or another), how can you remind yourself this week to have grace? When someone else falls short, how can you remember to have grace?
- How can the Group be praying for you?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



Weekly Scripture



Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.

– Philippians 3:1

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

– Philippians 3:12

For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.

– Philippians 3:13-14

Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

– Philippians 3:8-9

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

– Philippians 3:10-11

Chair Time

If we miss Jesus, we miss everything. We often think that we can tidy up our lives and look like we've got it all together. But without Jesus, it just doesn't matter in the long run. Paul's pursuit was not some religious performance, but was Jesus. Nothing else mattered to him. How important is Jesus to you? In your life, what competes with Jesus? Try to be specific.

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PRAYER

Pick out one or more of these verses and pray them specifically to Christ. Is there anyone else that has been on your heart that you need to pray for today?



Table Conversations

APPETIZER

- What is a dessert or snack that you tend to over-indulge on?
- What is something from this week's sermon that stood out to you?

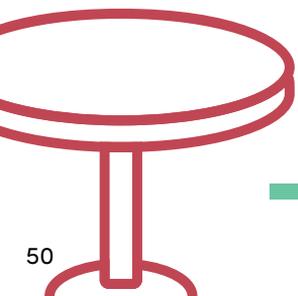
MAIN COURSE

- What are one or two things in life that bring you the most satisfaction and peace?
- In the West, we often live in the abundance of excess and possessions. Yet why does it seem we are never really satisfied?
- Read Philippians 4:4-13 together as a Group. What stands out to you?
- What does Paul say helps him feel content (verse 12-13)? Have you found this to be true in your own journey?
- Negativity, worry, anxiety, and stress often seem to be the waters we are swimming in. Can you relate? Do you have an example from your life or that you've observed?
- In the midst of these things, Paul says we can have a different kind of life. A great life. The best kind of life. How does Jesus help us to experience that kind of life now?

DESSERT

- In what area of your life are you really wanting or needing to experience God's goodness? Is there something you can do in the coming weeks, with the Spirit's help, to grow in that area?
- How can the Group be praying for you?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



Sermon Notes

A large grid of dots for taking notes, consisting of 20 columns and 25 rows of small black dots on a white background.



For I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.
 – Philipians 4:11b-13

Weekly Scripture



Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

– Philippians 4:11-13

And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.

– Philippians 4:19-20

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

– Philippians 4:4-5

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

– Philippians 4:8-9

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

– Philippians 4:6-7

Chair Time

Paul penned this letter from prison. But, as Matt Chandler once noted, "Paul can see his troubles and imprisonment only through the lens of grace-fueled optimism." What challenges and troubles are you currently facing? Is there a way to frame those through the 'lens of grace-fueled optimism'?

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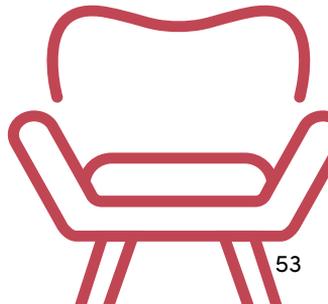
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PRAYER

Father, I ask for greater insight into how I can live each day with grace-fueled optimism. May I be motivated by Your good purposes in my life and in the world. And may You give me the strength to face each day with the strength that comes from Christ Jesus. Give me a sense of Your peace as I present these things to You today: _____ Amen.



That's a Wrap!

My favorite verse from this series:

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My biggest takeaway from this series:

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New habits or commitments I've made:

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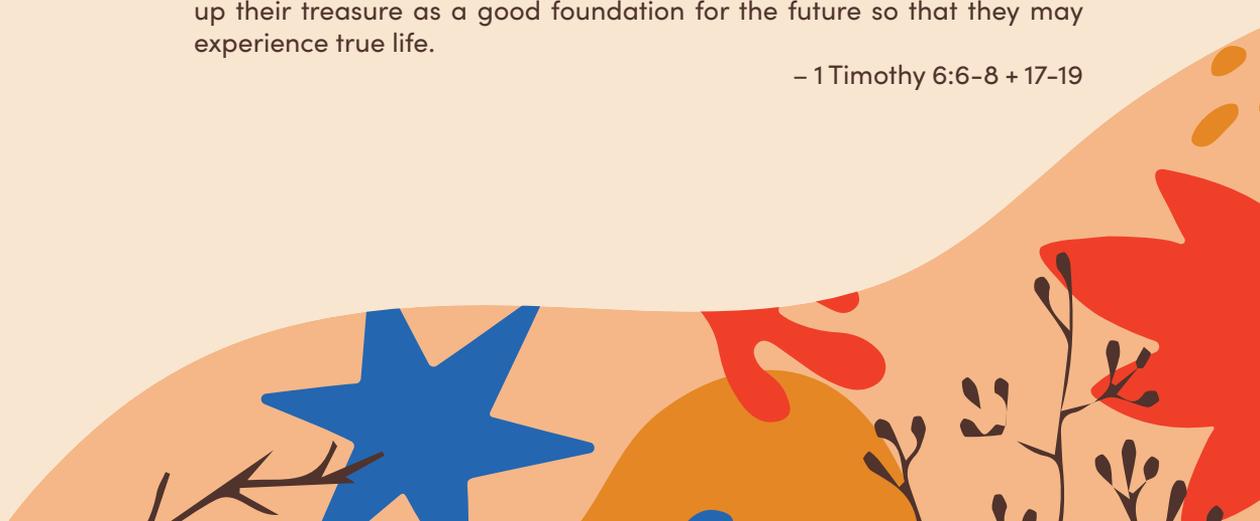
Thanks + Giving

HOW GRATITUDE & GENEROSITY FEED EACH OTHER

True godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.

Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.

– 1 Timothy 6:6-8 + 17-19



Reflection

Write down 5 things you're thankful for.

Give thanks to the
Lord, for he is good!
His faithful love
endures forever.
— Psalm 118:1

Write down the names of 5 people you're thankful for.
(Write them letters this week and tell them!)

Always be joyful. Never stop
praying. Be thankful in all
circumstances, for this is God's will
for you who belong to Christ Jesus.
— 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Since you excel in
so many ways—in
your faith, your
gifted speakers, your
knowledge, your
enthusiasm, and your
love from us—I want
you to excel also in this
gracious act of giving.
— 2 Corinthians 8:7

Sermon Notes



Reflection

As you look back over your life, what 3 organizations or causes have you been most generous with?

The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.

– Proverbs 11:25

As you think about this year, does your generosity match your desire to do good in the world?

Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.

– 2 Corinthians 9:6-8



Christmas

AT MCDOWELL

It's the most wonderful time of the year! (Well, minus the stress, disappointment, chaos, etc.) The story of Christmas leads us toward **hope, peace, joy, & love**, even in a world of stress, fear, disappointment, and bitterness. Be intentional this Christmas season. Let's choose Jesus—and find the hope, peace, joy, and love we all need this year.

ADVENT



For hundreds of years, Christians around the globe have set aside the four weeks leading up to Christmas as a time of preparation, reflection, and celebration centered around the arrival, or birth, of Jesus. This season is known as ADVENT. Advent literally means 'the arrival'. Traditionally, each week highlighted a theme that was brought about through Jesus. Christians also use this time to look forward to, and to prepare for the second coming of Jesus. There is coming a day when God will set all things back to right, and we will experience the full measure of **hope, peace, joy, & love.** Advent is time we remember and celebrate the arrival of Jesus, the Christ-child, and we eagerly await His return.





How do you define hope?



How do you define joy?

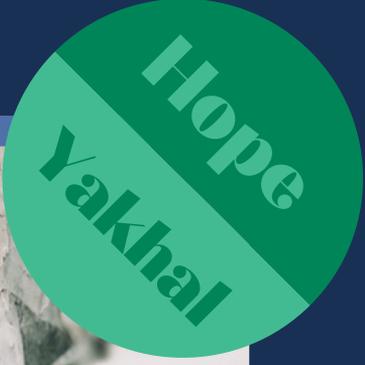


How do you define peace?

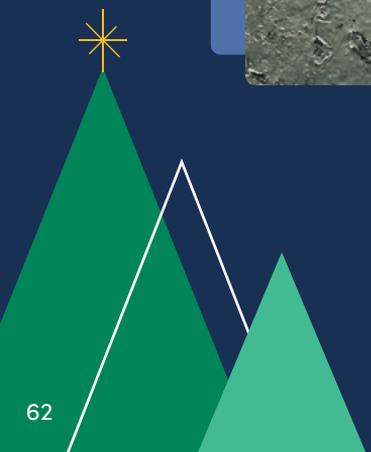


How do you define love?





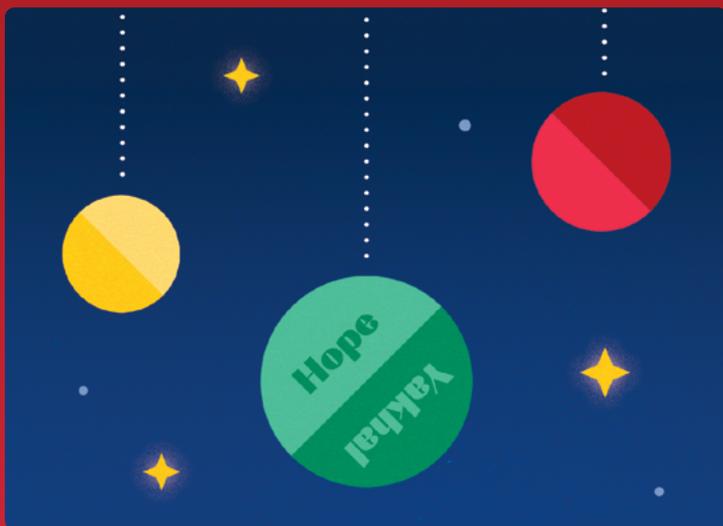
Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the Lord rises to shine on you. Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but the glory of the Lord rises and appears over you.
– Isaiah 60:1-2



Sermon Notes

A large white rectangular area with a grid of small black dots for writing notes. The grid is approximately 25 columns wide and 30 rows high. In the top right corner of the white area, there is a yellow circle partially overlapping a dark blue circle. In the bottom right corner of the white area, there is a yellow star.

Weekly Scripture



But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

– Isaiah 40:31

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

– Romans 15:13

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.

– Hebrews 10:23

I am counting on the Lord; yes, I am counting on him. I have put my hope in his word.

– Psalms 130:5

I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

– Ephesians 1:18

The Lord is good to those who depend on him, to those who search for him.

– Lamentations 3:25



Chair Time

The Biblical concept of hope is built on anticipation or waiting for something good to come in the future. This is the starting point of Advent. We wait and expect the GOOD GIFT of Jesus. We celebrate His birth, and also HOPE for His return. In other words, HOPE according to the Bible is found in Jesus. In Romans 15:13, what does Paul say is the spark to feeling a sense of hope in his life? What in your life could be diminishing or undermining your HOPE this year? Try to be as specific as possible.

Four rows of dotted lines for writing.

As you read through these passages, what do they reveal: about God; about humanity; about the world; and/or about you personally?

Five rows of dotted lines for writing.

Based on these passages, how do you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you to think, speak, or act differently? Try to be as specific as you can.

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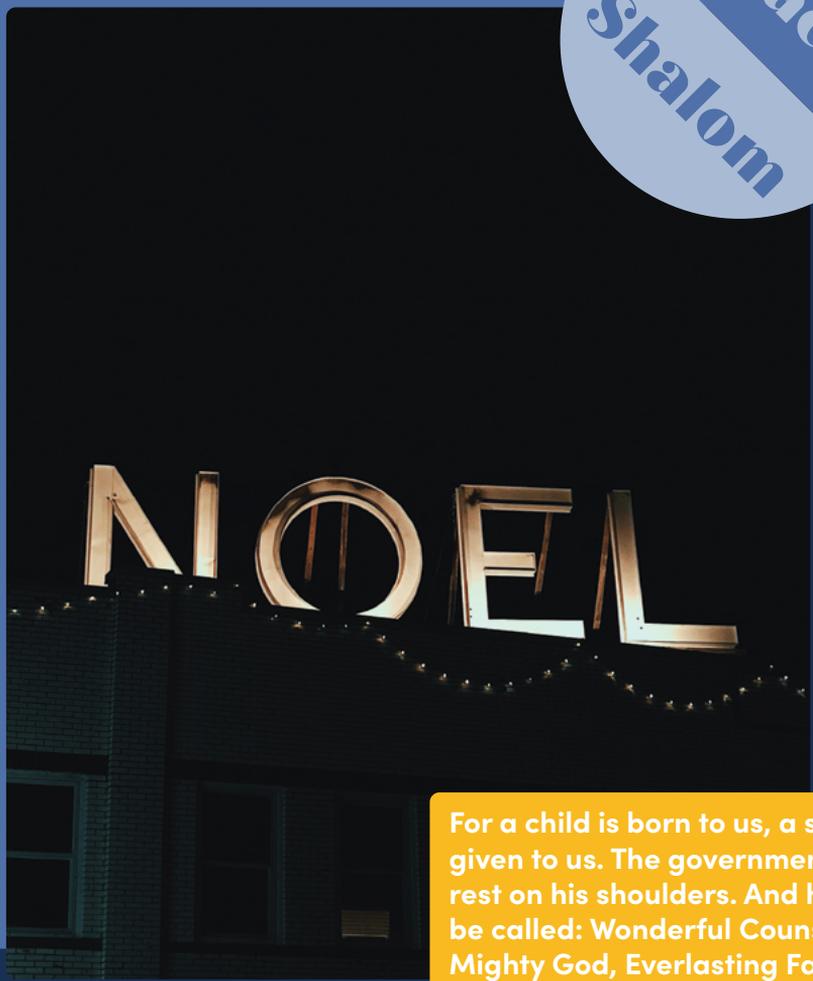
PRAYER

Father, there are things getting in the way of my hope in You. These things often compete with You in my life. Help me to hold tightly, without wavering, to Your truth and life that comes through Jesus. I don't want to miss Jesus this Advent season. Amen





Peace
Shalom



For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
— Isaiah 9:6

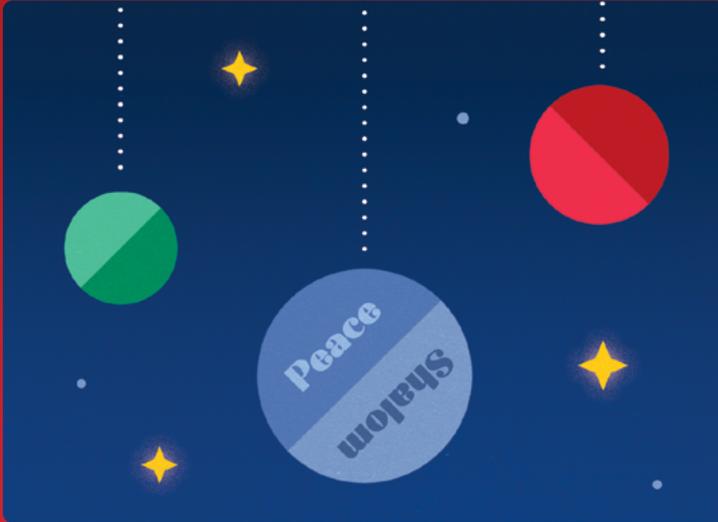


Sermon Notes

A large grid of dots for writing notes, consisting of 20 columns and 30 rows of small black dots on a white background.



Weekly Scripture



"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

– John 16:33, Jesus

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

– Ephesians 4:2-3

'May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favor and give you his peace.'

– Numbers 6:24-26

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe.

– Psalm 4:8

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

– Romans 15:13

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!

– Isaiah 26:3



Chair Time

Most of us have a concept of what peace is. It points to an absence of conflict. But there's also a deeper meaning. Peace is a state of wholeness. If you think about relationships, Biblical peace wouldn't just be about tolerating others, but about finding harmony with others. In Christ, we find this level of peace—both with God, and with others (through forgiveness, reconciliation, etc). What is one area of your life that could use a little more peace (wholeness) this Advent season?

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Where does Jesus say we can begin to experience peace in the midst of the chaos of the world (John 16:33)?

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As you read through these passages, what do they reveal: about God; about humanity; about the world; and/or about you personally?

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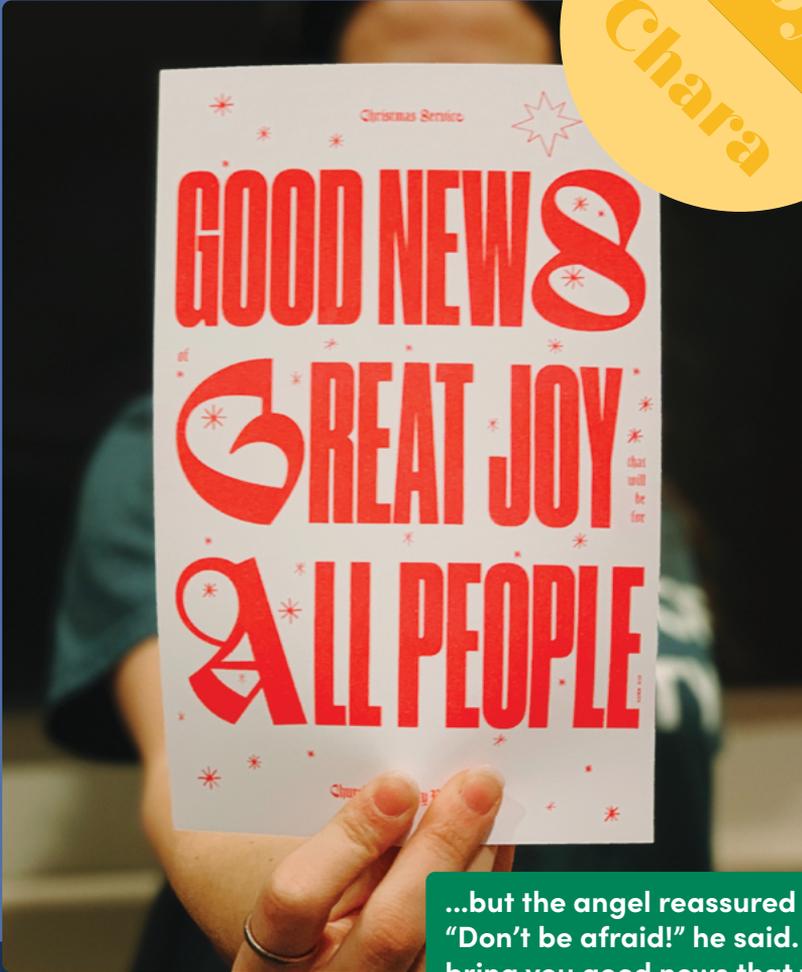
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PRAYER

Turn the blessing in Numbers 6:24-25 into a prayer today. God wants you to experience peace and wholeness in Him this season.





...but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people."
– Luke 2:10



Sermon Notes

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Weekly Scripture



For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.

– Psalms 30:5

You will live in joy and peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands!

– Isaiah 55:12

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

– Romans 15:13

I will shout for joy and sing your praises, for you have ransomed me.

– Psalms 71:23

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.

– Proverbs 17:22

Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18



Chair Time

Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Odds are, you can hum or sing that line. The theme of JOY runs through the Bible. That isn't to say that pain, difficulty, disappointment, and sadness aren't present. They are. But with the coming of Jesus, there is something substantial that can bring JOY in the midst of whatever circumstances we face. In some ways, this JOY is born out of the HOPE and PEACE we have in God. Joy can be chosen even in the darkest of days. Not as a replacement for sadness or sorrow. Those emotions are real. But in the midst of those emotions, we are offered a sustaining joy in this life. Is JOY a common theme in your life? What tends to eat away at the joy in your life?

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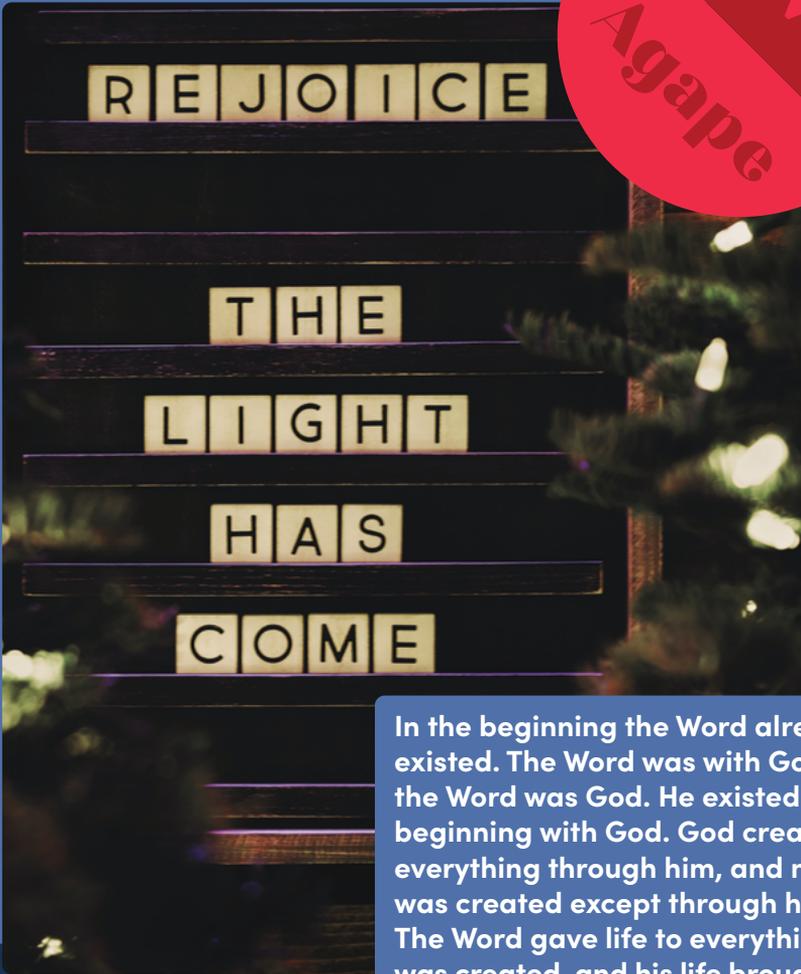
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PRAYER

God, here are some things that have brought joy in this season:

The greatest joy in life ultimately comes from You. Help me to recenter and refocus my heart and mind today on the joy that comes from Your Son, Jesus. Thank you!





Love
Agape

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

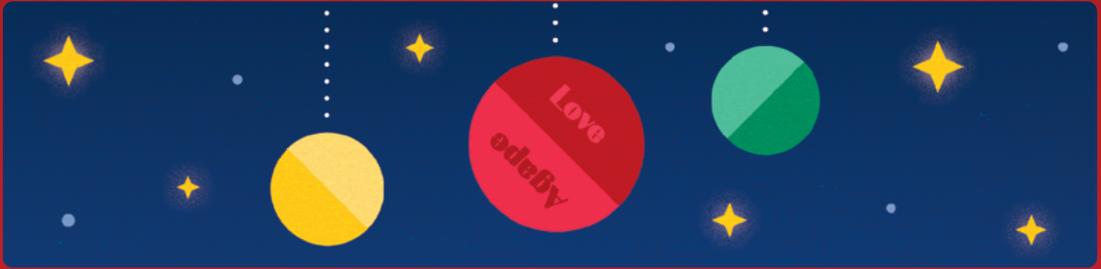
– John 1:1-5



Sermon Notes

A large white rectangular area with a grid of small black dots for writing notes. The grid is approximately 25 columns wide and 30 rows high. In the top right corner of the white area, there are two overlapping circles: a teal one on top and a yellow one on the bottom. A vertical dotted line runs along the right edge of the white area. In the bottom right corner of the white area, there is a yellow four-pointed star.

Weekly Scripture



The Birth of Jesus

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.² (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.)³ All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.⁴ And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.⁵ He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.⁷ She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

The Shepherds and Angels

⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified,¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.

¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

¹⁵ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child.¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished,¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.



Chair Time

At the heart of Christmas is this well-known truth: For God so loved the world, that He gave. It was LOVE that compelled God to send Jesus. Jesus not only personifies LOVE, but He is a gift of LOVE from the Father. And every time we give and receive a gift, we should do so grounded in this same kind of love for one another. Gift-giving at Christmas is appropriate because it mirrors the LOVE of God. What gifts are you excited to give this year—and who are you giving them to?

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As you read through these passages, what do they reveal: about God; about humanity; about the world; and/or about you personally?

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Based on these passages, how do you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you to think, speak, or act differently? Try to be as specific as you can.

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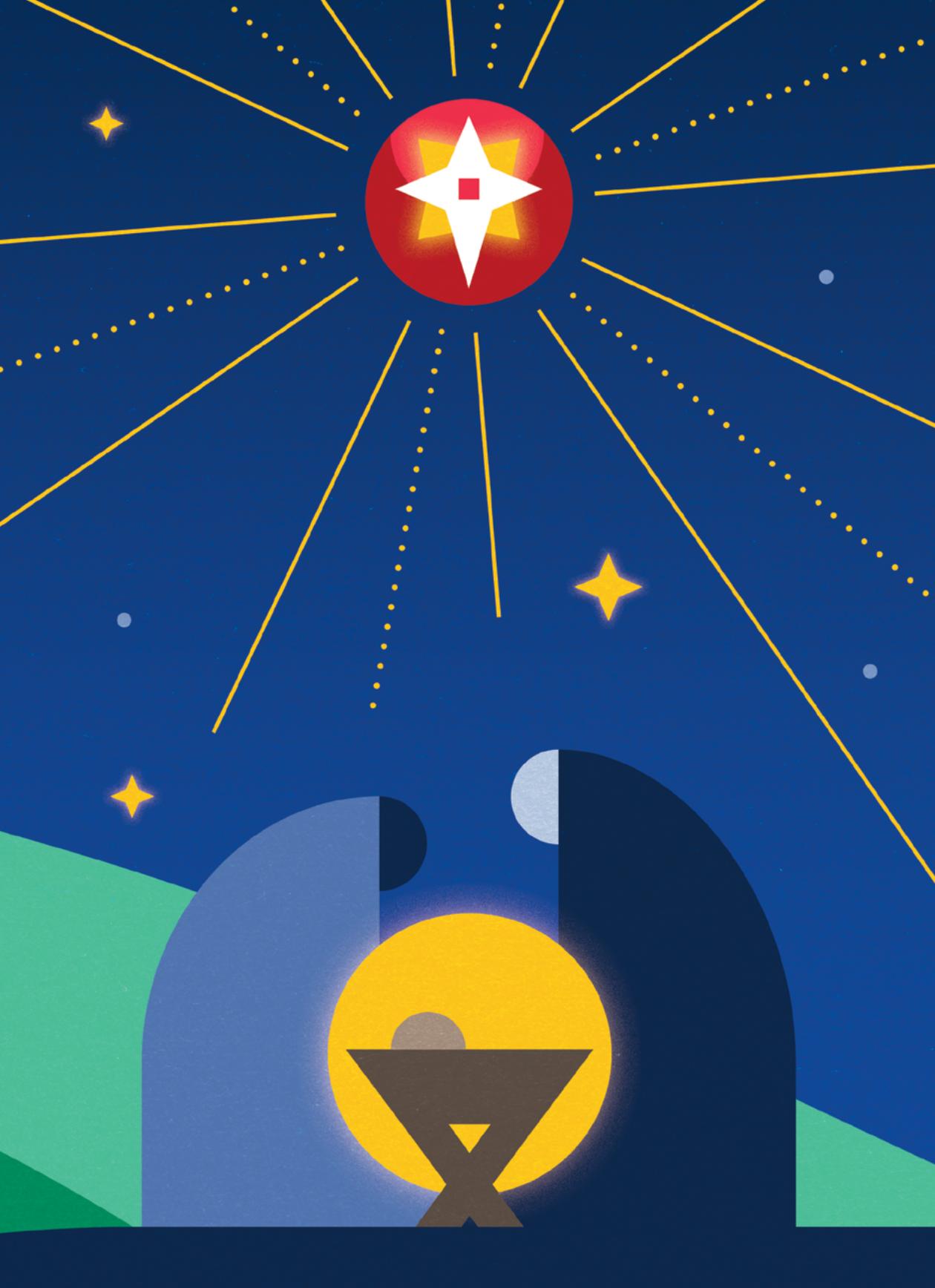
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PRAYER

How does this passage and the story of Jesus' birth lead you to pray today?







2022 FAVORITES + MEMORIES

Verse:

Book(s):

Worship Song(s):

Trip/Vacation:

Movie/Show:

Date Night:

Song/Artist:

Restaurant:

2023 GOALS + DREAMS + HOPES

Family + Friends:

Financial:

Work + Hobbies:

Other:

Faith + Service:



The end of the year is a great time for a personal check-up in some of the various arenas in our lives. Spend some time thinking through each of these categories below, rate yourself on a scale of 1-5, and answer these questions.

- How am I doing?
- Where am I thankful?
- What needs to change?
- How will it change?
- Who can I ask for accountability?

Faith Life: 1 2 3 4 5

Computer/Screen Life: 1 2 3 4 5

Marriage/Dating Life: 1 2 3 4 5

Financial Life: 1 2 3 4 5

Family Life: 1 2 3 4 5

Social Life: 1 2 3 4 5

Office + Work Life: 1 2 3 4 5

Attitudes in Life: 1 2 3 4 5

PRAYER

Father God —

You are the God of the universe, yet You still know me and love me. Thank You for being faithful and for never giving up on me. Thank You for providing everything I need.

As we enter this new year, may Your Spirit go before and walk beside me. May Your Spirit work in me as I follow Jesus and grow in my love for the people I encounter. May Your Kingdom come, and may Your will be done here in Scottsdale, Fountain Hills, and Phoenix, just as it is in Heaven. I love you Father. Amen.



