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# WHAT ON EARTH **AM I HERE FOR?**

**daily Bible readings**

a **42 day** journey  
to discover God's  
purpose for your life



# WHAT ON EARTH AM I HERE FOR?

## daily Bible readings

We're so pleased you're going to join us with our daily Bible reading.

### Here's how to use this booklet:

1. Find a quiet space and set aside say five minutes for you and God.
2. Read the Bible passage as printed - you may like to look it up in your own Bible too.
3. Read the notes underneath.
4. Ask yourself the question of the day and how it applies to you.
5. Use the 'think about' summary of what you've been learning.
6. Pray the prayer, or your own prayer if you prefer.
7. When you're done, tick off that day on the page or at the back

### **And you're all done!**

At the end of each week you can jot down a few thoughts on the 'thinking through the week' pages.



What on earth am I here for?

Day By Day • Progress Chart

Check off your Bible reading progress, day by day

#### Week 1 • You matter to God

- ☐ Day 1
- ☐ Day 2
- ☐ Day 3
- ☐ Day 4
- ☐ Day 5
- ☐ Day 6
- ☐ Day 7

#### Week 2 • Planned for God's pleasure

- ☐ Day 8
- ☐ Day 9
- ☐ Day 10
- ☐ Day 11
- ☐ Day 12
- ☐ Day 13
- ☐ Day 14

#### Week 3 • Formed for God's family

- ☐ Day 15
- ☐ Day 16
- ☐ Day 17
- ☐ Day 18
- ☐ Day 19
- ☐ Day 20
- ☐ Day 21

#### Week 4 • Created to become like Christ

- ☐ Day 22
- ☐ Day 23
- ☐ Day 24
- ☐ Day 25
- ☐ Day 26
- ☐ Day 27
- ☐ Day 28

#### Week 5 • Shaped for serving God

- ☐ Day 29
- ☐ Day 30
- ☐ Day 31
- ☐ Day 32
- ☐ Day 33
- ☐ Day 34
- ☐ Day 35

#### Week 6 • Made for a mission

- ☐ Day 36
- ☐ Day 37
- ☐ Day 38
- ☐ Day 39
- ☐ Day 40
- ☐ Day 41
- ☐ Day 42



■ The People-pleaser Trap

42

**Psalm 27:7-10**

<sup>7</sup> Hear my voice when I call, O LORD;  
be merciful to me and answer me.  
<sup>8</sup> My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"  
Your face, LORD, I will seek.  
<sup>9</sup> Do not hide your face from me,  
do not turn your servant away in anger;  
you have been my helper.  
Do not reject me or forsake me,  
O God my Saviour.  
<sup>10</sup> Though my father and mother forsake me,  
the LORD will receive me.

**Whose approval are you living for?**

All of us love to be valued, loved and appreciated. We crave the acceptance and approval of others. Relationships matter and we want to nurture them. There is an inherent danger in pleasing other people if that becomes more important to us than pleasing God. Whether out of fear or just a need to fit in, peer pressure is a powerful thing. I might get anxious over 'what will they think?' or 'what will they say?'. If I haven't set clear priorities then I will end up people-pleasing rather than God-pleasing. Psalm 27 reminds us that we only need to please one person, and that's God. Even though my family or friends might reject me [v10], the Lord never will.

**Question:** Whose opinion matters most in my life? Whose approval am I living for?

**Think about:** Happiness is my choice. I don't need anyone's approval to be happy.

**Pray:** Dear Father God, thank you for all the loving and supportive human relationships in my life. But please help me to live for your approval, even if others find that hard. Amen.

■ Thinking Through This Week

?

**What are the key things I've learned and been thinking about through this week?**



■ It All Starts With God

1

**Colossians 1:15-20**

<sup>15</sup> Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

**It's not about you**

If we want to figure out the purpose of life we need to start from the right place. It's not about our gifts, skills or abilities, our careers or our families. According to the Bible, that place to start looking is Jesus and not ourselves.

Here in Colossians we find an amazing claim: that all of us and all of creation were made 'by Jesus and for Jesus' [v16]. So if I was made by Jesus and if I were made for Jesus, then ultimately, I'll only ever find my true purpose in him.

**Question:** How can I remember today that life is about living for God, and not myself?

**Think about:** It's not about me

**Pray:** Father God, please use these 40 days to show me the purpose that you have for my life. Thank you, Amen.

■ You Are Not An Accident

2

**Psalm 139:13-16**

<sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.  
<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place.  
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,  
<sup>16</sup> your eyes saw my unformed body.  
All the days ordained for me  
were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.

**You are not an accident**

The Bible is very clear: human beings are not an accident. Your birth was no mistake or mishap. Every fibre of your being was made by the hand of a loving creator. Every aspect of who you are was chosen by God. It's why the Psalm-writer can praise God [v14] 'I am fearfully and wonderfully made'.

What that means, at very least, is that you were made for a reason. At the moment of your conception, God had a purpose in mind. How wonderful to know that God has a plan for your life!

**Question:** Does it make it easier to accept myself as I am, knowing that God created me, and has a plan for me?

**Think about:** I am not an accident

**Pray:** Father God, please help me to accept myself as I am, created by your loving hand and fearfully and wonderfully made. Amen.



What Drives Your Life?

3

**Ecclesiastes 2:10-11**

<sup>10</sup> I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;  
I refused my heart no pleasure.  
My heart took delight in all my work,  
and this was the reward for all my labour.  
<sup>11</sup> Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done  
and what I had toiled to achieve,  
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;  
nothing was gained under the sun.

**Everyone is driven by something**

Whether it's the need for approval, the desire for material things, a better quality of life or the fear of missing out, all of us are driven by something. But deep down, we're all looking for something more than this world has to offer.

This part of the Bible was written by wise King Solomon, who speaks here of the futility of life if we don't put God in the middle. He speaks of much he achieved and the many pleasures he enjoyed along the way. But ultimately, it left him empty. Without God he called his life *'meaningless, a chasing after the wind'*.

Living on purpose for God is the only way to find the thing we were made for.

**Question:** Would my friends and church family recognise the things that are driving me at the moment?

**Think about:** Without God in my life I'm chasing the wind

**Pray:** Father God, please help me see that living without you is like chasing the wind. Please help me to live on purpose for you today. Amen.

Made To Last Forever

4

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-11**

**3** There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:  
<sup>2</sup> a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
<sup>3</sup> a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
<sup>4</sup> a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
<sup>5</sup> a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,  
<sup>6</sup> a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
<sup>7</sup> a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
<sup>8</sup> a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.  
<sup>9</sup> What does the worker gain from his toil? <sup>10</sup> I have seen the burden God has laid on men. <sup>11</sup> He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

**There's more than here and now**

If I focus all my efforts on living for the moment I miss out on a really important truth: there's more to life than the here and now. On earth there's a time for everything - but we were not made for a certain period of time, but eternity.

Solomon explains when he says *'God has set eternity in the hearts of men.'* Our lives here on earth are but a moment in the for-ever that God has planned.

**Question:** How does the hope of eternity change how I view the struggles and frustrations of the here and now?

**Think about:** There's more to life than the here and now.

**Pray:** that you'd live in the light of eternity



Living With Purpose

40

**Acts 13:32-37**

<sup>32</sup> "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers <sup>33</sup> he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:  
" 'You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.'  
<sup>34</sup> The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words:  
" 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.'  
<sup>35</sup> So it is stated elsewhere:  
" 'You will not let your Holy One see decay.'  
<sup>36</sup> "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. <sup>37</sup> But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

**Living with purpose is the only way to really live**

Over these six weeks we have asked three key questions: "why am I alive?", "does my life matter?" and "what is my purpose?" By now we should see that God gives clear answers to all three.

Hundreds of years before Jesus, God used the life of King David to lead and shape his own generation. Comparing David's death and burial with Jesus' mighty resurrection, Paul was still able to say, *'David had served God's purpose.'* Oh that on the last day, Jesus could confidently say that of each of us!

**Question:** What does it mean for you, now, to serve God's purpose in your own generation? Are you willing to do that?

**Think about:** Living with purpose is the only way to really live

**Pray:** Dear Lord, thank you that you made me for a purpose. Help me really live as I serve that purpose for you. Amen.

The Envy Trap

41

**Proverbs 14:26-30**

<sup>26</sup> He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress,  
and for his children it will be a refuge.  
<sup>27</sup> The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,  
turning a man from the snares of death.  
<sup>28</sup> A large population is a king's glory,  
but without subjects a prince is ruined.  
<sup>29</sup> A patient man has great understanding,  
but a quick-tempered man displays folly.  
<sup>30</sup> A heart at peace gives life to the body,  
but envy rots the bones.

**Envy will wreck your purpose**

Whilst God created all of us for the same five purposes, the way we fulfil those purposes is completely unique to us. None of us is a clone or a carbon copy.

It's great to take an interest in the lives of others and as social beings that's how we're wired up. But interest can turn from envy when we begin to wish we were in that person's shoes or lived that person's life or had their stuff, family or ministry.

King Solomon in Proverbs tells us *'a heart at peace gives life to the body but envy rots the bones.'* As created beings, it's arrogant of us to think that God made a mistake when he made us how we are! It's a very destructive attitude and if we allow it to fester and grow will wreck the purpose for which God made us.

**Question:** In what areas of my life to I most often compare myself with others? Do I ever notice the signs of envy creeping in?

**Think about:** I cannot fulfil God's purpose for me if I'm envying others

**Pray:** Father God, I know how damaging envy can be so please help me to fight it. Thank you for making me as I am. Amen.





### Psalm 67:1-4

<sup>1</sup> May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face shine upon us,

*Selah*

<sup>2</sup> that your ways may be known on earth,  
your salvation among all nations.

<sup>3</sup> May the peoples praise you, O God;  
may all the peoples praise you.

<sup>4</sup> May the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you rule the peoples justly  
and guide the nations of the earth.

*Selah*

### The Great Commission is your commission

It's so easy for us to think too small when  
it comes to God and his mission. God is  
the God of all the nations. Remember,  
everyone everywhere was made by  
Jesus and for Jesus!

The writer of Psalm 67 wants God's name  
to be known and honoured everywhere -  
not just in Jerusalem, but over all the  
earth. His desire is that the whole earth  
may know *'your salvation among all  
nations'* [v2]. If all people everywhere  
need to hear about Jesus, someone  
needs to tell them! The challenge is still to  
'go', but with all the whole view. How  
could I serve God in mission in this  
country or abroad? What about church  
planting or missionary work? How about  
supporting others to go in Jesus name?

**Question:** Where do I fit in God's plans to  
bring the saving news to the nations? Do  
I need to think outside of my current  
plans and immediate circumstances?

**Think about:** The Great Commission is  
my commission.

**Pray:** Father God, please give me the  
heart and the desire to go wherever you  
want to send me. Amen.

### Ephesians 5:15-18

<sup>15</sup> Be very careful, then, how you live—  
not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most  
of every opportunity, because the days are  
evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but  
understand what the Lord's will is. <sup>18</sup> Do not  
get drunk on wine, which leads to  
debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

### Blessed are the balanced; they shall outlast everyone

Following Jesus isn't a one-dimensional  
activity. Having considered five different  
purposes for our lives (worship,  
fellowship, discipleship, ministry and  
mission) we need to keep them  
balanced, paying attention to all of them,  
not just one or two.

Beginning with the command to love  
God with all our heart and others as  
ourselves; then add to that the call to go  
and make disciples - we need to make  
sure that we're attending to both of these  
central activities. In Ephesians we're  
encouraged to live *'carefully'* [v15], with  
all God's wisdom, *'making the most of  
every opportunity'* [v16].

That will mean living a distinctive life,  
filled with God's Holy Spirit, walking  
closely in our relationship to Jesus.

**Question:** Of the five purposes covered  
in this material, which do I find most  
natural and which do I need to work on  
in order to live that balanced life?

**Think about:** Blessed are the balanced

**Pray:** Loving Father, thank you that you  
have good purposes for my life. I pray  
you would help me keep things in  
balance to live that careful, distinctive and  
wise life that you made me for. Amen.



### Luke 16:10-13

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said, "Whoever can be trusted  
with very little can also be trusted with  
much, and whoever is dishonest with very  
little will also be dishonest with much. <sup>11</sup> So  
if you have not been trustworthy in handling  
worldly wealth, who will trust you with true  
riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been  
trustworthy with someone else's property,  
who will give you property of your own?"

<sup>13</sup> "No servant can serve two masters.  
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 both God and  
Money."

### Life is a test and a trust

How we see our life will determine how  
we live our life. For example, if we think  
life is all about pleasure and happiness,  
we'll live in a way which focusses on  
getting more and more of those things.

This part of Luke is the end of a parable  
that Jesus taught his disciples. He speaks  
here of life as a test and a trust: what will  
we do with the life that God has given  
us? The person that's faithful in the small  
things will also be trusted with much; the  
more God has given you, the more  
responsible he expects you to be.

**Question:** What are the greatest gifts that  
God has given me? Am I using them well  
for his purposes?

**Think about:** My life is a test and a trust

**Pray:** Loving Father, thank you for the life  
that you have given me and the many  
good gifts that I enjoy. Help me to live as  
a good and faithful steward. Amen.

### Psalm 39:3-5

<sup>3</sup> My heart grew hot within me,  
and as I meditated, the fire burned;  
then I spoke with my tongue:

<sup>4</sup> "Show me, O LORD, my life's end  
and the number of my days;  
let me know how fleeting is my life.

<sup>5</sup> You have made my days a mere  
handbreadth;  
the span of my years is as nothing before  
you.  
Each man's life is but a breath.

### Life is a temporary assignment

Some people seem to think that they're  
going to live forever. But compared to  
eternity, life is extremely brief. This world  
is only a temporary residence: we'll not  
be here long so we shouldn't get too  
attached. The Bible speaks of God's  
people as *aliens and strangers*, just  
passing through.

Here in Psalm 39 these sobering truths  
are expressed in song: *'let me know how  
fleeting is my life'* and *'each man's life is  
but a breath.'* The good news is that God  
has prepared something so much better  
for those who love him!

**Question:** In what ways do I hold tightly  
to the things of this world, given that in  
Jesus I belong to eternity?

**Think about:** This world is not my home

**Pray:** Father God, please help me to hold  
loosely to the things of this world and not  
get too attached to my temporary home.  
Help me to know the hope I can have in  
Jesus, the eternity you have prepared for  
all those that love you. Amen.



■ The Reason For Everything

7

**Romans 11:33-36**

<sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!

<sup>34</sup> “Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counsellor?”

<sup>35</sup> “Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?”

<sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him  
are all things.

To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

**It's All For Him**

The ultimate purpose of all of creation is that God might get the glory. His glory is on display in nature, in his people, and most especially in the life and death of his Son the Lord Jesus. In the book of Hebrews we read that, ‘*the Son is the radiance of God's glory*.’ Here in Romans we see that ‘*from him and through him and to him are all things*.’ It's not about us, it's all about Him! To God be the glory!

As we take our place in God's plans and purposes, we begin to see that living for God's glory is the greatest thing we can achieve with our earthly lives. So the question is: who will we live for, ourselves or our God?

**Question:** What are the areas of my life that the glory of God is [i] most evident and [ii] least evident?

**Think about:** It's all for Him

**Pray:** Father God, please help me see the ultimate purpose of the life you've given me and then live every day in a way which gives you the glory. Amen.

■ Thinking Through This Week

?

**What are the key things I've learned and been thinking about through this week?**



■ Made For A Mission

36

**Matthew 28:16-20**

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

**I was made for a mission**

God is always at work in the world and he wants you to join him. This is your mission, and the fifth purpose for your life. We share this responsibility with all other Christians but we each have a role to play, specific to us in our circumstance. Having become a follower, or disciple of Jesus, we're to go and make more disciples. It's the process of telling others about our faith in Jesus and inviting them to follow Him too.

The wonderful blessing in all of this: we're not on our own. Remember, says Jesus, ‘I am with you always’ (v20). When we go in His name, he's right there with us!

**Question:** What do I fear most about taking part in God's mission? Have I thought about where I should go and who I should go to?

**Think about:** I was made for a mission

**Pray:** Loving Father, thank you that you are always working, and thank you that you invite me to help you in this vital work of mission. Help me to know where to go and who to go to with the good news. Amen.

■ Sharing Your Story Of Faith

37

**2 Peter 3:13-17**

<sup>13</sup> Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup> It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

**God has given you a story of faith to tell**

Every Christian believer has a story to tell and a message to pass on. As we're called into God's kingdom through repentance and faith, so Peter says we need to be ready to explain to others what Jesus has done in our lives.

Peter gives two steps here: first, we're to set Christ apart as Lord of our lives, living with him as our king; second, we're to make sure we're ready to talk to others about Jesus, in order that we may explain, in simple terms, why the death and resurrection of Jesus gives us the hope and faith that we live by.

**Question:** As I think about my own story of faith, have I got to a place where I'm ready to share it? Can I explain what I believe about Jesus in simple terms?

**Think about:** God has given me a story to tell and a message to share

**Pray:** Father God, sharing my faith story sounds a bit of a scary thing to do. Give me confidence to talk about Jesus and the faith I have in Him. Amen.



God's Power In Your Weakness 35

2 Corinthians 12:5-9

<sup>5</sup> I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup> Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no-one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.

<sup>7</sup> To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

God loves to use weak people

The world considers human weakness in a negative way, but God wants to use our weakness for good.

The apostle Paul knew his own weakness, probably some form of physical infirmity, that he calls '*a thorn in the flesh*' [v7]. This wasn't something he asked for, but he can see that his weakness lets God have the glory. He boasts in his weakness so that *Christ's* power may be on display.

**Question:** What do I think about my own weaknesses? Do I try to hide them? How can God use them to bring glory?

**Think about:** God works best when I admit my weaknesses

**Pray:** *Father God, I'm sorry when I've been ashamed of my weaknesses and tried to hide them from you. Please use me as I am that I may see your power at work in me. Amen.*

You are not an accident ?

What are the key things I've learned and been thinking about through this week?



Planned For God's Pleasure 8

Revelation 4:9-11

<sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

<sup>11</sup> "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

You were planned for God's pleasure

Bringing enjoyment to God, living for his pleasure, is the first purpose of your life. Offering that pleasure to God is what we call worship. It's a lot more than singing songs in church on Sundays, we worship God with all of our lives.

In our reading today we find ourselves in the throne-room of heaven, where every person is giving themselves in worship, laying down their crowns and praising '*Him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever*' - God himself.

The challenge then is to live every day for Jesus: doing everything as if I were doing it for him, dedicated to him, for his glory.

**Question:** Which of my daily tasks and duties do I need to think about as an act of worship? How will I live today for God's glory?

**Think about:** I was planned for God's pleasure

**Pray:** *Father God, help me live today not for myself, but for you, offering myself and my day as an act of worship. Amen.*

What Makes God Smile? 9

Ephesians 5:8-14

<sup>8</sup> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) <sup>10</sup> and find out what pleases the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

The smile of God is the goal of your life

If pleasing God is the goal of our lives then we need to discover how to do that. God smiles when we love him, trust him and obey him; he smiles when we praise and thank him; he smiles when our hearts desire is to serve him rather than ourselves. Here in Ephesians we're encouraged to live for God in response to what he's done for us, remembering that we were '*once in darkness, but now are light in the Lord*' that we might live as children of light as we '*find out what pleases the Lord*.' The old hymn-writer was right when they penned, '*Trust and obey / for there's no other way / to be happy in Jesus / than to trust and obey*.'

**Question:** Where in my life do I need to trust God more? Where am I feeling challenged to obey him, that he might be pleased?

**Think about:** God smiles when I trust Him

**Pray:** *Father God, I pray that 'trust and obey' would mark my life. Help me to live in a way which makes you smile. Amen.*





■ The Heart Of Worship

10

**Romans 12:1-2**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

**The heart of worship is surrender**

Surrender is a very unpopular word in our culture. It's the language of the loser and none of us want to wear that label.

The idea of surrendering is giving ourselves up to someone or something greater, which is very hard for us as independent and self-centred beings.

Having spent the first eleven chapters of Romans explaining the incredibly good news that Jesus died for sinners, here in chapter 12 Paul explains how we should respond to that [v1]: give your whole selves back to God. *'This is your spiritual act of worship,'* he says. If worship is bringing God pleasure, then giving ourselves back to God, surrendering our lives to him is the thing that will do us most good and bring him most joy.

**Question:** Where do I find this kind of sacrificial living easy and where are the greatest challenges for me?

**Think about:** The heart of worship is surrender

**Pray:** Father God, thank you so much for the death of Jesus, giving of him life that I might be forgiven. Help me to respond to that truth in surrender, giving my whole life back to you. Amen.

■ Becoming Friends With God

11

**John 15:12-17**

<sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.

**God wants to be your friend**

We relate to God in many ways: he's our creator, Lord, master and judge. But here in John, Jesus wants to call us his friends. The reason for that, says Jesus, is that when we accept the gospel our relationship with God changes, from casual acquaintance to trusted friend. 'I no longer call you servants,' says Jesus, 'but friends.' That status comes with the challenge of obedience [v14] but also the amazing privilege of knowing our Father's business [v15]. This is the kind of intimate friendship that God desires to have with each of his children.

**Question:** How can I make more of my relationship with God and the wonderful privilege of knowing my heavenly Father's business?

**Think about:** God wants to be my friend

**Pray:** Loving Father, it's amazing to think that Jesus died for sinners so that they could become your friends. Help me to know that friendship with Jesus, and live in obedience to your commands. Amen.



■ How Real Servants Act

33

**Matthew 10:40-42**

<sup>40</sup> "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. <sup>42</sup> And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

**We serve God by serving others**

The world measures success by how much progress we make, how much money we earn, and how far our reputation spreads. Jesus measures success in terms of servanthood. In order to follow him we don't need to achieve status or success, we need to learn how to serve. That work needs doing in my heart, I need a heart for service.

These words from Jesus in Matthew 10 challenge our self-centred ideas of service. True servants tend to avoid the limelight and don't trumpet their achievements. *'Offer a cup of cold water in my name,'* says Jesus, *'and you shall be rewarded'* [v42]. Jesus knows what we're up to so we don't need to make a fuss.

**Question:** Are there more or different acts of service that I could undertake for Jesus? What could I be doing?

**Think about:** I serve God by serving others

**Pray:** Father God, thank you for the privilege of serving you. Please help me to find different and new ways of serving others, that I may serve you more. Amen.

■ Thinking Like A Servant

34

**Philippians 2:3-7**

<sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

<sup>5</sup> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

**Service starts in your mind**

To be a faithful servant we need to change our thinking as well as our doing. We don't serve God because we're forced to, but because in our hearts we want to. Attitude counts for everything. Here in Philippians we're encouraged to consider the attitude of Christ Jesus, who set us a perfect example of humility and servanthood. Willing to step down from the glory of heaven, making himself nothing in order to serve the whole world through his dying on the cross.

Our attitude should be like that, says Paul. Sacrificial, humble, servant-hearted.

**Question:** As I compare my attitude in serving to that of Christ, what chimes in and where do I see a difference?

**Think about:** To be a servant I must think like a servant

**Pray:** Almighty God, thank you for the example of Jesus, wanting to serve rather than be served. Please mould my attitude in serving to be more and more like that. Amen.





Understanding Your Shape

31

1 Peter 4:7-11

<sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. <sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Only you can be you

Have you ever thought about how unique you are? After God made you, he broke the mould! Think about your finger prints or your DNA. Only you can be you! In his letter, Peter is urging his readers to 'use whatever gift he has to serve the Lord' [v10]. God didn't give us gifts to indulge ourselves or impress others. Serving others shouldn't be a chore or a bind, or a cause for grumbling. God gives us gifts in order that we might give them away in service to others, and we do that in the strength God provides.

**Question:** What are my God-given abilities, the things that make me a one-off? How can I use those to serve?

**Think about:** Nobody else can be me

**Pray:** Father God, it's amazing to think that I'm a one-off, created just as I am to fulfil a particular plan that you have for my life. Please show me more of the way that you need me to serve you. Amen.

Using What God Gave You

32

2 Timothy 2:14-16

<sup>14</sup> Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. <sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. <sup>16</sup> Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

God deserves your best

Unless we find the role that we were made for we can't serve God in the way that he's designed us. If I try and serve in a way that I'm not shaped for then it will be like trying to put a square peg in a round hole, very frustrating!

Here in the Bible Paul is encouraging his young apprentice Timothy to give of his best as he uses the teaching role that he has been given. 'Present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed' [v15]. If I'm tempted to use my gifts in a half-hearted way by being lazy or cutting corners I'll not be giving my best, or fulfilling the purpose for which God made me. Keep on searching until you find the role that's just right for you - and that might mean serving less in a ministry that isn't quite the right shape for me.

**Question:** How can I make the best use of the gifts God has given me?

**Think about:** God deserves my best

**Pray:** Loving Father, thank you for making me the way that I am and giving me gifts to serve you. Help me find where I can serve you, and give of my best that I may please you. Amen.



Developing Your Friendship

12

James 4:7-10

<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

You are as close to God as you choose to be

Without time and investment, relationships will go cold and ultimately die. We only get out of them what we're prepared to put in: time, energy and ongoing commitment.

The surprising discovery from the book of James is that as we come closer to God in our relationship with him, so he does the same, coming closer to us. God doesn't expect us to make all the running in the relationship. Rather, he mirrors our own closeness and commitment. 'Come near to God and he will come near to you.' [v8] What an encouragement - that each and every time we take a step towards God, so our relationship with him will deepen and grow.

**Question:** What practical choices will I make today in order to take another step towards God?

**Think about:** I'm as close to God as I choose to be

**Pray:** Father God, thank you for the privilege of a relationship with you. Help me invest the time, energy and commitment that our relationship my grow stronger and deeper. Amen.

Worship That Pleases God

13

Mark 12:28-31

<sup>28</sup> One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

<sup>29</sup> "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup> The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

God wants all of you

Relationships are never satisfactory if we go about them in a half-hearted way. In a marriage service the bride and groom promise, 'all that I am I give to you.'

The same is true in our relationship with God: the expectation from Jesus is very clear and very challenging: it requires all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength. There's no place here for half-hearted commitment or lukewarm obedience. God isn't moved by the dregs of my devotions or the leftovers of my life. His desire is to have all of me, every bit. The question is, will I give it?

**Question:** Which areas of my heart, soul, mind and strength are off the table when it comes to loving God? What do I need to do to change that?

**Think about:** God wants all of me

**Pray:** Dear Father God, this kind of loving obedience seems such a challenge - you want all of me! Forgive my half-hearted commitment and change me, that I may learn to love you with all of me. Amen.



When God Seems Distant

14

Psalm 77:7-12

- <sup>7</sup> “Will the Lord reject for ever?  
Will he never show his favour again?  
<sup>8</sup> Has his unfailing love vanished for ever?  
Has his promise failed for all time?  
<sup>9</sup> Has God forgotten to be merciful?  
Has he in anger withheld his  
compassion?”  
<sup>10</sup> Then I thought, “To this I will appeal:  
the years of the right hand of the Most  
High.”  
<sup>11</sup> I will remember the deeds of the LORD;  
yes, I will remember your miracles of  
long ago.  
<sup>12</sup> I will meditate on all your works  
and consider all your mighty deeds.

God is real, no matter how you feel

It's no mistake that God made us as emotional beings: able to *feel* the love of another, as well as to *know* that love. But what should we do in the times when God feels distant? When we don't feel it? Here in Psalm 77 we find this played out: in verses 7-9 the writer is questioning God's love and mercy, simply because he doesn't feel it. His prescription to himself: don't worry about the feelings, look at the facts. Remember what God has done. Bring to mind his mighty deeds. For us, that means the historical facts of Jesus and his death on the cross. These are still true, no matter how I feel about them.

**Question:** What strategies will I use in the times when my Christian life is dry and God seems distant?

**Think about:** God is real, no matter how I feel

**Pray:** Father God, help me to know you both in the good times, and when my walk with you is difficult or dry. Amen.

Thinking Through This Week

?

What are the key things I've learned and been thinking about through this week?



Accepting Your Assignment

29

Ephesians 2

<sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no-one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

You were put on earth to make a contribution

Almost every self-help book ever written is designed to help us 'get' more out of life, whilst the Bible is clear: God has work for us to do here, he made us to give, not just to get. This is often called ministry or service, and it's our fourth purpose.

This part of Ephesians is incredible: on the one hand reminding us what we were saved from [God's wrath, v3] but also what we were saved for [the good work which God prepared for us, v10]

**Question:** What might be holding me back from accepting a call to serve God?

**Think about:** Service is not optional

**Pray:** Father God, thank you for the gift of Jesus that saved me. Please help me to figure out how you'd like me to serve. Amen.

Shaped For Serving God

30

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

<sup>7</sup> Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. <sup>8</sup> To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

You were shaped for serving God

When we get stuck with a difficult task we invariably call in the services of an expert. Not many of us would try to fix the engine in our car or to a spot of d.i.y. dentistry! God created each of us with a unique set of gifts and skills, shaped for certain roles amongst his people.

We see that played out in 1 Corinthians in the way that God distributes his gifts: for some, the primary gift is wisdom, others get knowledge, others faith [v8,9]. All the gifts have God's Holy Spirit as their source; All are give for the common good. A key task here is figuring out my gift, and then using it to serve others.

**Question:** Have I managed to work out what my primary gifts might be? Am I using them to serve God and others?

**Think about:** I was shaped for serving God

**Pray:** Loving Father, thank you for shaping me for service. Help me work out what my gifts might be and show me how I may use them to serve. Amen.



### Philippians 1:3-8

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. <sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

#### There are no shortcuts to maturity

Growing up as a Christian is a long and slow process. Like toddlers developing into adults, it takes a lot of time and can't be rushed. God expects us to keep on growing more like Jesus. But for most of us, that growing is almost imperceptible from one day until the next.

Paul in Philippians is writing to encourage the Christians there, and he begins with a promise (v6): that God, who has begun a good work of salvation in their lives, will carry that on for eternity. As they say on Mastermind, 'I've started so I'll finish!'

**Question:** Where can I see areas of growth in my Christian life? Where do I need to be more patient?

**Think about:** There are no shortcuts to maturity

**Pray:** Loving Father, thank you for your desire to finish the work of salvation that you've begun in me. Please help me to be patient whilst you finish your work in my life. Amen.

What are the key things I've learned and been thinking about through this week?



### Ephesians 1:1-6

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

#### You were formed for God's family

God wants a family, and he wants all of us to be a part of it. This is his second purpose for your life. Right from the beginning of the Bible story, God is building a family for himself, people who will relate to him as Father and honour him with their lives.

The book of Ephesians opens with this incredible truth: that God chose his sons and daughters before the creation of the world (v4) in order to adopt them into his own family. He brings his children safely home through the death of his Son Jesus, that's a wonderful privilege and something to shout about! Every time someone come in to God's family it's a cause for much joy and celebration.

**Question:** What do I find are the greatest challenges of belonging to God's family? And what are the greatest joys?

**Think about:** I was formed for God's family

**Pray:** Father God, thank you that through Jesus I can belong to your family. Thank you that you welcome me home through adoption. Help me treasure my brothers and sisters like you do. Amen.

### Galatians 5:13-15

<sup>13</sup> You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. <sup>14</sup> The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." <sup>15</sup> If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

#### Life is all about love

Learning to love others is not an easy task. It runs counter to our culture and counter to our self-centred nature. It's much easier to love myself than it is to love other people.

In his letter to the Galatian church, Paul says, '*do not use your freedom to indulge...rather, serve one another in love.*' The freedom of the gospel is a wonderful thing, but we need to use that freedom to love others before ourselves. When we love, we're learning to do what God does, because God is love. This is particularly true within the family of God's people. God puts us together with our Christian brothers and sisters as a training ground, so we can learn what it means to love. Where there is no love, there is no family! So remember, what matters most is love.

**Question:** How am I doing in loving other members of my church family through my time and commitment?

**Think about:** Life is all about love

**Pray:** Dear Father, thank you that you are a God of love, that you made me for relationships and bring me into your family. Help me learn what it is to love others as I love myself. Amen.





■ A Place To Belong

17

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

<sup>19</sup> Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

**You are called to belong, not just to believe**

The 'Lone Ranger' may have made a good plot for a movie but it's a useless way to go on as a Christian. The Bible knows nothing of go-it-alone believers. Our following Jesus is always personal but it's not private. We're not just called to believe, but to belong.

This part of Ephesians underlines that point - as believers in Jesus we're members of God's household [v19], being built together as God's dwelling place. Having come to faith in Jesus, we're invited to take our place in God's house, where God lives by his holy spirit.

**Question:** Have I found a place to belong in the dwelling-place of God's people? What's my next step in belonging?

**Think about:** I'm called to belong, not just to believe

**Pray:** Father God, it's a wonderful privilege to be part of your family. Help me know what it is to belong, to take my place, being built into your spiritual house. Amen.

■ Experiencing Life Together

18

**Colossians 3:12-17**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

**Life is meant to be shared**

If we had the choice, most of us would prefer to share a meal with a loved-one than eat all on our own. In the same way, God puts us together in a church family with others so we can share not just meals, but our whole lives together.

This part of Colossians paints a picture of what that looks like: authentic fellowship marked by attributes like compassion, kindness, and patience [v12]. We're to learn how to 'forgive as the Lord forgave you' [v13]. Sharing our lives together in God's family should be marked out by forgiveness and peace.

**Question:** What practical steps could I take to connect more deeply with another believer? Am I learning how to forgive?

**Think about:** I need others in my life

**Pray:** Loving Father, thank you for choosing me to belong to your family. Give me the confidence to share my life deeply with others, all the joys and all the struggles, in truly authentic Christian community. Amen.



■ Growing Through Temptation

26

**James 1:12-15**

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

<sup>13</sup> When tempted, no-one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

**Every temptation is an opportunity to do good**

When God calls us into his family he wants us to learn to depend on him. That includes in the battles that we're fighting and the temptations that we face.

The promise here in James is the reward of a 'crown of life' for those who, with God's help, are able to resist their temptations. We don't resist those things in our own strength but with God's help - God doesn't send the temptations but he does allow them, enabling us to make right choices when temptation comes our way. Pray for strength to resist!

**Question:** What aspect of my character does God want to work on by standing firm against my greatest temptation?

**Think about:** Every temptation is an opportunity to do good

**Pray:** Almighty God, Thank you that you are sovereign in all things, that you even allow temptation for your own purposes. Help me make good choices when temptation comes my way. Amen.

■ Defeating Temptation

27

**1 Corinthians 10:9-13**

<sup>9</sup> We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. <sup>10</sup> And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

<sup>11</sup> These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! <sup>13</sup> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

**There is always a way out**

The choice to resist temptation or give in to it is won and lost in our minds. If we can grab the thought and take it captive then we stand ready to defeat that particular temptation.

The encouragement from 1 Corinthians 10 is that God knows our 'temptation limit' and won't let us be tempted beyond what we can bear [13]. Part of our fight against sin will involve dealing practically with our temptations: whether deleting unhelpful apps from our phone or removing ourselves from a tempting situation. God wants to help us, but in this discipline, we do need to help ourselves.

**Question:** Are there steps I need to take in order to beat sin and stay away from a recurring temptation.

**Think about:** There is always a way out

**Pray:** Father God, thank you that you have promised to limit the way I'm tempted. Please help me to fight my sin and defeat its temptation. Amen.





Transformed By Truth

24

John 8:28-32

<sup>28</sup> So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.” <sup>29</sup> The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” <sup>30</sup> Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.

<sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

The truth transforms us

Developing a Christlike character doesn't happen by accident. If I wanted to become a great footballer I'd probably do two things: first, I'd go and watch the best footballers I knew; second, I'd practice hard to try and emulate them. The same is true of our following Jesus. First, we look to his life and teaching; then we set out in obedience to follow. The wonderful blessing of following Jesus and trusting him is that's the way to true freedom. *'If you hold to my teaching... you will know the truth and the truth will set you free'* [32] That's transformational!

**Question:** How are we doing when it comes to holding to the teaching of Jesus? Are there parts of his teaching that we know we're not holding on to?

**Think about:** The truth will transform me

**Pray:** Father God, thank you that your word the Bible is truth. Help me hold on to that true word, knowing that it will change me to be more like Jesus. Amen.

Transformed By Trouble

25

Romans 8:22-25 & 28

<sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

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<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

God has a purpose in every problem

Many of us know all about the struggles of life, whether illness or anxiety, family or finances. Those struggles are part of what it is to be human in a fallen world: part of the 'groaning' that we see in verse 22-23. But even more surprising: our sovereign God has a purpose in the problem - *all things, good and bad, God works for the good of those who love him* [v28]. There's a purpose in the pain. Can we see? Can we learn to accept that whatever the circumstance, God planned it so that we might grow more like Jesus?

**Question:** Looking back, which difficult season of my life has caused the greatest growth in my Christlike character?

**Think about:** There is a purpose in every problem

**Pray:** Loving Father, these are hard lessons to accept, because none of us enjoys suffering. Please help me see your purpose, even in the pain. Amen.



Cultivating Community

19

Acts 2:42-47

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Community requires my commitment

We'll only ever get out what we invest in our relationships and the Christian community is no exception. It I don't spend time with my church family I'll not know who's who or what's what. Genuine fellowship will take my time and my commitment.

In the book of Acts it's really encouraging to read of such close relationships amongst God's people. Eating together, sharing their possessions, spending quality time together... just like a real family! Costly choices that demonstrated their shared love and devotion.

**Question:** How can I help cultivate family and community within my small group or church family? Have I got more to give?

**Think about:** Community requires my commitment

**Pray:** Dear Lord, I realise that community can't be manufactured but requires time and commitment. Help me invest the time I need into the lives of others. Amen.

Restoring Broken Fellowship

20

2 Corinthians 5:16

<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no-one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Relationships are always worth restoring

In a family it's not always plain sailing. People disagree and fall out with each other. Sometimes we hurt others on purpose, other times it's not intentional. God has always been in the business of restoring people through Jesus. Here in 2 Corinthians we're reminded of that incredible truth, that our Father God made peace with us through the death of Jesus [v18]. That God-and-us restoration becomes a pattern for us and other people: as God reconciles us, so his desire is that we reconcile others.

**Question:** Am I at peace with everyone in my church family? Where do I need to practice the ministry of reconciliation?

**Think about:** Relationships are always worth restoring.

**Pray:** Father God, I'm sorry when I haven't lived in peace with my brothers and sisters. Give me the heart to practice your pattern of reconciliation. Amen.



Protecting Your Church

21

**Ephesians 4:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

**It's your job to protect the unity of your church family**

The good news of Jesus is a great leveller: as I decide to follow Jesus and you decide to follow Jesus then we become united in God's worldwide family of forgiven sinners. Being in that family brings with it both blessings and responsibilities.

The letter to the Ephesians reminds us how highly God values that unity: *'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit'* [v3]. Unity isn't an optional extra in Christian living, it's foundational to our church family life, and we need to work hard to protect and maintain it, by bearing with one another in love.

**Question:** In what areas of church life am I choosing the path of unity over division as I bear with others in love?

**Think about:** It's my responsibility to protect the unity in God's family

**Pray:** *Father God, thank you that you place such a high value on unity. Help me chose the path of unity as I bear with others in love. Amen.*

Thinking Through This Week

?

**What are the key things I've learned and been thinking about through this week?**



Created To Become Like Christ

22

**Romans 8:28-31**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

<sup>31</sup> What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

**You were created to become like Christ**

Right from the beginning, it's always been God's plan to make you like his Son, Jesus. This is the end-point to which we're headed and the third purpose of our lives. In God's work of creation in Genesis he says, *'let us make people in our own image and likeness'* [Gen 1:26].

The apostle Paul in Romans expresses that same sentiment, that those whom God had chosen for his family might be *'conformed to the likeness of his Son'* [v29]. Over time, in our lives and character, we're to become more and more like Jesus. Growing like that is not quick nor easy, but it's what God has planned for us.

**Question:** How am I developing Christlike character at the moment? What area does God want to work on next?

**Think about:** I was created to become like Christ

**Pray:** *Loving Father, thank you so much for the life and character of your Son Jesus. Please work in my life that more and more I may be conformed to his likeness. Amen.*

How We Grow

23

**Ephesians 4:11-16**

<sup>11</sup> It was Jesus who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

**God wants you to grow up**

It was never God's plan for us to get stuck in spiritual infancy. Having come to Jesus through the gospel his plan is that we mature and grow in that faith. Spiritual infants are very unstable, *'tossed about by every wind of teaching'* [v14].

The way to maturity in Jesus is speaking God's truth in love to one another [v15]. That's how we are to grow up into Him.

**Question:** Where in my life to I need to stop thinking and acting as a spiritual infant and take steps to grow in Jesus?

**Think about:** It's never too late to start growing

**Pray:** *Father God, please give me the heart and desire to grow from beyond spiritual infancy into a mature faith in the Lord Jesus. Amen.*