



Essential Doctrine

BOOK 2

Council Road Baptist Church

Essential Doctrine - Book 2

This book belongs to:

Date I started:

Date I finished:

A prayer for my time using this book:



“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”

Genesis 1:26a

“Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

1 Peter 2:10

In 2023, Council Road celebrated 40 years at the corner of 30th and Council. There have been lots of moments worthy of celebrating. The ground-breaking of the first building, the hiring of all of our pastors, Big Weekends, VBS, the opening of the Cube. All these moments are impactful in Council Road’s history. Even if the amazing events and moments were removed, you would still be able to remember Council Road. It would not change who we are, and what is essential to this body of believers.

Council Road is defined by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the most essential aspect of who we are as a gathered, committed group of Christians. It is the reason we call ourselves Christians. The Gospel makes us who we are. This year, we are committed to make the Gospel the central theme in our lives. We will also work through 24

essential doctrines, disciplines and virtues that flow from the truth of the Gospel. We know that the Gospel and these 24 essentials will maintain Council Road biblical fidelity long into the future and push back darkness in our neighborhoods and cities.

Throughout our study, we will cover four major topics. Book one will give light to the Gospel, and how it is the lens in which we read the Bible, see the world and see ourselves. We will see how the grand narrative of Scripture, and the heart of discipleship are rooted in Christ’s sacrificial life and death. Book two will cover Eight Essential Doctrines. Our goal is to be planted deep in the truth of God’s word so that when we see or hear something contrary to the truth, we can not only name it but also give a better, biblical answer. Book three will cover the Eight Essential Disciplines that we see in Scripture. After this book, we hope that the disciplines of God don’t seem like a burden to carry but rather a delight in which to indulge. Book four Covers the Eight Essential Virtues we hold fast to as a church. These virtues are the fruits of the Spirit. As we study, we will grow in our love for God and for one another at Council Road.

We are a people of God, created in the image of God, to reflect his glory to the world. We hope that you find these studies as deeply impactful as we did in preparing them. Thank you, members of Council Road, for your faithfulness in the past, present and future. Thank you for pushing your pastors and staff toward the Gospel every time we are together. We look forward to this journey alongside you!

— The staff at Council Road Baptist Church

How to Use This Book

One of the primary goals of these studies to help us all see the need for community. To use these books for all they are worth, find a group, get plugged in and walk through them together. We recommend considering these ideas below as you begin your study.

- Find some time to read each weekday. Whether it is morning, evening or over your lunch break, the effort will be worth it!
- Read with someone. This doesn't mean together out loud. Instead, have a person or group of people to communicate with regularly about this book.
- Read the passages first. While it might be tempting to read the devotional before the passage, we strongly advise starting each study with the intake of God's word before the words of very fallible pastors.
- Write anywhere and everywhere. These books are yours, and we want you to use them!



Week 1

God and His Word

DAY 1

Who is God?

Exodus 3

I AM.

It is nearly impossible to wrap up the nature of who God is in one chapter of the Bible because the Bible is about God. Every page points to the nature of God and his mercy and grace to his people. So my task for all of us is to be a student of the Bible, and in doing so, we will be a student of God. We will know what it looks like to live for him, have a relationship with him, know what pleases him, how he is pleased with us and so on.

For our purposes today, Exodus 3 gives great insight into the kind of God we serve. God is the creator of all things, and he is on a mission to redeem brokenness. He tells Moses that he is I AM. He is the source of everything. He needs no name like false gods because he is the only God. He is God, holy and perfect, and he comes to his people to graciously rescue us from sin.

Questions for Reflection

1.) Why is it important to read the whole Scripture to understand God's nature?

2.) What is "I AM"? Why would God call himself that name?

3.) How does God rescue and redeem in Scripture?

4.) Does God's nature change?

5.) Jesus called himself "I AM" seven times in the New Testament. What does that tell us about Jesus?

Consider what might hinder you from thinking about God as I AM. How can you rest in his sufficiency as the creator and sustainer of life? God is a God who rescues, redeems and saves. Spend a few moments and thank him for being who he is. I AM.

DAY 2

The Triune God

Matthew 3:13-17

Matthew 3 presents us with a glimpse into the triune nature of God. When we say triune, we mean the trinity. The trinity is the doctrine that God is one in three persons. Matthew 3 shows Christ on earth, the Holy Spirit descending upon him, and God saying he is pleased. All three distinct persons of the trinity are there at this moment. Although the trinity is not specifically said in Scripture, it is implied repeatedly.

The trinity can give us great assurance to God's faithfulness and his plan to redeem the world through the death of his Son who, because he is God, can rightly take on the sins of the world.

Questions for Reflection

1.) Where are some places we see God the Father in Scripture? What is his role?

2.) Where are some places we see Jesus, the Son, in Scripture? What is his role?

3.) Where are some places we see the Holy Spirit in Scripture? What is his role?

4.) Why is it important that all three are equal?

5.) How does it help enhance our understanding of God to appreciate the Trinity?

When we think about the trinity, it is important to remember that Jesus is God. Jesus (God) died for our sins, not a form of God, but God himself. We should also be reminded that the Holy Spirit dwells with believers. Not a form of God, but God himself dwells with us in our hearts every day. Be encouraged, friends. God is with us, and we can know this because of the doctrine of the trinity.

DAY 3

The God Who Speaks

Ezekiel 37

Ezekiel 37 is a powerful picture of how God uses his word to bring dead things back to life. God, through his words, not only caused the bones to rise and walk, but he also repaired and restored them and eventually breathed air in the lungs again! This should make us consider how man was created in Genesis 1, through the very breath of God.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and see the beautiful correlation between these dry bones having life, and how the grace of Christ gives us life. We are the dead bones, but through God's grace, we can have life. How do we know about this mercy and grace? Through God's revealed word to us.

Questions for Reflection

1.) What is the significance of God speaking to us?

2.) Why is it not enough that God is known through creation (Romans 1)?

3.) How does it communicate his love that God speaks to us?

4.) How does God speak to us today?

God's word is the clearest way that he reveals himself. Make time for the word, read it often, read in joy, read it in sorrow and feel the life-giving power of the breath of God. He can use his word to make our dry bones come to life. Consider reading the passage again and insert yourself into the position of the dry bones. Be reminded of how God has breathed life into you by his word.

DAY 4

The History and Reliability of the Old Testament

Matthew 12:38-42; 2 Timothy 3:16

There are often questions posed about the historical reliability of the Scriptures. This should not surprise us, for our faith is built on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. And all the historical records we have of true eyewitnesses to his life, teachings and miracles are given to us by people with personal encounters with Jesus and those that recorded their stories on their behalf. The Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible), likewise, is often brought into question as to whether or not it is reliable based on apparent contradictions within the text and because of some of the miracles recorded. The next couple of days we will consider why we can have confidence in the reliability of the Scriptures.

Our faith is unique in that it is a historical faith. Christianity is not built on one individual who has a single experience or revelation about who God is like the Mormon or Islamic faith. Rather, we have historical records of the people of God over the centuries. And we have archaeological evidence to support much of what the Bible records as historical. Not just from the land of Israel, but from Egyptian, Babylonian and other ancient Near Eastern cultures that testify to the existence of the Israelites and the accounts of the Scriptures.

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Questions for Reflection

- 1.) What is a story in the Old Testament that you find difficult to believe actually happened?
- 2.) Why does it matter that the Old Testament is reliable?
- 3.) When we encounter difficult teachings of the Old Testament, how should we wrestle with their historical reliability?
- 4.) Read Matthew 12:38-42. Does Jesus speak of Jonah as a historical account or as a children's story?

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The Apostle Paul, in his final letter to Timothy, concludes by acknowledging the primacy of Scripture in the life of the Christian by saying, "*All Scripture is inspired by God*"

and is profitable...” (2 Timothy 3:16). Setting aside the New Testament for now which was not written completely at this point, the Old Testament Scriptures are vital in the life of a follower of Christ. We should not only know the Scriptures, but we should also acknowledge they are like Jesus himself. Jesus being fully God and fully man had two natures, so the Bible itself was written by man and yet also written by God. The Holy Spirit guided the authors of the Old Testament to write the words that Paul affirmed are God-breathed.

Jesus himself affirmed for us the authority of the Old Testament in his ministry on Earth. He quoted at length from the Old Testament, originally written in Hebrew, referred to sometimes in Judaism as the Tanakh. This is short for Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings). This is the same content as our Old Testament but grouped differently. Jesus says, “*You have heard it said,*” or “*Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.*” If Jesus confirms some seemingly tall tales of the Old Testament, we can trust they are accurate, even if those tails belong to fish.

DAY 5

The History and Reliability of the New Testament

Matthew 12:38-42; 2 Timothy 3:16

How do we know we have the inspired word of God in the New Testament? The process of New Testament canonization came about in three Cs.

The New Testament was first composed. The authors of the New Testament wrote their books of the Bible for particular audiences. Though they were written for a specific person or group of people, the authors of the New Testament recognized they were writing with apostolic authority and they wrote intending that others would read and study their writings.

That is the second phase of New Testament writings. After being composed, the writings were circulated. Sometimes by the expressed command in the writings themselves, and other times simply because it was the source material from the apostles, and those that followed them and wrote on their behalf.

Finally, after being composed and circulated, the writings were confirmed. This happened decades, even centuries, after the original writings. This is not because there was uncertainty about their authority, but because other writings were beginning to appear. The church councils were needed to clarify that the writings the church used all

DAY 6

Growth Day

Bible Verse

*“Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law² of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.”*

Psalm 1:1-2

Family Devotional

Recite the Memory Verse as a family.

The Bible is God’s word, and when we are consistent in reading it, we understand more about God, which helps us love God more. God’s word helps guide us in the right direction and is important for us to remember in life.

Parents Ask Kids:

What are some verses of the Bible that you already have memorized?

Kids Ask Parents:

What are some verses of the Bible that you already have memorized and why?

Student Growth Questions

Confront Your Sin:

Jesus’ desire is for us to “*abide*” in him (John 15:4). To fully abide in Christ, we must confront the sin in our lives, confess it and turn from it (repent). Spend some time asking God and yourself, “Is there any unconfessed sin in my life?” Talk to your Heavenly Father and ask him for forgiveness.

Confront Your Disciplines:

Reflect on this past week. How have you practiced the disciplines of your faith? Ask God which of the following disciplines he would have you practice more intentionally over the next week: Worship, Bible Study, Community, Witnessing, Serving, Praying, Giving, Fasting.

Confront Your Doctrine:

Doctrine is a big word that simply means “what you believe.” In what ways has this week’s reading about the need to walk in the Spirit shaped your view of the Holy Spirit? How has this week’s reading informed you about yourself? How has this week’s reading shaped your understanding of sin?

Adult Growth Questions

Before you begin working through these questions, spend a few minutes praying together. We suggest that you pray using the PRAY acronym below.

Praise:

God doesn't wait for us to call on him, but he comes to us and speaks. What does it mean that God is a speaking God? How can we slow down and praise him for his word?

Repentance:

Obedience to God's word is difficult but rewarding. In what areas can you confess a lack of obedience? How can God's word also provide encouragement in your confession?

Ask:

How do you prepare yourself to hear the word of the Lord? Spend time with a group member and think through ideas to help create a posture of hearing the word.

Yield:

How can you yield to God's sovereignty? What emotions does that bring up in your heart? How can yielding build trust?

What have you been most challenged by this week? How can you respond in obedience to this conviction?

WEEK 1

Group Liturgy

Opening Scripture

“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:10-16

Prayer

Speak, Lord, as we come to your word together. Help our minds and souls be challenged to obedience that produce greater joy and affection for you. Give us an admiration for the beauty of your word and give us ears to hear the life-sustaining truth that comes from it.

Group Confession

Almighty God, we come before you to recognize our inadequacy. In the light of your holiness, we cannot stand. We confess before you that our sin is ever before us. We have sinned against you both knowingly and unknowingly even this week and are deserving of separation from your presence. We acknowledge that our sins are like scarlet stains, and we cannot cleanse those stains apart from the power of your Spirit. Fill us with your Spirit that we might walk in your ways and not our own. Lord, guide us along the narrow path that leads to life and keep us from the easy road of sin that leads to destruction.

Group Assurance

Be assured Church, that the gospel revealed in God's word is sufficient to save us in our sin. We can joyfully cling to the cross and rest in your atoning work on our behalf.

Teaching Passages

Ezekiel 37

Optional Group Questions

- How does Ezekiel 37 point us to the importance of God and his word?
- Does this passage sound similar to any other passages in scripture? If so, which ones?
- How does God's word transform us?

- Read Ephesians 2:1-10.
- How do these two passages seem similar?
- How can God's word breath life into you this week?
- Do you regularly make time for God's word? How can you do that this week?

Closing Prayer/Benediction

"To the church of God.... ..to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to us all as and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

1 Corinthians 1:2-3

Sermon Notes



Week 2

Creation and Redemption

DAY 1

God as Creator and Cultivator

Genesis 1; Psalm 139:13-14; Colossians 1:16-17

Our understanding of creation not only informs our view of the meaning of life, but also helps us to understand such perplexing issues as death, disease, poverty and sin. Despite these things, we see that life has design, purpose and meaning. I know of no other philosophy or worldview that offers such a complete, in-depth explanation to these overarching questions. Truly, there are only two choices when it comes to the meaning of life: Either you believe there is no creator, and life is an accidental collision of atoms, and therefore, meaningless, or you see ample evidence in nature of design pointing to a creator, and therefore, life has purpose.

Questions for Reflection

1.) How does the belief in a creator differ from the secular view that there is no God when it comes to crucial issues such as human rights, sanctity of life, etc.?

2.) Why is it significant to believe that life has purpose and meaning beyond ourselves?

3.) How does belief in a creator influence a person's self image?

“In the beginning, God...” That simple teaching in Genesis 1:1 has ultimate consequence in the way we live and understand life. *“God created man in his own image...male and female he created them...”* This, too, is a concept that has implications for our actions, and how we view our lives. Because we were created in God's image, every life has value and purpose.

DAY 2

Man and Woman Reflected in His Image

Ephesians 5

Within biblical marriage, we celebrate who God created us to be. Men and women are affirmed and encouraged to be all that God intended, celebrating their separate and important roles. Men and women are co-equals and co-regents within the sacred realm of biblical marriage.

Questions for Reflection

1.) Why is it important to understand the different “roles” in marriage and the family?

2.) Why do you believe the Bible compares marriage to the relationship between God and His church?

3.) What does it mean that men and women are co-equals and co-regents within the sacred realm of marriage?

The result of a healthy, loving marriage is that over time, husband and wife draw closer to God and closer to one another. This loving relationship is modeled for their children, and the home becomes a place of refuge, shalom and learning. Children see their father as a spiritual leader, a pastor, and servant leader to his family. They show their mother respect and love as a constant source of nurturing, spiritual knowledge and leadership.

DAY 3

The Problem of Sin

Romans 3:1-23

The Bible teaches that our sinful condition has affected every aspect of life—spiritually, physically, socially and emotionally. The human condition is a desperate one. As children of our father, Adam, and our mother, Eve, we are offspring of the curse. Our situation is even more desperate when we fail to believe God or deny his reality. In elevating humanity above God, we lose our identity and our only hope for salvation. The essence of “fallenness,” the sin of Adam and Even in the garden, is the belief that God is the enemy of human happiness, and that human beings can find happiness, joy and meaning in their own power. Our sinful nature separates us from God and places us in opposition to him. Because of our nature, we are utterly incapable of restoring our relationship with a holy, pure God. But God is a God of love and perfect justice. In his justice and purity, God knew our sin had a price that needed to be paid; yet in his great love and mercy, God paid that price through the atoning sacrifice of his one and only son, Jesus Christ.

This concept is in direct opposition to the popular teaching of secular humanism, which says there is no reality other than the material world, with human beings at the fringe. To the secular humanist, the concept of a creator is a construct of the human mind, and therefore, not to be taken seriously. Because we live in an essentially material universe, the humanist would say that Darwinian science is the only way to understand reality. This is a worldview

that offers no hope for the future and no real answer to the problem of evil and suffering.

Christianity teaches something different. Though we are marred by sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), yet in a relationship with Jesus Christ, we are redeemed, and our purpose is restored (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Questions for Reflection

- 1.) What does it mean that sin is the opposite of human happiness?
- 2.) How is our sin a rebellion against God?
- 3.) Why does a price need to be paid for our sin?

God created us to glorify him and to enjoy him for all of eternity. Scripture teaches that we have purpose, meaning and direction. Although we cannot explain suffering and evil in this life, we know that it will be answered fully in the next life. Life may be difficult and suffering inevitable, but we look to a glorious future, and we know that all things will work together for the good of those who find their purpose in God. And when we find that purpose, abundant life is the result in this life and his likeness in the life to come. Biblical teaching about human purpose lifts the vision of humanity.

DAY 4

Saved by Grace

Ephesians 2:8–9; Romans 8:1-4

Because of God’s grace, Christ died on the cross on our behalf, absorbed the wrath of God’s judgment and took the blow so that we could be reconciled to God. Not only does God’s grace restore us, but his grace also makes us aware that we need salvation in the first place. Salvation by God’s grace alone—grace plus nothing else—restores us to a relationship with God.

In Genesis 1–3, we learn that the fall of humanity wreaked havoc on the spiritual, physical, emotional and social components of God’s creation, but we also see God’s unfolding plan in human history through the prophecy of the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross.

He will wound your head, but you will wound his heel, God said to the enemy in Genesis 3. In this pivotal prophecy and the unfolding narrative of the Old Testament, we learn of God’s people’s failed attempt at goodness and to keep the covenant of the law. The spectacle is a profound reminder of the depth of our sinful nature and the futility of our attempts at righteousness

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Questions for Reflection

- 1.) How does God’s grace restore us to a relationship with God?

- 2.) Why do we need to be reconciled to God?

- 3.) What did humanity lose as a result of the fall in the garden in Genesis 3?

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God’s redemptive work is seen in every aspect of creation. The Bible teaches that salvation is because of the grace, mercy and patience of God, and not because of anything we do. Although we must realize our need for God, even the ability to reach that conclusion comes from God’s grace. We make the choice to accept God’s free gift of life in His Kingdom, but nothing of that choice could have been realized without God’s grace.

DAY 5

Justified by Faith

Romans 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21

What does it mean that we have been “justified by his grace”? What exactly is it that we have done that requires this justification? Or as a friend in college once asked me, “I know I am a sinner, but come on, did it really require God to kill his son over it?” Such a question portrays two very important realities: The perfect justice and holiness of an almighty God, and the depth of our sin, and the damage it has caused.

The Bible teaches that all on this side of eternity see through a dark glass (1 Corinthians 13). In other words, we have a limited and blurred perspective of reality. There is the reality that we perceive, and then there is the reality that only God knows and sees. We all know intuitively that our sense of reality is very limited because we can understand the limitations of time and space. Even when we see things very well, we don’t see them perfectly. It only stands to reason that we do not know all there is to know, and we cannot possibly begin to perceive all that is real. But Scripture teaches that God exists in perfect awareness of all that is real and with a sense of perfect justice. To understand the meaning of God’s justice is to understand his perfection. Because of God’s perfect justice, he cannot just “let sin go.”

Of course, you and I do this all the time. We forgive people when they wrong us, so it seems unreasonable that God could not do the same. Why does God hold people

accountable for their sins? Why can’t He just wave his hand and say, “All is forgiven. Jesus doesn’t have to die. Everyone gets a pass!” But that would not be the response of a God of perfect justice. God’s perfect justice requires a cost for sin: When you do the crime, you do the time. In perfect justice, every transgression will certainly require a corresponding perfect payment.

The truth is none of us would want to live in a universe without a sense of perfect justice and morality. If there was no standard for morality, we would not have an intuitive sense of injustice. When a person says they do not believe in a holy and righteous God, I always ask, “So where do you get your understanding of justice and truth?” They may answer that people just come to this understanding through logic and intuition. My question then is, “By what standard do we judge that this opinion is actually logical, and by what intuition do we come to that conclusion?” There can be no biological or evolutionary explanation for a sense of morality.

Because God has established his justice on the universe, we have an innate sense of its importance. But God also is a God of love, so by his grace, Jesus died on the cross on our behalf to satisfy his perfect sense of justice. When we receive him by faith and bring the Gospel into the center of our hearts, we are saved.

Questions for Reflection

1.) Why is it important to live in a world of justice?

2.) How does God satisfy his sense of justice and his sense of love for us?

3.) How is God's grace an answer to his justice and love?

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If we exist in a universe driven purely by the force of "survival of the fittest," then it certainly cannot be true that we evolved into an understanding of morality and truth. The person who says they do not believe in a righteous and holy God certainly does not think that rape and racial genocide are just "inconvenient." Most people have a very angry and emotional response to this kind of injustice. But why? The only answer is there is a God in the universe separate from us who created us with an intuitive sense of His justice and righteousness.

Such a question portrays two very important realities: The perfect justice and holiness of an almighty God, and the depth of our sin, and the damage it has caused.

DAY 6

Growth Day

Bible Verse

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."
2 Corinthians 5:21

Family Devotional

Recite the Memory Verse as a family.

Because of God's grace, Christ died on the cross on our behalf. Jesus was the only perfect person and never did anything wrong. Yet, he died for our sins, so that we can be with God.

Parents Ask Kids:

What does salvation mean to you?

Kids Ask Parents:

How often do you remind yourself of what Christ did on the cross for our family?

Student Growth Questions

Confront Your Sin:

Jesus' desire is for us to “*abide*” in him (John 15:4). To fully abide in Christ, we must confront the sin in our lives, confess it and turn from it (repent). Spend some time asking God and yourself, “Is there any unconfessed sin in my life?” Talk to your Heavenly Father and ask him for forgiveness.

Confront Your Disciplines:

Reflect on this past week. How have you practiced the disciplines of your faith? Ask God which of the following disciplines he would have you practice more intentionally over the next week: Worship, Bible Study, Community, Witnessing, Serving, Praying, Giving, Fasting.

Confront Your Doctrine:

Doctrine is a big word that simply means “what you believe.” In what ways has this week’s reading about creation informed you about God? How has it informed you about yourself? What is grace?

Adult Growth Questions

Before you begin working through these questions, spend a few minutes praying together. We suggest that you pray using the PRAY acronym below.

Praise:

What moment did your sin become real and weighty to you? How did God’s grace treat the weight of sin?

Repentance:

What sins still cling close? With humility and vulnerability, share them with a group member. Don’t forget we can share because Christ has covered our sin and shame by his grace.

Ask:

How do you reflect the image of God to the world? What are tangible areas or people of focus with whom you can share God’s image?

Yield:

What have you been most challenged by this week? How can you respond in obedience to this conviction?

Group Liturgy

Opening Scripture

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’

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

And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’ And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”

Genesis 1:26-31

Prayer

Thank you for making us in your image and in your likeness. Help us see that our role in redemption is to spread your image to the world. Lead us to people that need the Gospel and give us the courage to share how you created us and redeemed us through your Son.

Group Confession

Lord God, we confess before you that we have fallen short of your glory this week. In our thoughts, words and actions, we have rebelled against you and your good design for our lives. None of us are righteous, and even our good deeds are as filthy rags before you. You have placed eternity in our hearts, and yet we have chosen that which is worldly and ungodly this week. We do not deserve any of the gifts you so graciously give us, including the opportunity to be justified in Christ. Father God, we acknowledge our sinfulness before you and pray that you would help our unbelief. By your Spirit, give us more faith to trust in your Son, Jesus Christ, every day and to live in light of his amazing work.

Group Assurance

“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. And he said to me,

Sermon Notes

‘These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. And behold, I am coming soon....’

Revelation 22:3-7a

Teaching Passages

Genesis 1-2; Revelation 22

Optional Group Questions

- Why does the Bible start and end in a garden? What is God teaching us?
- Do you see any other correlations from these passages?
- How does creation reveal the glory of God? How can we use our image to reveal the same glory?
- When you read Revelation 22, what comes to mind? How does it fuel you to live today?
- What do these passages do to stir your affections for God? How can you live that out this week?

Closing Prayer/Benediction

“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”

2 Corinthians 13:11,14



Week 3

The Family of God and the Family at Home

DAY 1

What is the Church?

John 3:1-15; Colossians 3:16

Jesus created the church and said the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Jesus is also the head of the church. Jesus loves the Church, and if we love Jesus, we will love it as well.

To truly understand the meaning of the Church, we need to distinguish between the local church we attend every week, and the universal Church that exists in eternity. Scholars refer to this as the difference between the visible and the invisible church. The visible church is the one we see and understand from our perspective, whereas the invisible Church is the one that only God sees and understands from his perspective. For our purposes, we will look first at the visible church and then the invisible Church.

So what exactly is a local, visible church? Every follower of Christ should know what defines a local church. When we look at Scripture, we see three basic characteristics of the local church:

- A local church is a community of baptized believers who join in covenant together to meet each Lord's Day under the authority of the Bible and the leadership of elders (pastors) to worship and engage in Gospel-centered ministry. (John 3:1-8; 13:34-35; Acts 2:41; 14:23; Eph. 3:10; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 10:24-25)

- The regular gathering of the local church involves the preaching of the word, singing, praying, giving and the practice of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The dynamics of loving fellowship always involve accountability, encouragement, ministry and discipline. (1 Cor. 12:12-26; 1 Thess. 5:11; Matt. 18:15-17)

Questions for Reflection

- 1.) What is the difference between the local, visible church and the invisible, universal Church?
- 2.) Why do you believe Jesus established the Church?
- 3.) What are the most important qualities of the Church?

The local church embodies God's plan for reaching the world through evangelizing and serving its community and making disciples, raising up leaders and starting new churches. (Matt. 28:18-20)

DAY 2

What Does The Church Do?

(Trust in the Gospel, meet together, ordinances, mission)

Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 28; John 20:21

In his book, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, John Stott asks what has God sent the Church into the world to do? If we can answer that, he thought, we can choose proper priorities to focus the Church's time, resources and energy. Stott frames the debate with the two competing views of Christian mission: One camp says that evangelism and winning souls is all God is concerned about; the other says social justice is mission, even if it's not the Church doing it. All that matters is social renewal. But are these true reflections of God's own mission—the purpose for which He has sent His Son (and then His Church) into the world?

To answer these questions, Stott reflects on the Great Commission. Here, the emphasis Jesus gives to His followers is clearly on preaching, teaching and making disciples. But Stott makes a surprising turn. Although earlier in his life he would have seen *mission* solely in terms of evangelism, he now says the following:

The actual Commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, lest we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus.

Both evangelism and social action are a part of mission and cannot be separated. For Stott, the crucial form of the Great Commission is expressed not in the Gospel of

Matthew, but in the Gospel of John. *As the Father has sent me, even so I send you* (John 20:21). So we must ask, how was Jesus sent by the Father into the world? At the core, Jesus was sent into the world as a servant: *I am among you as one who serves* (Luke 22:27). Jesus humbled himself and took on the nature of a servant (Philippians 2:5-8), giving of himself for the sake of others.

Jesus came to seek and save what was lost and to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, but He also fed hungry mouths, washed dirty feet, comforted the sad and healed the sick. Jesus was both a witness and a servant; His mission was of both words and deeds. It is impossible in the ministry of Jesus to separate His words from His deeds. Proclaiming the Gospel and living it out are forever inseparable for those sent by the Father.

While Stott maintained the importance of making disciples in the Great Commission, he did not believe it was the only mission of the church.

Questions for Reflection

1.) What does Jesus mean when He says, “*As the Father has sent me, so I send you*”?

2.) Why is it important for the Church to focus both on evangelism and social action?

3.) How do evangelism and social action go together in the church's mission?

The Church must also take seriously the *Great Commandment* which is also found in the book of Matthew: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind,*” and “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:37-38). Stott concludes that if mission includes both evangelistic and social responsibility, service to others as a life's work is at the heart of the Christian mission:

“Jesus Christ calls all his disciples to ministry, that is, to service. He himself is the Servant par excellence, and he calls us to be servants too. This much is certain: if we are Christians we must spend our lives in the service of God and man.”

DAY 3

Why Does the Church Matter?

Ephesians 2:13-3:13

Christ established the Church as a biblical community to accomplish His work and to provide the dynamic spiritual growth every Christian needs. The hope of humanity is not found in education, business or government. The only hope is the forward movement of the community of Christ.

Notice Paul says that his intent was that “the manifold wisdom” of God be “made known” through the Church. Therefore, the Church's initiative is divine precisely because God established it through His Holy Spirit. No other institution or entity has been given the assignment or the empowerment to embody the manifold wisdom of God. The word manifold means “many sided” or “many levels.” The very nature and wisdom of God is lived and taught through the life and mission of the Church, a mission with eternal significance, impacting rulers and authorities in heavenly realms.

The Church is not perfect. Composed of sinful, fallen men and women, the church has often been plagued with embarrassing scandals and tragic controversies. But with all of its weaknesses, the Church is still God's plan by which the message of Christ is carried down through the ages into every nation and tongue. The mission movement throughout history has planted churches that have planted churches, and in the process, has spread Christianity worldwide.

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Questions for Reflection

- 1.) What makes the Church so important?
- 2.) How does God use the Church?
- 3.) Why does God want us to be committed to the work of the Church?

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For all of her faults, the Church remains the bride of Christ, who one day Christ will receive and sanctify at the wedding feast. In that image, we find the meaning and purpose of the Christian Gospel. Here in the Church, people find ministry and discipleship, spiritual gifts and accountability. Wounds are healed, marriages restored and direction found. The Church is a place of learning, equipping, training, inspiration and worship.

DAY 4

The Family: Marriage

Galatians 6:1-4

God has established two institutions on Earth: The first is the family, and the second is the Church. Within the Church, believers grow in the faith and are disciplined into spiritual maturity. In the family, marriage models the relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church. In this way, Christian marriage is a sacred covenant between one man and one woman, male and female, established before God for the purpose of raising a family and glorifying God. The husband and wife love and serve one another in spiritual communion and covenant. If God wills, they raise and nurture children, bringing them up in the faith and disciplining them into adulthood. The role of the church is to partner with parents in this process.

The family is the most basic human institution upon which every other institution depends. If the family unit breaks down, the rest of society breaks down as well. The most desperate and far-reaching issues in a culture are the result of broken families and homes that malfunction within the biblical model.

Consider the central issue of the marriage relationship. The biblical model for marriage, found in the Genesis account and in Ephesians 5, represents a comprehensive, far-reaching philosophy of marriage. In this relationship, the Bible explains, husband and wife model the church and serve and love one another in a way that reflects the specific roles God has created in us. God created marriage,

and therefore, His instructions are complete.

Let's look at three different philosophies of marriage through this biblical lens:

The Corrupted Top Down Philosophy of Marriage: In this perversion of the biblical text, the man “lords over” his wife and children in a kind of militaristic, top-down relationship. Remember that the curse in the Garden of Eden to the woman Eve was that her husband would “lord over her.” Many have mistakenly seen this as the biblical approach, but in truth, this philosophy is the result of sin and is destructive and overbearing.

The Fifty-Fifty Philosophy of Marriage: This philosophy is one of the most common approaches to modern marriage and is especially popular in Hollywood and high society. It is a view of marriage that mirrors a business partnership in which everything is shared fifty-fifty. But just as the business partnership is one of the least successful models, in the same way a high percentage of these marital arrangements lead to divorce. My dad used to say, “If you go into marriage with an exit clause, you will exercise that clause every time!”

The Biblical Philosophy for Marriage: The only correct and truly comprehensive approach to marriage is the biblical model. In this philosophy, the man and woman serve one another as they were uniquely created. The husband loves his wife in the way that Christ loves the church as prophet, priest and king—providing vision as a prophet, interceding as a priest and leading and taking initiative as the servant king. The woman loves her husband as the church loves and lifts up Christ. She affirms, strengthens and encourages her husband with respect and delight.

As the husband is the servant leader, the wife is the servant lover. But as the Bible says, “*They serve one another out of reverence for Christ.*” In this biblical approach, both husband and wife recognize that the meaning of marriage is not simply to make yourself happy, but to make one another holy, as the relationship results in the sanctifying work of God’s Spirit, with the outcome of deep, abiding respect, fulfillment and joy. As the church points to Christ, so marriage points to Christ.

Questions for Reflection

- 1.) How does marriage reflect the true meaning of the Church?
- 2.) How does seeing marriage in this way raise its meaning?
- 3.) How can an improper view of biblical marriage lead to a failed approach?

Marriage is not envisioned in Scripture as just being a metaphor for the Church, but is actually a true reflection of the Church, so that within the context of the family, the vision for the coming wedding feast in the book of Revelation is realized.

DAY 5

The Family: Singleness

1 Corinthians 7:1-3

One should not neglect the biblical principles regarding singleness when examining the Bible's teaching about the family. The Bible teaches some will have the gift of abstinence and should remain single. In fact, the Apostle Paul goes so far as to say that his preference would be that people remain single so they can concentrate their passions on Christ and his work:

“I want you to be free from anxieties. The un-married man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:32–35).

Although Paul admits that this direction is impractical for most people, he makes the obvious point that one should not treat singleness as an anomaly or something to be avoided, but as something that can be perfectly natural and even preferable at times. John Stott, one of the most effective pastor-theologians of the modern era and a lifelong single, made this observation:

In spite of rumors to the contrary, I have never taken a solemn vow or heroic decision to remain single! On the contrary, during my 20s and 30s, like most people, I was expecting to marry one day. In fact, during this period, I twice began to develop a relationship with a lady who I thought might be God's choice of a life-partner for me. But when the time came to make a decision, I can best explain it by saying that I lacked an assurance from God that he meant me to go forward. So I drew back. And when that had happened twice, I naturally began to believe that God meant me to remain single (from “John Stott on Singleness” in Christianity Today).

The clearest teaching for those who choose not to marry can be found in Jesus' own words in Matthew 19:11–13 when addressing the disciples' questions about singleness:

“Jesus replied, ‘Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it’” (Matthew 19:11–13).

In this passage, Jesus cites three reasons not to marry. First, a person may be “born a eunuch,” which means either a person has a birth defect or a homosexual orientation that would congenitally prevent him from marrying. Second, a person may have been “made a eunuch by others,” which refers to the ancient practice of forced mutilation but also can include other imposed situations that prevent marriage. Finally, someone may simply choose not to marry for spiritual reasons.

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Questions for Reflection

- 1.) Why is it important for the church to have a biblical view of singleness?

- 2.) How can singleness be redemptive?

- 3.) In what ways can the church do better in its approach to singleness?

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The important point is that Scripture points to both marriage and singleness as acceptable in God’s eyes. Both have been declared “good” by God’s word (see Genesis 2:18 and 1 Corinthians 7:1), and one choice should not be exalted over the other. The church should promote the wonders and joys of marriage and family, and at the same time proclaim the wholesome and spiritually valid reasons for remaining single.

DAY 6

Growth Day

Bible Verse

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

Colossians 3:16

Family Devotional

Recite the Memory Verse as a family.

We have a family at home and a family as part of the church. Both are necessary in helping us learn more about God and helping us to worship God. We need both.

Parents Ask Kids:

How does our family help you learn more about God and worship him?

Kids Ask Parents:

How has our family helped you learn more about God and worship Him?

Student Growth Questions

Confront Your Sin:

Jesus' desire is for us to “*abide*” in him (John 15:4). To fully abide in Christ, we must confront the sin in our lives, confess it and turn from it (repent). Spend some time asking God and yourself, “Is there any unconfessed sin in my life?” Talk to your Heavenly Father and ask him for forgiveness.

Confront Your Disciplines:

Reflect on this past week. How have you practiced the disciplines of your faith? Ask God which of the following disciplines he would have you practice more intentionally over the next week: Worship, Bible Study, Community, Witnessing, Serving, Praying, Giving, Fasting.

Confront Your Doctrine:

Doctrine is a big word that simply means “what you believe.” In what ways has this week’s reading about God’s institution of the family shaped the way you view your parents? What does this knowledge tell us about the character of God? Has this week’s reading about marriage changed your understanding on marriage? How so?

Adult Growth Questions

Before you begin working through these questions, spend a few minutes praying together. We suggest that you pray using the PRAY acronym below.

Praise:

How is the church a gift from God? What do you think it means for the church to be the bride of Christ? How does the gift of the church bring us to praise?

Repentance:

How do you think family at home and the family of God are similar? How can we lead and cultivate gospel community in both?

Ask:

Why would unity be so important in the church? In the family? Ask the Lord for gracious humility and a desire for his glory to be done in both.

Yield:

Being a member of a church requires mutual yielding. How do we see that played out in the Scriptures? How do we see it played out at Council Road?

What have you been most challenged by this week? How can you respond in obedience to this conviction?

Group Liturgy

Opening Scripture

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, that we all have a family in you. Your word shows us the need for the body of Christ, the family of God. Help us to be vulnerable with one another and to find our ultimate security and rest in you.

Group Confession

Father God, we come before you and recognize that we have wandered this week. In our relationship with you and in our relationship with others, we have acted dishonestly and squandered good gifts that you have placed in our

lives. In both blatant rebellion and in self-righteous behavior, we recognize how we have lived as prodigals even this week. Lord, help us to turn back to you. Let us not take advantage of your kindness that is meant to lead us to repentance. By your power, help us to return to your loving arms and to flee from our sin that so easily entangles.

Group Assurance

As we live together as separate families, but together in the family of God help us be assured of your grace by these words:

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Ephesians 3:14-19

Teaching Passages

Ephesians 5:21-33

Sermon Notes

Optional Group Questions

- How does this passages reflect marriage, but also every relationship in the church?
- What does it teach us about how a family is to live?
- What is submission in this passage? Is it bad? (See verse 21)
- How is a husband to lead his family?
- How does this encourage us to live under Christ's authority? Is he domineering?
- How can you give yourself up for someone else this week? Your family, friends, church?

Closing Prayer/Benediction

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

Ephesians 3:20-21



Week 4

The Kingdom of God and the Worship of the King

DAY 1

What Does Jesus Say is the Kingdom of God (Part 1)

Matthew 4:12-17; Mark 1:14-15

Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom of God. Referred to also by the more standard Jewish expression “the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus talked about this more than any other subject. As such, the kingdom of God is a primary teaching in the Gospels. When translated from the biblical languages, “kingdom” refers to the activity of a king reigning over a people, as opposed to just a specific location. Therefore, the kingdom of God refers to His sovereign rule over His people.

When Jesus talks about God’s kingdom, He does so as if it is an already/not yet kingdom, meaning it came with Jesus’ earthly life and reigns now in the lives of believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but it will fully come when Jesus returns and reigns on earth. Our study will focus on the kingdom (or rule) of God at the time of Jesus and now.

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Questions for Reflection

1.) Read Matthew 4:12-17 and Mark 1:14-15. What can you learn about Jesus in these passages containing His first recorded comments about the kingdom of God?

2.) What is the significance of the Old Testament passage Jesus quoted in Matthew?

3.) What did Jesus mean by “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”?

4.) What part does repentance play in the kingdom of God, and why would regular repentance be necessary for God’s ongoing rule in your life today?

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Jesus did indeed talk a lot about the kingdom. Clearly, He wanted people to understand and experience God’s kingdom while He walked on earth, after He returned to Heaven and most completely when He returns again. Accepting Jesus’ sacrificial gift of Himself on the cross and His authority in our lives allows us to experience the glorious already/not yet kingdom of God and the peace and joy within it. May you meditate on the magnificence of this gift today!

Check out these resources:

Tim Mackie & Jon Collins, The Bible Project Podcast on “The Kingdom of God, Part 1,” November 3, 2015, <https://thebibleproject.simplecast.com/episodes/866f7279-866f7279>.

Tim Mackie & Jon Collins, The Bible Project Podcast on “The Kingdom of God, Part 2,” November 10, 2015, <https://thebibleproject.simplecast.com/episodes/4275d8f4>.

David Seal, “Kingdom of God” in Lexham Bible Dictionary, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

DAY 2

What Does Jesus Say is the Kingdom of God (Part 2)

Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus used different methods to teach about the kingdom of God. Sometimes He taught about it directly, but often He used stories called parables to illustrate meaningful truths. Unfortunately, it is easy for us to miss the full impact of these passages as the context of the original audiences was quite different from ours. For example, when Jesus told His original hearers that the kingdom of heaven belonged to those like the little children, He was inviting them to come to Him (see Mark 10:13-16), He was talking to people living in a society who did not even highly value little children until they were old enough to contribute to the benefit of the family.

Matthew 13 records several parables where Jesus compares the kingdom of God to things that may seem odd to modern-day, western Christ-followers not living in the ancient middle eastern agricultural setting of Jesus’ original audience. Consider that as you read Matthew 13:24-30 and its following explanation in verses 36-43, then answer the following questions:



Questions for Reflection

- 1.) In light of Mark 10:13-16 and the cultural context, why might Jesus have said “anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it?” What childlike characteristics may He be referring to?

- 2.) What can you learn about God and His kingdom from Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43?

- 3.) What can you learn about the world and our enemy?

- 4.) What can you learn about the future for the people of God’s kingdom?

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In the Matthew parable, we can see God growing His kingdom while the enemy (the devil) is trying to thwart its growth. Both spiritual forces are very much active at work today. Although there often isn’t a lot of discussion about spiritual warfare among conservative evangelical Christ-followers, Scripture is clear that we need to be on

the alert to the devil’s schemes to harm God’s kingdom rule of Christ-followers, referring to Satan as our adversary in 1 Peter 5:8-11. That passage goes on to encourage us to resist Satan and be firm in our faith. Ephesians 6:10-18 further exhorts us to put on the full armor of God and details what that is so we can indeed be strong in God’s power. Regardless of how intense the struggle gets, never forget that as a believer, the “*One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world*” (1 John 4:4, CSB).

Check out these resources:

Tim Mackie & Jon Collins, The Bible Project Podcast on “The Kingdom of God, Part 1,” November 3, 2015, <https://thebibleproject.simplecast.com/episodes/866f7279-866f7279>.

Tim Mackie & Jon Collins, The Bible Project Podcast on “The Kingdom of God, Part 2,” November 10, 2015, <https://thebibleproject.simplecast.com/episodes/4275d8f4>.

David Seal, “Kingdom of God” in Lexham Bible Dictionary, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

DAY 3

The Fulfillment of the Kingdom of God

(New Heavens and Earth – Revelation 7 and 21)

Revelation 21:1-22:5

The overarching story of Scripture is that of a God who keeps coming to dwell with His people. In Genesis 1-2, God tells of creating humankind in His image and commissioning them to reign over His perfectly created world, a world where they have unhindered fellowship with Him. Somewhere between Genesis 2 and 3, Satan decided he no longer wanted to be just an angel but wanted equality with God and was, therefore, banished from Heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15; Revelation 12:1-12). Satan tempted Adam and Eve, and they chose disobedience, ushering in sin that corrupted our fellowship with God. Undaunted, God came in the form of the Son to bring a measure of His kingdom to Earth. Jesus paid the price for our sin when He was crucified on the cross, and the Holy Spirit came to dwell within us. But wait, there is more to come!

In the last three chapters of Scripture, Revelation 20-22, God paints a spectacular picture of the final fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. He will forever remove anyone and everything that keeps us from experiencing His unfiltered presence and will establish His magnificent and permanent earthly kingdom. You won't want to miss this!

Questions for Reflection

- 1.) According to Revelation 21:1-7, after God has fully eliminated Satan and all evil (Revelation 20), what do those of us who have chosen to follow the reign of God as part of His kingdom have to anticipate? What do you most look forward to from this description?
- 2.) What does Revelation 21:22-26 say will be unique about the final city of God? What will be the significance of these glories for those of us there?
- 3.) What do you see in the last book of the Bible (Revelation 22:1-2) that was in God's original creation account (Genesis 2:9; 3:1-7), and what is different in God's fulfilled kingdom?
- 4.) What does this tell you about the character of God?

When God’s fulfilled kingdom comes to Earth, it will be to a new Earth that will infinitely eclipse even His originally created paradise. He will dwell with us not in a temple meticulously built with human hands, not in a weakened human form as when Jesus walked the Earth, and not only as a Spirit who guides us from within. This reading assures us that He will dwell with us in full glory (Revelation 21:22-27). We “will see His face,” He will be our literal light, and with Him, we will “reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:4). Now that is a kingdom to look forward to!

Check out these resources:

Dennis E. Johnson, “The Bookends of Biblical Theology,” in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008).

Robert A. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 600-2.

“What is the Kingdom of God? Understanding Its Meaning,” *Christianity.com*, April 19, 2023, <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/god/what-is-the-kingdom-of-god-understanding-it-s-meaning.html>

DAY 4

Why Gather on the Lord’s Day?

Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25

The Old Testament frequently records Jews gathering for weekly worship and the offering of sacrifices. Many of the Psalms we love were written for those purposes and sung in those settings. Fast forward to the second century and writings from there record the Christian church regularly gathering for worship on the first day of the week (our Sunday), in honor of Jesus’ resurrection. Although there is no specific directive in the New Testament for Christ followers to gather together on a specific day of the week, there are certainly ample descriptions of them gathering for worship, teaching, fellowship and prayer. Let’s read both our focal passages and consider why gathering together is critical to us drawing closer to God and each other, as well as to better representing Him to the world around us.

Questions for Reflection

1) Read Acts 2:42-47. Why might each element mentioned of the Acts believer’s gathering (teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, caring for practical needs and praising God) be important in drawing nearer to God and to each other?

2) Verse 42 says that the Acts believers were “devoted,” a word which The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament translates as meaning to persist at, to remain with, to be loyal, to occupy oneself diligently with something, to pay persistent attention to. Is this description indicative of how you engage with teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer in our gatherings? What practical changes could you make to increase your devotion to be as it was originally intended?

3) Read Hebrews 10:24-25. The word “encourage” is an active word that the Bible Sense Lexicon defines as “to earnestly support or encourage a response or action.” How might your gathering weekly aid not only in your encouragement, but also in you encouraging your brothers and sisters in Christ? What practical changes could you make to more actively support and encourage other CRBC brothers and sisters to respond or act in ways that please God and best reflect Him to our surrounding world?

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Unfortunately, there are many things that seem to conspire to keep us from gathering in person, to being devoted to the elements in our weekly gatherings and to actively encourage one another—responsibilities, distractions, weighty concerns and physical limitations, to name a few. It is far too easy to stay home in our pajamas, or even to go through the motions of passively participating in church. Prayerfully consider how you can more actively engage in our worship elements and who you can encourage there. May our hearts align with the Psalmist who joyfully proclaimed, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” (Psalm 122:1)

DAY 5

What is a Christian Sabbath? How Can We Practice It?

Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-18; Mark 12:28-31

We began our study this week discussing the kingdom of God and how that phrase represents God's rule in our lives. It is only fitting that we end this week considering one of the ongoing ways we celebrate His continual rule: by keeping a Christian Sabbath. God was very specific with Moses regarding how the Israelites should keep a Sabbath and why (Exodus 20:8-11; 30:12-18). While He symbolically tied His Sabbath command for a day of rest to the example He had set in Genesis 1-2 of resting after intentionally creating for six days, He also made it clear that the Sabbath was for the nation of Israel to remember how He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15; Exodus 30:12-18).

Although Christ-followers are not legally under this law, Jesus didn't abolish the Law when He came, but actually called believers to what author Jen Wilkin refers to as "an expansive obedience." In her book, *Ten Words to Live By*, she encourages us to ask ourselves, "How might I practice Sabbath in broader and deeper ways?" and to consider Jesus' Sabbath behavior.

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Questions for Reflection

- 1.) Read today's Old Testament focal passages and note that God says to keep the Sabbath holy. How might you need to adapt your Sabbath observance in order to keep it holy? What behaviors should you stop, and what might you start?
- 2.) Besides regularly teaching in Sabbath services, Jesus often healed and helped others on the Sabbath. How might you use the Sabbath to lessen the work of others and to be a blessing to them?
- 3.) What preparations could you make ahead of time to set aside a Sabbath day for worship, rest, to remember God's provision, keep the Sabbath holy and follow Christ's examples?
- 4.) What are the consequences for you and others of you not keeping a Sabbath?

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As our CRBC by-laws state:

Sabbath-keeping enhances our reliance on God. It is a day to abstain from work, from our incessant need to produce and accomplish, from all the anxieties about how we can be successful in all that we have to do to get ahead. The result is that we can be still and know that he is God.

That is a practice and reminder that has beautiful consequences for us and the lives we touch. Let's celebrate His reign and enjoy His Sabbath rest!

Check out these resources:

Ten Words to Live By, by Jen Wilkin

DAY 6

Growth Day

Bible Verse

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”

Mark 1:14-15

Family Devotional

Recite the Memory Verse as a family.

The kingdom of God refers to his sovereign rule over his people. There is no greater King than Christ and no other King that could provide the hope that he does. As Christians, we are part of this glorious kingdom.

Parents Ask Kids:

What does it mean when we refer to God's kingdom?

Kids Ask Parents:

What makes Jesus the King of Kings?

Student Growth Questions

Confront Your Sin:

Jesus' desire is for us to “*abide*” in him (John 15:4). To fully abide in Christ, we must confront the sin in our lives, confess it and turn from it (repent). Spend some time asking God and yourself, “Is there any unconfessed sin in my life?” Talk to your Heavenly Father and ask him for forgiveness.

Confront Your Disciplines:

Reflect on this past week. How have you practiced the disciplines of your faith? Ask God which of the following disciplines he would have you practice more intentionally over the next week: Worship, Bible Study, Community, Witnessing, Serving, Praying, Giving, Fasting.

Confront Your Doctrine:

Doctrine is a big word that simply means “what you believe.” In what ways has this week’s reading about the kingdom of Heaven informed your understanding of life after death? Does the knowledge of eternity change the way you live now? How does the knowledge of eternity shape your view of God?

Adult Growth Questions

Before you begin working through these questions, spend a few minutes praying together. We suggest that you pray using the PRAY acronym below.

Praise:

God has established his kingdom. Get with a group member and thank God for his kingdom.

Repentance:

How do the Sunday morning gatherings in our church bring us to repentance and also show us God’s sufficiency? Why do we practice these things weekly?

Ask:

What does it mean for the kingdom of God to already be here but not yet fulfilled? How does that impact the way we live? How does it impact the way we see our future?

Yield:

How do you rest? How does the Scripture point us to regular yielding to the Lord as worship?

What have you been most challenged by this week? How can you respond in obedience to this conviction?

Group Liturgy

Opening Scripture

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”

Mark 1:14-15

Prayer

Lord, help us pray like you encourage us to pray. That your kingdom would come and that your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us eyes to see the reality of your coming kingdom. We pray that all the churches in our city would be focused on the mission seeing you as King and we ourselves as ambassadors of this great kingdom and king.

Group Confession

Lord, we come before you and acknowledge our need to repent today. You have offered us an eternal kingdom through your Son, and we have repeatedly chosen to build our own kingdom instead. With the brief moments of our lives this week, we have pursued comfort instead of pursuing Christ. In a culture clamoring for our attention,

we admit that we have been distracted this week and have not set our eyes on the King of Kings. Lord, help us to fix our eyes on you, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. By your Spirit, keep us from sin and help us to not turn back from the work of your kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Group Assurance

Today we need the reminder that we live in an eternal kingdom ruled by a gracious God who promised Peter, and us, this truth:

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

Matthew 16:18

Teaching Passages

Matthew 4:26-34

Optional Group Questions

- How does this parable connect to the kingdom of God?
- How might this parable call us to live?
- What is the soil that we should be planted in? What does it look like to be in that soil?
- How does our community and group life help cultivate us?
- What ways is a mustard seed like the kingdom of God?
- How can we increase the kingdom of God? Who in your life needs this truth? Pray for them together.

Sermon Notes

- What are common pitfalls in your abiding and remaining in Christ? How can your group encourage you to lean into Christ?

Closing Prayer/Benediction

As we end our time of study, help us be reminded that you sit on the throne, and you deserve the glory for it.

“To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

1 Timothy 1:17



COUNCIL ROAD
baptist church