



WALKING

A 40-DAY

IN HIS

JOURNEY

STEPS

Caption

Walking In His Steps

A 40-Day Journey

By

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Walking In His Steps

We are living in a lonely and challenging time. Christians are trying to figure out their new normal regarding Bible studies, attending Church activities, and how they can continue to grow their faith. Some churches have continued with in-person Bible studies, while most focus on internet studies and meeting through Zoom. There is a great need today for Bible relevant studies that can be used in person or via the internet to bring people together. There has never been a time where Christians needed to communicate with one another more.

Today's complex issues are calling Christians back to the basics of their faith. A practical study emphasizing current problems and issues and how they relate to their faith are being sought. While there are many outstanding studies on the Disciples' life or highlighting individual Biblical characters, the current demand is for studies that will help Christians with the current issues they are experiencing. They want to live a life that will lead people to Christ; however, they are looking for what the Word says about today's issues.

Walking In His Steps is more than a book; it guides a 40-day journey to living a life sold out to Jesus Christ. This study will enable readers to understand and discuss what Jesus expects from us as we deal with many of life's most important questions. By the end of ***Walking In His Steps***, readers will desire to continue to study God's Word and invite their friends to share in this relevant study. Readers will be encouraged to commit to 40 days of intense study. The study will foster group discussion, increase the readers' desire to learn, and, most importantly, prepare readers for life's daily struggles and eternity.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Life has many hurdles, and we live in a time that seems to be changing at a rate, unlike anything any of us have experienced. Christians are not attending Church as they did before the pandemic. With the reduction in school and church activities, families are spending more time at home, and they are looking for ways to but normalcy back into their lives. Churches are also searching for new ways of including their members in meaningful activities to keep them engaged in the Word of God.

Christians worldwide are looking for something significant to unite them, give them hope, and answer their questions regarding what is coming.

Almost 20 years ago, Dr. Rick Warren authored one of the most compelling small group studies in history. Church groups from across the world found the study to be timely, relevant, and life-changing. Millions of Christians took the 40-Day journey, and for many, it changed their life. Today readers are looking for another similar study to bring Christians together, help them grow spiritually, and keep them focused on the power of Jesus during these uncertain times.

We sometimes fail to remember how specific God is in Scripture concerning the importance of 40 days. Whenever He wanted to prepare a person or group, He set aside 40 days. God considers 40 days a spiritually significant period of time.

- It rained forty days and forty nights when God cleansed the world and started over.
- Noah waited forty days after it rained before he opened a window in the ark.
- Moses was on the mountain with God for forty days.
- It took the spies forty days to search out the Promised Land and bring back fruit.
- Goliath challenged the Israelites for forty days before being killed by David.
- Jonah warned the city of Nineveh that they had forty days until God would overthrow the city. The people repented in those forty days, and God spared the city.
- Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness.
- Satan tempted Jesus for forty days.
- Jesus was seen on earth for forty days after His resurrection.

Despite the fast-paced culture we live in and its stressful impact on each of us, ***Walking In His Steps*** will empower readers to understand that God's Word is just as applicable today as it was when written regarding current problems and life issues! This study is designed to appeal to both men and women, regardless of age, that have already accepted Jesus as their personal Savior. However, this can be used as a perfect opportunity to invite non Church going friends to be exposed to what Jesus has to say about what is going on in today's world.

The study is designed to run 40 consecutive days. Readers are encouraged to read a chapter each day that will allow them to ponder and discuss what they have read and its relationship to Scripture. Readers will be encouraged to create a small group, and the group will meet once a week for a short introductory video, candid discussion of the week's journey, and discuss how what they have read can impact their life. These sessions can be done weekly in person or over a program such as Zoom. An introductory opening video will outline the study and discuss what participants can expect in the first meeting. The remaining sessions will occur after participants have finished each week's reading. The daily read is approximately 15 minutes. The group meetings are suggested to run about an hour, with a 10-minute introductory video available to play before each session. The video can also be downloaded and viewed before each week if readers are doing this alone. The ***Walking In His Steps*** experience is being created to provide a relevant and Biblically sound study for individual participants, members of small church groups, or to be used by entire Church congregations. Participants will see how our material culture is trying to intimidate Christ's followers into becoming politically correct instead of Biblically obedient.

CURRENT OVERVIEW

The study is structured into 40 days or six weeks. The weeks are highlighted below:

- Week One: Why Are You Here?
- Week Two: Preparing For Troubles
- Week Three: Living In The World, But Not Of The World
- Week Four: People Are Always Watching
- Week Five: Called To Live A Life Of Integrity
- Week Six: How Will You Allow Jesus To Use You?

Each week has seven daily readings that can be done in around 15 minutes. The daily topics are:

WHY ARE YOU HERE?

- You Are Here For A Reason
- What's Important To You?
- You Are Made In Christ's Image
- Becoming A New Creation
- Serving Others
- You Are Unique
- Life Of Faith

PREPARING FOR TROUBLES

- Believing The Bible, All Of It
- Expecting Temptation
- The Devil Is Working Against You
- When Life's Not Fair
- It May Not Be Easy, It's Always Right
- Storms Are Coming
- Being Truthful

LIVING IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

- Who's Your Boss?
- Finding Your Balance
- Family Is Important
- Not Compromising To Fit In
- Who Are You Comparing Yourself With?
- When Is Enough, Enough?
- Are You Sharing?

PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS WATCHING

- Are You Faking It?
- Real Friends Are Hard To Find
- Staying The Course
- Using Your Time Wisely
- Don't Give Up
- Being Unique
- Living Beyond Reproach

CALLED TO LIVE A LIFE OF INTEGRITY

- Are You Sharing Your Faith?
- How Will You Be Remembered?
- Give Everything To God
- Don't Compromise
- Leaving A Legacy
- People Are Counting On You
- When You Are Alone

HOW WILL YOU ALLOW JESUS TO USE YOU?

- Using The Gifts God Has Given You
- Allowing The Holy Spirit To Guide You
- Giving Away What You Don't Own Anyway
- Now What?

The daily reading will be divided into five sections:

- A Verse To Ponder And Remember
- Prayer For The Day
- Daily Reading
- Questions To Answer
- Prayer Request For The Day
- Thought Of The Day

THE AUTHOR

Background:

Dr. Joe Pettigrew is the founder of *In The Zone* Ministries. *In The Zone* has hosted large events for men in over 40 states. He is a popular speaker for churches and civic groups and has authored three books. He has been featured in the Harvard Business Review, Fortune, and USA Today. His podcast is subscribed to by thousands in all fifty states.

Joe is a former university professor, College Dean, and the founding principal of the Leaderpoint Consulting group. He served as a college dean for The University of Memphis, the University of Florida, and the University of Kentucky. He is a fellow of the National Center for Creative Learning. Joe has taught leadership as an adjunct faculty member at Harvard, Duke, Kentucky, LSU, Rice, Tulane, North Carolina, Columbia, and Penn State. He has coached over half of the worlds Fortune 500 CEOs in his career. In 2008, Dr. Pettigrew placed all his energy into *In The Zone* ministry.

Previous Writing:

Joe has written three books and several chapters for books.

- *Living Life In The Zone*
Thomas Nelson, 2008
- *1+1=3* Helping Your Husband Become The Man God Wants Him To Be 2016
- *The Pursuit*, A 40-Day Study For Men
The Parable Group, 2019

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

As to provide the best feel for the manuscript, find included Week One, along with all seven Chapters for your review. Other Chapters are available upon request.

WEEK ONE:

WHY ARE YOU
HERE?

Day 1

You Are Here For A Reason

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

—Romans 12:2

PRAYER FOR TODAY

God, I love you. I am so busy. I feel pulled in every direction. Please help me focus on the one thing you are calling me to do—Bring glory to You. As I go through my day, help me realize everything that I do that brings glory to You are my purposes. Show me, Lord, how to bring glory to you in everything I do, and Jesus, please forgive me when I fall short. I love you, Jesus.

Congratulations, you are here for a reason! What that reason is, only you and Jesus know for sure, but you are here for a reason. There is no magic bullet offered here to reveal this to you; however, more and more people are beginning to ask themselves some fundamental questions: “Why am I here?” and “Why did God create me?”

In addition to finding out these answers, we are finding ourselves frustrated, afraid, and confused. The world is changing, and some things don’t make sense anymore. If we aren’t careful, we can find ourselves living on a merry-go-round, asking when and where to get off. We know we are not supposed to worry, but we need some answers. We wake up, go to work, take care of our family, go home, and then to bed. Tomorrow we get up, and do it all again. You may have asked yourself the question, “Is this all there is to life?” You want to know why you here? Surely it isn’t to do the same thing today you did yesterday and every day before that? Do you

ever feel your life is on autopilot? We are all living in a crazy time, and that is one of the things that makes this study special. With everything going on around us, it is easy to forget that God created you with a specific purpose in mind.

Why Do You Think God Put You Here?

People often travel all over the world, trying to answer this one crucial question. They attend seminars, read books, go to counseling sessions, and often check out of life to “go find themselves.” God tells us in Scripture that He has a specific reason for you, a purpose, unlike anyone else's.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11

Looking back, some of the most uncomfortable moments in your life may have come when you were asked to do something you had never been asked to do before. Perhaps you can relate to being asked to do something totally out of your comfort zone. When that happens, we can wonder if God is placing us in this situation because He knows what He wants us to learn.

God has many great ways to get us ready for what He has planned for us. When He was preparing to free Israel's people from slavery, He gave Moses the primary leadership role. Do you remember what Moses said? “Are you kidding me, God? I am the wrong one for this.” Well, that's not what he said to God but rather, *“Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?”* Moses had lived in three cultures, was raised as a Jew as a child, educated in the Egyptians' wisdom, and lived among the Midianites. *“Who am I?”* Moses was questioning his identity and ability. *“I'm not very good with words.”* Then he pleaded, *“Send anyone else!”* It sounds as if Moses didn't want God to pull him out of his comfort zone. Moses had failed once in a big way. He was no longer the prince of Egypt, but he was a wanted for murdering and a poor shepherd. He must have possessed genuine self-doubt about his leadership skills. He probably also thought, at his age, this appointment would mess up his retirement plans. He was way past his prime, felt incapable of doing anything worthwhile for people, but God chose Moses. He was glorified as the reluctant leader, but he stepped up to the challenge. Moses accomplished his purpose, not because of his wisdom, but because God's power was revealed in His weakness. Moses discovered at an old age why he was placed upon this Earth.

Why did God make you? Why did God decide to create you? These questions are as old as the human race itself. Some believe their goal in life is to create wealth and be rich. Some believe they were created to be happy and enjoy their toys. And yet others believe they were put here as

part of a plan. Your purpose is to love Jesus, love others, and to become the best version of yourself possible. Have you ever met someone who believes there is no purpose to their life but instead just a series of a coincidence that happens to occur? You were created for a reason, and the clues are all around you in plain view. Your purpose is so deeply embedded in your daily life that it can easily be overlooked.

“But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” Exodus 9:16

God placed you in your current job for a reason. God put you within your present family for a reason. God even set you in your church for a reason. Finally, God placed you in this study, *Walking In His Steps*, for a reason. Jesus has been clear with us from the very beginning—He created you to bring glory to Him in everything you do, so the real question is how do you determine what His will is for you as you share Him with the world.

You Are In The Place You Belong. Why?

It often seems that everyone seems to know why they were placed on this Earth, except you. Sure, you have a gut feeling; however, there is always a small voice in the back of your mind that is asking, “how do you know if you are following God’s plan?” When you were growing up, you surely remember having a friend or two who seemed to understand their purpose on this Earth. In elementary school, some were going to be cowboys, policemen, nurses, or princesses. Once you made it to high school, some felt called to be accountants, attorneys, or physicians. Some of them ended up doing what they anticipated. However, for many, we had no idea why God put us here in elementary school or high school or college. As a matter of fact, some of us are still trying to figure it out.

It seems that we go to school, graduate, find our soul mate, have children, and then the bills start pouring in. Whatever job we start out doing often becomes our life’s work. We didn’t necessarily choose our occupation; it chose us. We weren’t looking for our calling in life that would showcase why God placed us here. We were simply looking for a job to feed our family and pay the bills. We often thought about whether or not we are doing what God intended us to do, but for many, it didn’t matter—we were stuck. Wouldn’t it have been easy if God would have sent each of us an email or a text with his plans for our lives? When you think about it, we are here for such a short time; if we knew what God wanted us to do, it would save us a lot of time and worry.

We’ve been taught to think that dissatisfaction is a bad thing. Such a terrible thing that we should do just about everything possible to avoid it. Shove it down. Ignore it. Act like it doesn’t bother

us. Take a pill—plaster on a smile. Don't misunderstand; dissatisfaction can result from spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-12) and not an indication that we are out of God's will. But it can also be a road sign that He has another purpose for you. So if you're miserable in your current career or job and you've prayed, sought counsel from others, and looked for guidance through Scripture, and you're still miserable, consider that God may have another plan.

Most of us want to find out the reason we are here. The world often tells us to let our heart be your guide. "If it feels good, just do it!" If you are having fun, making money, not hurting anyone, and taking care of your family, then indeed, you must have found the reason God put you here.

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." Proverbs 19:21

We have all read about people who believe they must move across the globe to determine why they were put here. Who knows, maybe they do. However, according to Scripture, everyone's purpose in life is the same, but how we accomplish it is different. Our purpose in life is to glorify God; the question is where and how have you been created to achieve this. While this often sounds easy, it has kept more people up at night than almost anything else. How were you made to glorify God?

All this time, you may have been looking for that specific job you thought would define who you are and why you are here, when in reality, you may be in the right position now. Wherever you are planted, your focus must be to love God first and then love everyone else as we love ourselves; the question is how.

Do You Second Guess God Regarding Your Life?

Like many things in our lives, we often find that we are overcomplicating things. This may be true with our question today as well. Some believe they need to change careers, change marriage partners, find a different family, or change locations to find the reason for being here. In (1 Corinthians 10:31), the Apostle Paul said that we must "*do all to the glory of God no matter what we do.*"

That doesn't seem to mean that you have to be in a specific job. You may just be precisely where Jesus needs you to be. The world wants you to believe that your job, your children, or your hobby is the reason you are here. If we believe that we are never satisfied with what we have, we always look for something better. Do you know what the "open door" approach to finding God's

will is? You wait until a door opens, assume it is God who is opening it, and walk through it. The problem with this approach is God is not the only one who can open a door.

What Does God Want You To Do Different?

Once we commit our lives to study the Word of God, we often become obsessed with trying to be obedient and ensure we are in his will. At some time, we have all prayed and asked God to give us clear directions to be sure we are following His will. We ponder if our pursuits are serving our purpose.

“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.” Romans 8:28

What Trials Are You Experiencing? How Do You Think God Is Using Them?

What about you? What is your excuse for not discovering the reason you were created? What’s your excuse for not developing your passion? The apostle Peter indicates some things that slow down this process: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking. Peter says those things must be laid aside. The writer of Hebrews says we need to *“lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us.”* The apostle Paul encourages that we avoid worldly wisdom, and we are told, *“the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”* (1 Corinthians 3:19) Whatever is slowing down your growth and your ability to identify and share your purpose in Christ should be put aside.

Notes From Reading:

Questions For The Group:

Prayer Request for Today:

Day 2

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU?

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

— *John 13:34-35*

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Lord Jesus, please help me re-prioritize my life. You are essential, but I love the things in my life as well. Please help me as I try to place you in the position you belong in my life. I know I am still supposed to take care of and love my family but help me reorder the way I think and act like you are my top priority.

What is important to you? Now let's think about this another way. Let's assume no one will ever know your answer or see your notes. Now, what are the top three most essential things in your life in order? We often talk about our priorities in life, but how many times have you stopped to think about which of these essential things are the most important.

Take a moment and imagine that you're at the end of your life. You now have a few minutes to give yourself some advice. What would that advice be? Would it be something like, "I should have spent more time" Let's spend some time today reflecting on what is the most important thing in your life. Our priorities often change as we go through life, so taking some time to reflect on this is essential.

Where would you place your relationship with Jesus on your list? Is He the top priority in your life, or is He somewhere right behind your children, family, and friends? This week's Scripture is

intended to remind us that our relationship with Jesus is intended to be the essential relationship in our life. This almost seems like an impossible task because so much emphasis is placed on your ranking in the parent of the year contest. Scripture warns us that we should not put anything or anyone above our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Rank Your Priorities?

Many believe their relationships with friends are the most important thing. For others, work is at the top of their priority list. However, if married, your relationship with your spouse is called to be our second most important relationship. Whichever relationship we value the most is the one we devote our time and energy to nurturing. If any of these relationships ring a bell, it may mean that your priorities have slipped out of line.

These relationships are undoubtedly vital to your happiness. Good friends, a committed spouse, and great children are relationships; we must thank God for every day. We tend to forge an inseparable bond with people we believe we can always count on, no matter how dark things get. We desire people around us that can be our confidant, shoulder to lean on, and sometimes the voice of reason we need. We should always remember how fortunate we are, surrounded by people that we love.

“A new commandment I give to you that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

We talk about putting Jesus at the top of our list, but it seems that so many things keep pushing Him back. If we don't spend time with our family or job, we hear about it. However, if we don't spend the time we desire with Jesus, He just waits His turn for when we can fit Him in.

What Priorities Do You Need To Change?

Your cell phone alarm goes off; you roll over and grab your phone and see that you have several emails from work and more text than you can count. One of your friends tagged you on a post on Facebook, and before you know it, you are scarfing down breakfast and jumping in the shower in a mad dash for work. Driving to work, you promise yourself that today you're going to create

some time to spend with Jesus. When you get to work, it is crazy, and large projects are pressing. Your friends are texting because it's your time to pick where to meet for lunch. Afternoon comes and goes, and you've decided you are too busy to even go to the gym. The kids have soccer practice, band practice, and need school supplies before you head home. You'll get back on track tomorrow and spend that time you promised Jesus. Does that sound at all familiar?

God has given you an internal guidance system that you need to keep the main thing, the main thing. Often, people provide you with many opportunities to spend your time unproductively. We have to be cautious with their advice and motive. Jesus cautions us to be willing to give up whatever and whoever is keeping us from Him.

One of the core beliefs we have as Christians is that Jesus should always come first in everything. Sometimes that means we have to make some important decisions. People often try to convince us that something "isn't that bad" or that you can do something you know in your heart you shouldn't do. When that happens, we have to put our relationship with Jesus above all else. We have to be firm and clarify exactly where we stand, not allowing ourselves to be influenced by them.

When we have to give up something we enjoy, we naturally want to hold on to it. So the next time you feel the pressure to put things in front of your relationship with Jesus, stop and pray about what things or people are keeping you from this relationship. Whoever or whatever they are, probably don't even know that they are a part of it—for example, your children. It's not your family's fault if you fill out of balance in your relationship with Jesus. You should be commended for the effort you are placing at your job, with your spouse and your family. Today we are merely rethinking how to put Jesus back at the top of the list.

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life." Matthew 19:29

Our life is short. In a world of chaos, social media, and divisiveness, we love precious things that can quickly become overshadowed. Sometimes some circumstances are out of our control and consume our time and attention. Sometimes our own choices cause us to switch the things that mean the most. We all have different needs and priorities in our life, but we share one thing in common: the absence of Jesus at the center of our life will cause us to feel incomplete. While our lives and priorities may differ, we must remember that there is one thing vital to living a life of fulfillment... something we need to fight for... something that matters.

The disciples were standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. They had just finished a long night of fishing and had caught nothing. Jesus walks up and tells them to go back out and cast their nets into deeper water. The Bible says that when they did, they caught such a significant number of fish the nets were breaking. When they placed all the fish in the boats, they almost sunk. It was there that Jesus said to them, *"From now on, I want you to be fishers of men."* We must realize what a life-changing decision this was for these early disciples. The Bible puts it this way, *"Then they brought the boats to land, left everything, and followed him."* They left

everything and made Jesus the main thing. Think for a moment about what they would have left behind to be his disciples. What are you willing to leave behind to make Jesus front and center in your life?

Things That Are Taking Up Your Time

They left their jobs as fishermen. It wasn't a hobby they did to relax; it was their livelihood. This is how they made a living, and they quit their jobs immediately to follow Jesus. They even left their families because Mark speaks of Simon's mother in law, so we know Simon was married. So this was not only a commitment for the disciples but also their families. They left their security, and all they knew to follow someone who had not even told them where they were going. One of the things that happen when we decide to place Christ in His place is that we have to give up some of our control, not easy for many of us. These men left their jobs, their families, and their sense of security; why? Because they chose to invest their lives in something much bigger. Instead of making their relationship with Jesus important, they made it the most important.

*(Jesus said) "But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."
Matthew 6:33*

The first step in prioritizing our life is for us to "*seek first the Kingdom of God.*" Jesus wants us to know that His priorities must be our priorities. There is a show about people who trade in their large expansive homes for "tiny houses." In this episode, a young lady decided to downsize from her three-bedroom house and moved into a 384 square foot "tiny house." This transition liberated her as she no longer had a mortgage, and her monthly bills were much lower. Before moving in, she purged many of her most prized possessions. Old photos, love letters, and even her college letter jacket landed in the trash. What things in your life do you need to purge that is affecting your relationship with Jesus.

What Things Do You Need To Get Rid Of?

Let's commit today that we will strive to place Jesus at the top of our priorities. We can still love our spouse, adore our children, and have the most incredible friends in the world. Let's just don't forget who provided all those things to you.

Notes From Reading:

Questions For The Group:

Prayer Request for Today

Day 3

MADE IN CHRIST'S IMAGE

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

— *Genesis 1:27*

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Dear God, help me to prioritize my life as so I place studying your Word and desiring to live in your image at the top of my list. I want to study, but I don't seem to have the time. Please help me find the time to learn your Word and discover what God wants me to be. Lord, I don't even know where to start.

God made you special. The Bible tells us that God created us in His image. What does that mean?

How do you feel about yourself today? I mean, you should feel great about who you were made to be like. For some reason, low self-esteem is a disorder that is sweeping our country. How can we feel bad about ourselves when we were created in the image of Almighty God? According to “The Self Esteem Book” by Dr. Joe Rubino, 85% of the world's population is affected by low self-esteem. We all need to listen very carefully to the truth. You are someone extraordinary. God made you, and He made you in His image.

One of the main reasons people struggle with having healthy self-worth is they don't fully grasp what it means to be made in God's image. Like Adam and Eve, we will always struggle with sin and failure; however, we must remember that God considers us unique. Interestingly, today so many people face great battles concerning how they view themselves. Ninety percent of all people surveyed in a recent poll would like to change at least one aspect of their physical appearance. How about you?

What Would You Like To Change About Yourself?

It is still disappointing how many people believe that man and woman just appeared on Earth through some cosmic explosion and that God had nothing to do with it. Our children study evolution and the big bang theory in school as if they are the real reasons we all came into existence. Scripture says we are created in the image of Christ, but does that mean we look like Him? Does it mean He made us have a heart like His?

Some of us simply struggle with the idea of what it means to be made in the image of Jesus. God is of tremendous and immeasurable worth, so human beings made in his image must be of great value as well. The most obscure person is not ordinary in God's eyes. Being made in the image of God provides the basis for our life. If we are made in the image of God, we share His characteristics.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, 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." Genesis 1:26-27

There are few questions more significant than what it means to be an image-bearer of God. It's at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It governs our ethics, calling us to see every person (not just those like us or those we like) as valuable and treat every individual with dignity, respect, and honor. It helps us answer questions like:

- Why do we exist? What is our purpose?
- What makes human life valuable?
- Where does our worth, dignity, and value as human beings come from?
- How should I talk to, treat, interact with, and relate to this person or group?

The Biblical testimony is that God made men and women with a uniqueness that was not present in the other things He created. Only men and women were created in God's image and had this extraordinary honor and privilege. Only humanity had God breathe life into them. We are unique among all creation. Scientists tell us that there are a hundred thousand million stars in the Milky Way and millions upon millions of galaxies. If we ponder this type of facts, we can easily find ourselves feeling small and very insignificant. The universe we live in is beyond our comprehension, and the God who made the stars and everything else made you. Amid this overwhelming universe, God made you in a way that sets you apart from everything else He

created. You are not a product of chance. God specifically creates you, and He knew you before you were born! He knows your name!

"I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Psalm 139

This is what sets us apart. Knowing that God created each person uniquely, and He knew you before you were born, how should we then deal with such issues as abortions, the disposal, and physician-assisted suicide. Do we have a right to take such action against that which is created in God's image? When God created man in His image, He said that we would resemble God in ways other than a physical likeness. He designed us, not like the animals, but with an erect posture, and with us capable of facial expressions corresponding with emotional feeling and a brain and tongue capable of articulating symbolic speech. God gave us the intellectual ability, which is far superior to any animal. We are given a mind capable of hearing and understanding God's communication with us, emotions capable of responding to God in love and devotion, and a will that enabled us to choose whether or not to obey God.

In What Ways Are You Willing To Change To Become More Like Christ?

When a former Chicago mayor was concerned about violence in the city's housing projects, she did a surprising thing—she moved into one of them. She lived for twenty days in an apartment in the dangerous community of Cabrini Green. While her action sparked controversy, her decision to live among Chicago's poorest citizens also drew needed attention to a long-neglected neighborhood. The Gospel of John begins by focusing on how God came to dwell among us. John takes us to the beginning—not just when Jesus was born on Earth but back to the beginning of time. The Son of God did not begin to exist at His physical birth; He was present at the Creation: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:10) John stakes a claim: Jesus is God. Jesus coexisted with His Father from the beginning.

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14

As much as we like to break the world into little groups, denominations, cultures, races, etc., our small little world of "us" and "them," the truth is that we are all one species bound together on Earth, and we are more alike than different. Dividing ourselves into groups is a sad and self-serving endeavor in the vast scheme of things. God's love is for everyone because regardless of where they come from, we were all created in His image irrespective of who they are.

If We Are Created in the Image of God, Why So Much Division?

We don't want to be phony Christians who turn the world off because we only like people that are like us. Non-believers can smell a fake. Years ago, a new missionary went to Venezuela for the first time. He struggled with the language and didn't understand most of what was going on. He visited a local church and took the only spot available—on the front row—because he arrived late. Trying not to make a fool of himself, he followed the man's actions sitting next to him. As they sang, the man clapped his hands, so the missionary clapped too. When the man stood to pray, the missionary stood also. When the man sat, he sat as well. During the preaching, the missionary didn't understand a word. He sat and tried to look just like that man next to him. Then he perceived the preacher was giving announcements. People clapped, so he looked to see if the man was clapping. He was, and so he applauded as well. Smiling, the preacher said something else. When the man stood, the missionary jumped to his feet. A hush fell over the congregation. A few people gasped. He looked around, and no one was standing. After the service, the preacher stood at the door, shaking the hands of those leaving. When the missionary greeted the preacher, the preacher said, in English: "I take it, you don't speak Spanish." The missionary said, "No, I don't. Is it that obvious?" "Well, yes," said the preacher. "I announced that the Rodriguez family had a newborn baby boy and would the proud father, please stand up."

You Are Made In Christ's Image, Do People See This?

How beautiful is it to think that God, the Creator of the universe, made us in His image? He looked at us and called us His masterpiece and very good. We shouldn't just observe the inherent value, but we must work to view it in those around us. We should walk in confidence, knowing that our Creator makes no mistakes, loves you, and sees you as beautiful.

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10

This verse doesn't just talk about us being God's handiwork but declares we each are called to fulfill good works. We are so valuable that God entrusted tasks for each of us to carry out His

kingdom's betterment. God has gifted us each unique talents and abilities; therefore, your calling will look different from someone else's.

There is no need for comparison, only continual striving to reflect Jesus Christ by living by His Word and pursuing the specific calling for each of us. It sends us on a mission to reflect to the world who God is. If we are made in His image, shouldn't the way we live reflect Him?

Notes From Reading:

Questions For The Group:

Prayer Request for Today:

Day 4

A NEW CREATION

“...and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

— Ephesians 4:24

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Jesus, please help me to be the person you created me to be. I want those around me to see the difference that you are making in my life. Change me from the person I have been. Reorder my priorities in life. Jesus, I need help because the only person I know how to be is the one I have been. I want to be a new creation in you. Please help me to follow your example and resist the pull from this broken world.

We all have a strong desire to be ourselves and live our own life. We live in a world where people seem to be worried about themselves and disregard how they may clash with others. Should the world see a significant difference in your life once you accepted Jesus into your life? When we become a Christian, we are to be a different creation, and our lives must show this significant and sometimes drastic change. We all desire to start over sometimes. Giving our life to Christ is just this chance to have a fresh start. If you want to see a more remarkable change in your life, today is the time for you to become a new creation.

Our lives are changing, and it is happening so subtly that most don't even notice. It seems we are all getting pulled into the idea of how many toys we can accumulate as we travel through life. What matters most to God isn't what we do; it's who we are. So pursuing specific accomplishments in life isn't nearly as important as becoming the new, better person God desires. We must use our time and energy wisely, but we must focus on living up to our potential, growing into the person God wants us to be. Becoming a new person means letting go of what has filled your life and filling it with love and joy. How do you become the person God wants you to be?

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

We learn that a person is a new creation when we are in Christ. *"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation."* (Galatians 6:14-15) So how do you become a new creation? *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."* (Galatians 3:26-27) When you act through faith and are baptized, you enter into Christ. Paul also connects the new creation or new life to baptism in his letter to the Romans. *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life."* (Romans 6:4) Therefore this change comes about when you accept Christ.

Have You Changed Since Accepting Christ?

How do you change? The major change is, "old things have passed away."

"If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." Ephesians 4:21-24

Therefore, it is a conscious behavior change brought about because your sins are removed. *"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all."* (Colossians 3:8-11)

God has already created a new self for you. You are not a different person; you are a new creation and your best self. You are all that God made you be. Your character, personality, capabilities, and passions are changed in what Paul calls your "new self." Paul uses the imagery of new clothing. (Ephesians 4:22-24) It is like a new outfit hanging in our closet. You could put it on, although it is not the kind the thing you have worn before, it might even be sort of scary to wear it in public because you are not sure how people will react. Yet we know that it is much better than what we usually wear, so we put it on! Of course, the new self God has for you goes much deeper than what is on the outside; it goes to the core of who you are. If Paul were writing

today, he might be talking about a software upgrade, even a significant update of your entire operating system.

Our new self comes with unique passions and a new attitude toward life. Our perspective becomes like Jesus: we have a great love for people, a servant's heart, strengthening in facing evil, and a desire to please the Father. Think about what a difference this can make as you face the challenges and opportunities of life. The new self accepts the righteousness of Christ as God's gracious gift, freeing you to be honest about who you are and what you do.

When You Can't Be Everything For Everyone, How Do You Feel?

When was the last time your children or grandchildren caught you "talking with Jesus?" Today is the day to start allowing yourself to act the way Christ intended for you to act. Take off your baggage and ask God to help you be the new creation He promised.

"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:13-14

Jesus is not interested in all your past mistakes, but rather in the new person you are becoming. The Apostle Paul teaches us a great lesson about looking ahead rather than dwelling on the past. But that doesn't mean Paul developed amnesia while he was in the Roman jail. He clearly remembered his history and did not forget the man he once was. He didn't, however, let his past discourage him or defeat him. He was determined to press on and to keep running the race. Paul was focused on eternity and what awaited him at the end of his life.

We've all made mistakes and have a past that we can't change. Maybe the mistake was an affair, something you said, or an addiction of some type. We are accustomed to viewing our lives in the order of "past, present, future." The Bible suggests that we consider time as flowing from the future into the present and then into the past. As a new creation, you should be future-oriented, forgetting what lies behind you. Have you ever noticed how mired down in the "here and now" you often become? Sometimes it's dark and scary, and we're fumbling around because we feel like we have lost control because of things like broken relationships, money problems, and illnesses. Paul was focused on the future. He pressed toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Paul used the image of a race to describe the Christian life. In (Philippians 3:12), Paul wrote, "*I press on.*" In verse 14, he wrote, "*I press toward the goal.*" The word press means to run swiftly to catch a person or thing, to run after. Paul was focused on the future and the person he could become.

You may be one of the millions that enjoy social media. People like to keep up with family and friends while seeing the new creative ideas other people come up with. I recently read an article about a study that revealed spending extended time on social media makes people worried, lonely, and unhappy. Being on the site also increases feelings of discontent as users compare their lives to others. One researcher wrote, “We want to learn about other people and have others learn about us—but through that very learning process, we may start to resent what others have.” Perhaps a negative part of the human condition is the urge to compare ourselves to others to find how we measure up. It is hard to move forward in our new life if we can’t let go of our old one.

Who Do You Compare Yourself With?

Our discontent, loneliness, and jealousy usually stem from our focus on ourselves, and when we are allowed to change and shed our old lives, we find real joy. Today, we should ask God to turn our hearts and minds away from ourselves and become the new creation we desire. Away from who we are and more into who we want to become.

“They came to John and said to him, Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him. To this, John replied, A person can receive only what is given to them from Heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.” John 3:26-28

John the Baptist’s disciples expressed similar feelings of discontent and jealousy. People became upset because others went to Jesus to be baptized instead of going to John. They viewed it as a competition. John was quick to set them straight. He clarified his position concerning Jesus by saying, “*I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.*” He asserted that his decreasing popularity was precisely as it was meant to be: “*He must become greater; I must become less.*” John compared himself to an attendant at a wedding. He was never meant to be the main attraction.

How wonderful it is that God is in the improvement business? We have all wandered away from God, and the world has left us broken, dirty, and in need of serious help. A wonderful Christian couple—Chip and JoAnn Gaines—have a television show called “Fixer Upper.” Their show’s tagline is: “We take the worst house in the best neighborhood and turn it into our client’s dream home.” I love to watch this show because of the interaction between Chip and JoAnn with their children, and they are not ashamed of their faith. As incredible as the Gaines’ ability and giftedness is, as impressive as it is to see what they can do with old homes in need of restoration, God does so much more with us when He restores us to our new creation. He can take that which is ugly and make it beautiful in His image. He can take the worst of sinners and transform us into the best of saints. God never does a patch job, fixing and repairing just parts of who we are—He

always does a complete restoration, both inside and out. His work is wonderful, and when He is finished, we are not the same person we were when He started. God takes that which is useless and falling apart and makes it strong and loyal in Him to do things of eternal significance. And unlike the homes restored on “Fixer Upper,” which will one day begin to deteriorate and wear out, we have been given an eternal “fixing up” by God.

So How Can We Be Made New in Christ?

Accept Jesus as your personal Lord of your life: It’s one thing to believe in Jesus, but it is another to make Jesus Lord of your life. Invite Jesus into your heart, ask Him to cleanse you of your sins, and if you believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, that He is the Son of God (the awaited Messiah), then you shall be saved.

Spend time in God’s presence and the Word: Faith comes by hearing the Word (Romans10:17). Real transformation and decisions/choices/lifestyle changes are made when our thinking is appropriately aligned. Prayer is vital, as well. Let’s not just give God a big request list, but in the stillness of our devotion time, we can hear God speaking to us in our spirit if we carve out the time and seek Him genuinely.

Confess your sins and turn from your old ways: This doesn’t happen overnight necessarily either, but some people have testimonies of being delivered of drug abuse, alcohol addiction, and other former ways. Sometimes this can take time, but God is faithful. If we choose to obey, He will bless our lives. Those who honor God will be honored. When we resist the devil, He shall flee.

Be around like-minded believers: How can you flourish in the things of God if you are walking with the rebellious or with people who don’t desire to serve God and His Kingdom? If you want to be a professional dancer, you hang with dancers at dance studios; you take classes and work hard. If you're going to be a singer, you practice, do exercises, rehearse, etc. If you want to be a firm believer and change, you need to learn from the Bible and apply it and be around others who are doing it better than you.

Stay in worship and guard your mind, ears, and heart: Honestly, what you think about, you do, and what you do, you become habitual. Don’t you want to be known as a worshipper? One to leave a legacy for Jesus? Don’t you want to fall at His feet in worship and thank Him for all that He has done? Seriously, we are so blessed. We have our health, salvation, friends, family, schools, jobs, a roof over our heads, cars, computers, phones...we have more than enough.

What’s Your Plan For Change?

Notes From Reading:

Questions For The Group:

Prayer Request for Today:

Day 5

SERVING OTHERS

“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.”

— *Hebrews 6:10*

DAILY PRAYER

God, help me to find my calling for serving others. I know how important this is, but I don't seem to have the time to do it regularly. I want to be your servant, but I'm not sure exactly what that means. Please place me in the situations you wish me to serve the people you want me to help. I love you so much; I don't know when or how to serve you.

The new national theme song should be “What’s In This For Me?” The idea of servant-hood is something few people think about except at Christmas or when a national disaster takes front stage in our world. People indeed continue to volunteer to help others, but our society seems to be saying, “it is better to take care of yourself than worry about those who don’t take care of themselves.”

Nothing is more central to Christians than our desire and need to serve others. Jesus came to Earth to be a servant, and we are called to be servants as well. Being “called” by God is often thought that only missionaries, pastors, nuns, and a few church leaders experience. The Bible, however, says everyone is “*called to serve God*”—by serving others. We are not saved by serving, but we are saved for serving. It is interesting how many people embrace their belief that helping others is their ticket to receive eternal life. While their service is noble and commendable, the real disappointment is waiting.

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
Mark 10:45

Jesus didn't come wanting others to serve Him, but instead, He served everyone, including those the world seemed to reject. A Chinese saying proclaims, "If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap. If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody." For centuries, some of the greatest thinkers have suggested the same idea: Happiness is found in helping others.

Today the mass media is convinced that people are only motivated by their self-interest. We are taught that acting rationally is to maximize what we desire for ourselves. Values such as—service, duty, allegiance to others, morality, and shared ideals—seem to be irrelevant or at least negligible. Studies indicate that we receive a stronger sense of purpose and meaning in life when we serve others.

A local newspaper recently headlined a young woman who spends her spring breaks in the African bush treating AIDS patients. When we read articles such as this, we often think about what you can offer in comparison, because you certainly can't take off and go to Africa. Even if you did, would you know what to do? The answer is more straightforward than you think: a lot. You shouldn't be intimidated and feel that you would be competing against others when you serve people. Small choices—little steps—often lead to significant change. If you asked the girl volunteering in Africa, she'd probably be able to track back a trail of small choices and decisions that led her there, one step at a time. She probably didn't just suddenly go from never having served to board on a plane for Africa. We are called for different purposes—some more dramatic than others, but not necessarily more important. The mission field is not limited to far-off places—it includes our home, city, work, and home. Wherever you are, God has something vital going on.

Where Are You Serving Others?

There are two kinds of people in this world: those that help others and those that don't. God said that His followers should be helpers, and we are commanded to serve others. God created you so that you will not find fulfillment until you are helping others. Even though God designed us to serve, we have difficulty making time available to do so. Jesus took the time to teach the disciples about servant-hood; however, today, we know it is essential; we simply can't find the time.

What do you believe was the motive for the Disciples to follow Jesus? Was it honor, glory, or power? As we look at their early lives, it seems these things were on their minds. When the Disciples began following Jesus, their motivation seemed to experience God more deeply and meaningfully. As they realized that Jesus was about restoring the Kingdom of God on Earth, their

motives began to drift to things like power, honor, and glory. When you think about being a servant, you have to be aware of this as well. Within us, we all have a deep desire to be honored, experience glory, be essential, and be served. It's so natural we see people vying for position and prestige almost everywhere we look. If we are going to embrace the power of helping others, we must check your motives before we begin. Even if we desire it in our hearts to serve others, we can't seem to find the time to do it. God placed us in time, at this exact time, and God will take us home when He chooses. The Lord put us here to make an eternal difference, and serving others is essential to Him. Can you find the time?

“As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work.” John 9:4

In 1974, Harry Chapin released a song titled, “The Cats in the Cradle.” The sad song told the story of a dad who could never find the time to do things with his son as he was growing up. Later, when his child became an adult, the child learned from his father and could not find the dad's time. The question is, how are we going to make time to serve others?

Robert Moffett, a great missionary, once said, “We shall have all eternity in which to celebrate our victories, but only one short hour before the sun sets in which to win them. We have only a limited number of days to make a difference in this world. We must stay on track, follow God's lead, and stay focused.”

Don't you just love the story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana? His mother mentions the wine problem to Jesus. He hasn't performed any miracles up to this point, so she's probably not expecting Him to start then. Jesus probably did have a reputation for fixing difficult situations, and as his mother, She had a lot of faith in Him. Jesus doesn't show much response to His mother's hint. *“What does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.”* I'm sure Mary knew her Son well, and instead of arguing or giving up, she turned to the servants and said, *“Do whatever He tells you.”* And off she went, leaving the problem in Jesus' hands. As Mary anticipated, Jesus got to work on the situation—although maybe not exactly the way she had imagined. He performed His first miracle. He didn't do it on His own by causing the wineskins to refill themselves magically. No, Jesus had a better idea. He made service a part of His miracle. *“Fill the jars with water,”* He said. Jesus asked them to do it, which was good enough for them, and it should be good enough for us as well.

Have You Witnessed A Miracle?

To learn what God wants you to do and how He wants you to serve requires that we must spend time with Him in His Word. Jesus knows all the things you are dealing with. He, too, was tempted, betrayed, hungry, tired, misunderstood, and falsely accused. Christ has promised to be in our midst and never leave us. He also promises to be with us when we find ourselves serving in areas we are not comfortable in. You can count on one thing for sure; He is already there. Serving with Christ doesn't mean just handing out meals or giving money. There is a never-ending need to serve our fellow man.

“Mourn with those who mourn.” Romans 12:15

Our world is full of people that are sick and hurting. How great it will be to have no more needy people, no beggars, and no worried widows. Wouldn't that be a great way to live today? Unfortunately, selfishness has a way of infecting us. It accounts for much of what we say and do. The cure to greed is to have the serving mind of Christ. By God's grace, we should not stand far off in fear or disgust from anyone. In prayer, we must cry out to God, trusting in His promise that they shall all be comforted.

Where Can You Serve?

Sometimes the idea of serving intimidates us. We must not fall into the trap that we have nothing to offer. We all have things to offer. Just in case you need a few ideas to get you started, take a look at some ways you can serve:

Be kind to strangers. The absolute best way you can serve both God and others is to be kind. Smile. Don't snap at the sales clerk for taking too long. Don't demand to have your way. Don't berate the telemarketer. Don't be a road rage-filled driver.

Remember someone. Send a birthday card or gift to a lonely widow or widower. Let them know their special day is still unique. Call someone who feels under the weather, going through a difficult time, or experiencing a grievous loss.

Pray for those in need. Don't generalize your prayers. Be specific. Pray for _____, who is experiencing the rigors of boot camp. Pray for _____, who is experiencing a difficult pregnancy. Pray for _____ and _____, who are trying to be patient while waiting for the call to travel to South Korea to finalize their little girl's adoption. Pray for the leaders of our nation by name.

Share food. Invite a college student to your home for dinner. Fix snacks for the high school youth group to enjoy during their Bible study. Fix a meal for a new mom, the people who just moved into the neighborhood, or someone just home from the hospital. Bake cookies, bread, or pies to give to first-time visitors at your church.

Share your time. Sit and read to an older adult. Take someone to and from their doctor's appointment or their chemo treatment—volunteer to help the church secretary with some of her duties at church. Offer to prepare class materials for Sunday school teachers. Read to the children at a daycare.

Share your stuff. Donate sports equipment, clothing, and household items to shelters, children's homes, and other organizations. Host a Bible study in your home (even if you aren't the one teaching it). Invite the youth group to enjoy the pool in your backyard or the horses on your farm. Give away part of your garden's produce.

Share your talents. Teach a Bible study. Offer to do hair and nails for the high school girls at church for prom. Babysit for young parents so they can enjoy a date night now and then. Perform car maintenance and handyman chores for the elderly in the church and your neighborhood. Tutor a child or children struggling in school. Help a young couple set up a reasonable budget. Teach others how to garden, sew, or whatever it is you are good at.

Share the Word. Leave a devotional book or a Bible on the table at a restaurant. Just Ask. Ask people how you can pray for them and help them... then do it.

*“let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”
Galatians 6:9*

Notes From Reading:

Questions For The Group:

Prayer Request for Today:

Day 6

YOU ARE UNIQUE

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

— *Romans 12:4-5*

DAILY PRAYER

Jesus, please help me see the uniqueness of those around me. Please help me identify and appreciate the differences in my family and friends. I need to be reminded that every person I encounter, even those I am not particularly close to, are created in the image of Jesus Christ.

How can I treat people the way I sometimes do, when we are all made in His image.

There are some strange people in this world. Some that know you probably agree. Have you ever thought about how different people are? It seems a bit crazy that we were all created to be unique, yet we spend so much of our lives trying to be like someone else. Do you try to dress like someone else, have a similar car, or own a house equal to your friends? Society separates and labels people that stand out as being different. Like the people who wear different clothes or hairstyles are often singled out as being strange. Wear your hair with a color that is different from the masses and listens to people talk. While we live in a time that says we are individuals, and it is OK to be different, we often spend a lot of time trying to fit in and be just like everybody else.

Have you ever wondered how parents have multiple children, and yet each one of them is so incredibly different? Each child has the same mother and father, grow up in the same environment, and act as though they could be part of another family. The reality is, we are all very different, and we were created that way on purpose. This is one of the miracles of life—no two people are the same. We all have something that makes us stand out. We all also share one

major thing in common: we are made in the image of Jesus. Shouldn't that mean that although we are unique, we are more alike than we think?

*"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."
Psalms 139:14*

People are different, and our passion for things are different. A prize possession to one person is junk to another. Someone's comfortable temperature is someone else's sweltering heat. One person's bright illumination is someone else's blinding light. We act differently because we perceive, think, feel, want, need, react, and judge differently. The older we get, the more we seriously underestimate how different we are. This implies a few things; it means that you don't always understand others as much as you think you do—why they do what they do, and the intent of their actions and words. And other people don't understand you as well as you think they should.

What Things About Your Life Do You Desire To Change?

Every person is a unique puzzle composed of pieces of personality, life experiences, knowledge, and emotions. Each of us has our perspective and set of values, primarily fueled by how we have been raised and how we've experienced and navigated the world. Regardless of the path your life has taken, the journey leaves its mark. We all have something unique and valuable to contribute to the world. You might enjoy the same food, share hobbies, or hold similar beliefs or opinions as other people. What makes you different from all others is not these things by themselves, but the combination of all these things that only you have. You are unique.

You share many things in common with other people; however, you are essentially one of a kind. No one has been given the same makeup as God gave you. Your face, fingerprints, voice, and genetic makeup are matched by no one else's. Likewise, God has handcrafted you with your personality, unique set of talents, and motivations. That means one thing — you have an individual purpose in life that no one else can fulfill.

We don't have to travel far to discover just how much God loves diversity and variety. Think about it; God made over 300,000 species of just spiders. Did you know that in one cubic foot of snow, there are 18 million individual snowflakes and not one of them alike? And while we can't tell the difference, it's just snow to us; God created each of them. God likes variety in people too. If you have ever waited in an airport or stood in line at Wal-Mart, you have seen all sorts of unique and different people, none of them alike. God made every one of us individually, and when we look in the mirror, we see just how different we are. There's no one else like you in the

entire world. You are a one and only, and God broke the mold after he made you. He doesn't create carbon copies, only originals. You are unique to God. You matter to Him.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah 1:5

Due to this uniqueness, you were created for a specific purpose. God created everything in the world for a purpose. You're not merely the result of a biological process. You're who you are because God made you, and God has a plan and purpose for your life. God made you for a reason. He designed you. It was His idea, and God doesn't make mistakes. God didn't just sit down and randomly access many components and put them together, and out you came. God purposefully and personally designed you.

How Are You Different From The World?

Do you enjoy going to the beach? Have you ever seen photographs of individual grains of sand blown up by a microscope? Some grains look like red, polished stones while others look like icicles. Some resemble speckled yellow and brown eggs, and still, others are shaped like corncobs, snowflakes, and precious gems. Some grains are square; some, spherical; and some are flat. No two grains are the same. And you'd never know you were even looking at grains of sand if no one told you. The next time you sink your toes into the warm sand, think about every tiny grain, unique in shape, depth, color, and texture. God created every one of this infinite variety of grains. Because God shows off His creative abilities in tiny bits of sand, think about how much more He has done—and can do—with you, the crown of His creation.

Too often, however, we try to model ourselves after another person. Whether the object of our admiration is a friend, celebrity, or a stranger—we lose ourselves in trying to be like someone else. The Lord knows why each grain of sand is a certain way, and He knows the same about you. You must seek God through His Word to help you determine why you have the characteristics you have and what purpose He has in mind.

There have been many depictions of Jesus in the movies, but few portray Him as happy. It's as if enjoying life is something contrary to God and His nature. Jesus is always seen as this serious person with little joy and with even less of a sense of humor. Do you see Jesus that way? We certainly can picture Him as being stern when He needs to be, but we should also see Him as filled with joy and having a great sense of humor. If you want to let people see a glimpse of what Jesus is like by watching your actions, are you happy and full of life?

If we look around us, there are many things that make us laugh. Look at all the funny expressions on the faces of children and little babies. Have a friend share a funny experience, and we do what? Laugh. Jesus saw and experienced life in its fullness, and don't you think He laughed?

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

The feeling of inadequacy affects all of us to some degree and is a common human trait. Another trait is to “fake it till you make it” both show we are not insufficient. Have you ever started a new job and acted as though you knew more than you did? Have you been in a class only to find out that it is way beyond your abilities, so you try to appear to be at the same level as everyone else? Have you ever had to give a speech or present a program before a group and be uncomfortable at the thought of having to do such a thing? If you were in any of these groups—you fit in well with every other person on earth. Although inadequacy is a common condition, it is the causal factor for countless adverse effects in our lives. Inadequacy can lead to compensating by lying, deceiving, addictions, overworking, and materialism. Inadequacy can be and is, for many, a devastating condition. We don't have the same talents as everyone else because God didn't give us those talents. He gave us unique talents.

The Apostle Paul faced his fear and inadequacy and gave us an example of overcoming this problem. When Paul went to the Corinthians, he trusted in the power of God. He did not try to impress them with his great learning and oratory skills, but instead, he laid his fears (1 Peter 5:7) upon Jesus. Through the power of God, Paul communicated the Gospel with great effectiveness.

Learning to love ourselves for who/what we are is a big challenge, and when people persistently avoid us for being ourselves, it makes it that much harder to embrace our uniqueness. You must continue to be the best version of yourself.

Everyone has their quirks; some are good; some are a bit frustrating. If you embrace yourself for the good and the bad, you can become an even more likable person. Don't go with the crowd! It's the path less-traveled by where all the hidden treasures lie. Maybe life is uncertain for you now, but you're capable of taking back control of your life by being who God made you to be.

How Does God Want You To Change?

The great evangelical preacher Billy Graham was once asked a question. This question and his response are worth considering.

Q: I wish God had made me a different person. I'm just a very ordinary person without any talents or special abilities, and my life isn't very exciting. It seems like other people get all the breaks. Why is life so unfair? — D.F.

A: Let me ask you a question: Did God make a mistake when he made you the way you are? Did he forget what he was doing and leave something out when he made you? No, of course not. God knew what he was doing, and he made you exactly the way he wanted you to be. Furthermore, you are unique; no one else in the world is exactly like you. (Think how dull the world would be if we were all exactly alike!) Even before you were born, God knew all about you, and he has a specific plan for you. God's words to Jeremiah apply to every one of us: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." (Jeremiah 1:5)

You may not be a pro athlete, celebrity, or on the Forbes 100 richest family's list. Still, God gave you specific gifts and abilities, and the most fulfilling thing you can do is discover them and use them for His glory. Begin by believing the most important truths you will ever know: God loves you, and Christ gave his life for you. By faith, open your heart and life to Him today and ask God to help you become the person He created you to be. Don't let envy or jealousy or anything else keep you from His plan for your life. Instead, keep your eyes on Christ. The Bible says, "*Be content with what you have, because God has said, Never will I leave you.*" (Hebrews 13:5)

"But even the hairs of your head are all numbered." Matthew 10:30

Christ calls us to be different! And it isn't about us; it's about Him. Christ teaches us a set of values and ideals, which is distinctive from the world. He calls us to be different, to be counter-cultural. We are not to get our cue from those around us, but from Him, and prove to be genuine children of our heavenly Father.

Advertisers are seizing any opportunity to appeal to the "me" obsessed generation. After all, who are you more likely to trust? The pretty face of an anonymous model or the picture of someone you know and love? It has become routine for celebrities to broadcast trivial information and fill Twitter with the insignificant moments that constitute their day, the implicit principle being that nothing is mundane once you are important enough. This delusion then spills out to the non-celebrity; recording ordinary events becomes proof of your importance.

Our Lord is gracious and compassionate and has rescued us through Jesus Christ, our Lord! He helps us in our struggles. He will allow us to throw off the hindrance of pride and fear of being different than the world around us! He helps us to be salt, light, and hope in a broken world. We must encourage one another to give to Him our all in humility and a teachable spirit every day. Let's encourage each other to dig deep into the Word of God, which will equip us through the Holy Spirit. Let's run together, the race God has marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith! Let's embrace being different!

Notes From Reading:

Questions For The Group:

Prayer Request for Today:

DAY 7

A LIFE OF FAITH

“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

— *Galatians 2:20*

DAILY PRAYER

“Jesus, it is often hard to believe that we were crucified in the garden with you on that late afternoon. That you died so that we can live is so amazing that I just often can’t understand. I know that you are living in me through the Holy Spirit, but I often ignore Him. I try so hard to solve my problems, and I forget that you are always with me. Please help me to lean on you and stop trying to do things myself.”

We are born with the desire to control situations, and we often like to do things our way and on our schedule. One of the significant problems of our time is that Christians have been somewhat passive and have not stood up for what is important to Jesus in our world.

Once we accept Jesus into your heart and life, He makes us a promise. He promises that he will never leave us and that the Holy Spirit will live in us forever. Have you ever wanted to go into a place that you knew you shouldn’t go to, to maybe do something you know you shouldn’t do? How about have an inappropriate discussion or encounter with someone you know you shouldn’t be meeting with? Because of your relationship with Jesus, He lives within you, everywhere you go. Your life is His life, and we serve Him through our faith. We can’t take a break from Him while we do what we may want to do. He is always with us.

A couple of years ago, a national home improvement store produced a commercial that shows a proud do-it-yourself-er rewiring an old ceiling light in his living room. After he finished, he proudly gives the light one last turn, climbs off the aluminum ladder, and steps aside to turn on

the switch. When he turns it on, he stands with his hands on his hips and chests out, proudly being satisfied with his brilliant work. Within a second of the light coming on, the outlet sparks, and the entire fixture falls to the floor, crushing a priceless antique table on its way down. The scene cuts away to the outside of the house, looking through the clear bay window of the room where the man is standing. Suddenly, the light fixture comes flying through the picture window and lands in the yard. The words flash on the screen: “Need help?”

What Things Do You Need To Let Go Of?

Doing-it-yourself in home improvement doesn't always work, and this is also true in your personal life. We are all in desperate need of help when it comes to overcoming sinful habits and attitudes that keep us in bondage. To attempt to continue doing it yourself only leads to further frustration and disaster. Your faith is not a religion; it is a way of life. We must desire to have nothing to do with things that would cause us to stray from Biblical authority. To the Christian, this means the absolute death of our ego and a complete revival of our desire to live for Christ in our life.

Satan hates it when we express our faith in prayer, going to church, or attending a Bible study. While he hates these things, what he hates the most is for us to pray. If we stop this one thing, Satan will be happy. We are not people who were given a one-time assignment, then sent out on our own to do our best. As followers of Christ, we need to stay connected every day, all day long. Paul said we are to “*Pray without ceasing.*” That's how we experience His power, His presence, and His person.

“Wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be remembered and discussed.” Mark 14:9

At a dinner held to honor Jesus, Mary anointed Him with expensive perfume made from the essence of nard— a unique plant that grew only in the Himalayas. Mary's perfume cost the equivalent of a whole year's salary for a laborer in ancient Israel. Some Bible teachers believe the perfume Mary used to anoint Jesus was her perfume—a treasure, her most precious possession, she had been keeping for her wedding. Mary's generous gift to Jesus invoked strong negative responses. Some dinner guests rebuked her harshly, but Jesus commended her. Mary had done a “beautiful” thing. She had placed the perfume on Jesus to prepare Him for His death. (Mark 14:8) Leading up to this time, He had often said that He would be betrayed, killed, buried, and He would rise again. His disciples didn't seem to believe Him, for they didn't want it to happen. But Mary had been listening to Jesus, and she acted in faith to what she heard. Believing

His words, she lovingly ministered to Him in His last week before He went to the cross. She gave her very best to honor Him.

“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1

Have you struggled with doubts about your faith? Many still have unanswered questions. Despite all the unanswered questions, we have chosen to live by faith, not by sight, and in doing so, we’ve become able to truly witness how patient, just, loving, and amazing our God really is. Some of you have been a Christian for a long time, but you may struggle to find God in your everyday life. Some are silently questioning what they really believe. So, how can we “live by faith” in a world that tells us, “seeing is believing?”

We can choose to believe in order to see. Our society has become accustomed to needing proof of something to believe it is true. If you can’t explain it logically within your scope of human understanding, others tend to dismiss it. To dismiss faith on the premise of logic is to dismiss the point of faith. Faith defies our worldly logic and earthly understanding. God succeeds where our worldly logic fails! When we choose to believe and have faith in what we do not see, God will reveal Himself to us in ways that are undeniably, inexplicably, and unimaginably the work of something bigger and greater than ourselves. He does this through His creation, our innate moral compass and human conscience, His Word, His Son Jesus, and, among believers, through the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit.

We can read famous authors who have presented their case for Christ and for having faith in what we do not see. The truth is, we will never have all the answers. The Bible explains that there will never be conclusive evidence to prove to all humankind that He is the Creator. He has ordained that some questions remain unanswered to force us to lean on our faith. We will always have questions, but God is capable of things that are not humanly possible. The good news is, we don’t have to understand everything to follow God and be saved from a life of sin. We don’t need all the answers to step toward Jesus and choose to believe.

“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

We can consider God’s track record and trust in His promises. Someone who is trustworthy has a track record of following through on what they say they will do. They keep their promises. Let’s take a moment to look at God’s track record. Out of the hundreds of prophecies in the Bible that have come to pass, including Jesus’ birth (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:1), crucifixion (Psalm 22:16, Luke 23:33, John 20:25-27), death on the cross (Amos 8:9-10, Matthew 27:45), and His appearance to Saul, James, and hundreds of others three days later (Psalm 16:10, Matthew 28:1-10, Acts 2:22-32), every single one has been fulfilled, without error, down to the most intricate detail. God is batting a thousand. Knowing His track record, we can trust that God will keep His promises.

Consider this one from (Jeremiah 29:13): *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”* If you can trust in God’s promises of love, protection, forgiveness, strength,

wisdom, and guidance, then you can trust that He will reveal Himself to you when you earnestly seek Him. We do this by spending time in His Word, engaging in fellowship with other believers, and devoting time to knowing Him through prayer, and putting His Word into practice in our everyday life. You do this by keeping your mind and heart fixed on Him.

What Is God's Track Record In Your Life?

Building a relationship, having all the answers. Instead of asking, “Why me?” we should ask, “What can I learn from this experience? How can I use this as an opportunity to build my character, strengthen my faith, and become more like Christ? Instead of asking, “Where are you, Jesus?” you can move closer to God by prioritizing your time with Him, reading His Word daily, and participating in small groups. God’s love is constant and unchanging, so when you feel distant from Him, you are the one who has walked away.

“Come close to God, and he will come close to you. Clean up your lives, you sinners, and clear your minds, you doubters. Humble yourselves in the Lord’s presence...” James 4:8,10

Instead of asking, “How could You allow this to happen, God?” we can identify what we are feeling in that moment (e.g., lonely, heartbroken) and go to God in prayer for His comfort. God promises to bind up the wounds of the brokenhearted (Psalm 147:3), comfort us in our tribulation (2 Corinthians 1:3), lighten the load of the burdens we carry (Matthew 11:28-30), and deliver us out of our troubles (Psalm 34:17) if we belong to Him. It all starts by saying “yes” to God. Instead of asking, “What is your will for my life?” and waiting around for Him to hand us a detailed 30-year plan, we can seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance in our daily life and allow those decisions to determine our path. We can “pray for an open and willing heart” and “surrender to the Spirit’s leading with that friend, child, spouse, circumstance, or decision in our lives right now.”

When you focus on having all the answers, you steal precious time from investing in building your relationship with God and others – the two things in life that matter most. When you focus instead on building those relationships, your time and energy are used to develop the talents and resources God has given you to serve others so that you can leave a legacy that outlives you.

When you put your relationship with God first, setting aside our own desires to serve Him, we “live by faith” and learn what it means to be faithful, self-disciplined, compassionate, forgiving, humble, and loving.

Why do we need God for this? It is through a deep understanding of how we have been forgiven by Christ that we become able to truly forgive others. *“Be kind and compassionate to*

one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32) We can only fully and completely understand what it means to love unconditionally and forgive wholeheartedly when we experience it for ourselves, not just try to practice it on our own. This cannot be done simply by “being a good person” – to do this; we need to have faith in Jesus. When we choose to “live by faith” and accept Christ’s personal invitation to follow Him...

- We gain a personal understanding of true forgiveness, selflessness, and unconditional love at the most intimate level possible.
- We learn to emulate the example of someone who was God in the flesh while understanding what it means to die to our own flesh and live a life beyond what we are capable of on our own.
- Our lives can become stories of answered prayers, unexpected blessings, renewed perspectives, and new opportunities that would have otherwise never come our way.
- We become recipients of the mercy, patience, comfort, healing, strength, and love of God.
- As a reward for our faith, we experience the joy that succeeds our time on Earth and the eternal rewards that He has promised to those who choose to follow Him. We witness the power of God’s supernatural activity in our life on Earth and have the privilege of seeing what God will do with us beyond this life.

“And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Hebrews 11:6

If you’re struggling with doubt today, ask yourself, “Am I willing to hold on to that doubt and risk never having these opportunities?” Isn’t it worth letting go of doubt to risk ending up right back where you started then to wonder if there is something bigger and greater on the other side of your fear? You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by accepting Christ’s personal invitation to know Him, follow Him, and be made new by living your life according to His Word.

Is Your Conscience Prodding You To Do Something Today?

Some say, “Let your conscience be your guide.” Left to our conscience, we often go away from our faith rather than toward it when it comes to what God wants us to do. He wants us to do what

is Biblically sound. Our conscience is not His standard, nor should it be our guide. The best we can do cannot equate to God's standard of righteousness and holiness.

If you could find your way to goodness, you'd have no need for Jesus' death and resurrection. You would have no need of salvation. Your faith would be worthless. You'd have no need of the Holy Spirit. Because of your sinfulness, you need Jesus, and you need the Holy Spirit to guide you. A Native American who is also a Christian said this about our conscience: "In my heart, there is an arrowhead with three points to it. If I do wrong, the arrowhead turns and cuts me. If I do wrong too much, I wear out the points, and it doesn't hurt me quite so much. But when the pain is gone, watch out."

We should ask only one source for advice—Jesus. The devil can open doors and invite us into his world as well, but when Jesus chooses us, He gives us the tools necessary to thwart off the devil no matter how crafty he is.

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" Matthew 6:25

Notes From Reading:

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