

CROSSWALK

UNCOMF- ORTABLE

SEASON 2



A SERIES GUIDE

UNCOMFORTABLE

SEASON 2

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LOVEWELL CREATIVE
in Partnership with
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*For all those who love to be uncomfortable, look for
uncomfortable, and are willing to live uncomfortable lives.*

INTRODUCTION

Welcome back to our Uncomfortable series. As you know, we are packing some of our series into two different packages. Getting to the second half of the year, we will see some familiar series come back to go deeper into the concepts and texts we have begun exploring in the first seasons of these series.

This second season of the Uncomfortable series will discuss uncomfortable people, diversity, worship, unity, and comfort. I, for one, look forward to these conversations, sermons, studies, and the opportunity to grow in uncomfortable situations as a child of God and someone who would like to represent Christ more in all that I do.

Becoming comfortable with discomfort is something that we all have to strive to do. I was listening to a podcast with a former Navy SEAL and was blown away by what the SEALs were expected to become comfortable with. Most of their training was based on the idea that they were trying to make you uncomfortable and deeply distressed so they could handle anything thrown at them. It seemed almost intolerable. However, this former SEAL seemed to relish what he became through the process.

Have you ever thought that God could use these situations to grow you toward the person God wants you to be? I don't believe that God sends hardship and suffering to us, but I do know that God can use

anything to teach us to become the people he envisions us to be. Without adversity, we may never reach our potential. So being people who can handle discomfort means that we have learned to trust in God in those difficult moments, uncomfortable situations, and being pushed outside of our comfort zones.

So, let us get started being uncomfortable once again. This time, I swear we won't make someone who has never played Cello do it in front of the congregation-3 times!!! However, you never know what you might get with this Uncomfortable Series!

Thanks so much for joining us on this journey of discomfort.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tim', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Pastor Tim and the Series Guide Writing team.

DAY 1

UNCOMFORTABLE PEOPLE



The church is filled with weird and crazy people. We can admit this to one another. It doesn't sound like the most excellent thing to say about church people. But we are all a little crazy at times.

Have you ever had that conversation with someone so awkward that neither of you knew what to say? You get to that point in the conversation where you are unsure whether to break it off or go in for more, but it will be uncomfortable.

This may not be anyone's fault, but it does create some awkwardness along the way. And we have to be ready to live with some of that awkwardness if we are going to be in a community with one another. Today, we will discuss the first "most awkward conversation" recorded in scripture. We find it in Genesis 3.

Genesis 3:1 The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he

asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

2 “Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied.³ “It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”

4 “You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. 5 “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

6 The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful, and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. 7 At that moment, their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

8 When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. 9 Then the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

10 He replied, “I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.”

11 “Who told you that you were naked?” the Lord God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”

12 The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”

13 Then the Lord God asked the woman, “What have you done?”

“The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”

The last few sentences are the ones that create an uncomfortable situation for all involved. God is creating some room for grace, confession, and forgiveness. But all that Adam and Eve want to do is blame one another and ultimately, God for the situation they find themselves in. How often do we do this same thing?

It is uncomfortable to take responsibility for our actions. It is almost so painful that we simply don’t do it. Like Adam and Eve, we are willing to blame other people, blame God but rarely blame ourselves for where we are.

What would happen if we were willing to be very present in our understanding of who and what we are? If we all were willing to stand up and speak to the reality of what we had put ourselves through, while at the same time creating a space for grace for not just ourselves but for others as well, I think we would

DAY 2

NOAH GETS NAKED



Genesis 9:18 The sons of Noah who came out of the boat with their father were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham is the father of Canaan.) 19 From these three sons of Noah came all the people who now populate the earth.

20 After the flood, Noah began to cultivate the ground, and he planted a vineyard. 21 One day he drank some wine he had made, and he became drunk and lay naked inside his tent. 22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw that his father was naked and went outside and told his brothers. 23 Then Shem and Japheth took a robe, held it over their shoulders, and backed into the tent to cover their father. As they did this, they looked the other way so they would not see him naked.

24 When Noah woke up from his stupor, he learned what Ham, his youngest son, had done. 25 Then he cursed Canaan, the son of Ham: “May Canaan be

cursed! May he be the lowest of servants to his relatives.”

26 Then Noah said, “May the Lord, the God of Shem, be blessed, and may Canaan be his servant!

27 May God expand the territory of Japheth!
May Japheth share the prosperity of Shem, -and may Canaan be his servant.”

28 Noah lived another 350 years after the great flood.
29 He lived 950 years, and then he died.

This has always been an uncomfortable story to me. There are a few reasons why. First, just the fact that he grew a vineyard first, and then got drunk pretty quickly (I mean, it would have taken months) seems pretty significant. Did he plant anything else? Was he willing or able to grill up some vegetables as well, or was it just straight to the wine?

Also, the fact that a son saw the father naked. Always weird.

But then the punishment was because the son viewed the father naked. Is that fair? Noah put his son in this sort of situation, and yet the son was punished for it. Did the son know when he entered the tent that Noah was naked? It seems like it might have been so uncomfortable for him that he went right out and told his brothers they had to do something to fix the situation. Either way, it seems we are left with a

dilemma; what do we do with this text and this deeply uncomfortable situation?

First, Noah needed to take responsibility for his drunkenness rather than pass the punishment to his son. I've never been comfortable with this. Secondly, why didn't the other sons stand up to Noah for the sake of the son who saw him naked? Couldn't they have intervened and helped a little with this awkward family situation?

For whatever reason, the biblical narrative doesn't let us know anything other than what we have just read, so we are in the midst of something uncomfortable without many opportunities to make things less uncomfortable.

Throughout my years of pastoral ministry, I have been in the midst of some pretty uncomfortable situations with families and have been surprised at how willing some people are to bring one more person into their awkward situations. It is when you must find patience, wisdom, and sometimes compassion for those you minister to.

We all probably become comfortable with a certain level of family and the strangeness that comes with every family system, but when we are introduced to a new one, it seems even crazier! This is the issue when you marry someone. You are used to YOUR family's crazy, not someone else's families crazy.

DAY 3

HAMAN FORCED TO HONOR MORDECAI



The King Honors Mordecai

Esther 6:1 That night the king had trouble sleeping, so he ordered an attendant to bring the book of the history of his reign so it could be read to him. 2 In those records he discovered an account of how Mordecai had exposed the plot of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the eunuchs who guarded the door to the king's private quarters. They had plotted to assassinate King Xerxes.

3 “What reward or recognition did we ever give Mordecai for this?” the king asked.

His attendants replied, “Nothing has been done for him.”

4 “Who is that in the outer court?” the king inquired. As it happened, Haman had just arrived in the outer court of the palace to ask the king to impale Mordecai on the pole he had prepared.

5 So the attendants replied to the king, “Haman is out in the court.”

“Bring him in,” the king ordered. 6 So Haman came in, and the king said, “What should I do to honor a man who truly pleases me?”

Haman thought to himself, “Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?” 7 So he replied, “If the king wishes to honor someone, 8 he should bring out one of the king’s own royal robes, as well as a horse that the king himself has ridden—one with a royal emblem on its head. 9 Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king’s most noble officials. And let him see that the man whom the king wishes to honor is dressed in the king’s robes and led through the city square on the king’s horse. Have the official shout as they go, ‘This is what the king does for someone he wishes to honor!’”

10 “Excellent!” the king said to Haman. “Quick! Take the robes and my horse, and do just as you have said for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the gate of the palace. Leave out nothing you have suggested!”

11 So Haman took the robes and put them on Mordecai, placed him on the king’s own horse, and led him through the city square, shouting, “This is what

the king does for someone he wishes to honor!” 12 Afterward Mordecai returned to the palace gate, but Haman hurried home dejected and completely humiliated.

13 When Haman told his wife, Zeresh, and all his friends what had happened, his wise advisers and his wife said, “Since Mordecai—this man who has humiliated you—is of Jewish birth, you will never succeed in your plans against him. It will be fatal to continue opposing him.”

14 While they were still talking, the king’s eunuchs arrived and quickly took Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared.

This story is such a great misdirect. It begins one way, and then ends in another way entirely. It has always been a story that seemed like such divine retribution, yet it was almost tongue-in-cheek. Haman thinks the reward is his. However, it is given to Mordecai instead.

There have been times when I have been up for awards but didn’t receive them. I have even been up for jobs and didn’t get them. These are times of deep frustration, sadness, and disappointment that can be really hard to process.

We know that Haman deserved this little frustration, as he is the villain in the Biblical narrative, constantly manipulating things for his benefit and to the detriment of others. He is not a nice guy, a snake in the

DAY 4

JESUS CALLS OUT HIS BETRAYER



John 13: 18 “I am not saying these things to all of you; I know the ones I have chosen. But this fulfills the Scripture that says, ‘The one who eats my food has turned against me.’ 19 I tell you this beforehand, so that when it happens you will believe that I am the Messiah. 20 I tell you the truth, anyone who welcomes my messenger is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming the Father who sent me.”

21 Now Jesus was deeply troubled, and he exclaimed, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me!”

22 The disciples looked at each other, wondering whom he could mean. 23 The disciple Jesus loved was sitting next to Jesus at the table. 24 Simon Peter motioned to him to ask, “Who’s he talking about?” 25 So that disciple leaned over to Jesus and asked, “Lord, who is it?”

26 Jesus responded, “It is the one to whom I give the bread I dip in the bowl.” And when he had dipped it, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. 27 When Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus told him, “Hurry and do what you’re going to do.” 28 None of the others at the table knew what Jesus meant. 29 Since Judas was their treasurer, some thought Jesus was telling him to go and pay for the food or to give some money to the poor. 30 So Judas left at once, going out into the night.

This story comes to us amid the Lord’s Supper narrative, right after Jesus had washed everyone’s feet. So there must have been a sense of solemnity around the room. All who were there would have recognized the gravity of what they were experiencing, probably knowing things were due for a change, and quickly. So Jesus does something he was actually pretty good at doing.

He calls out his betrayer.

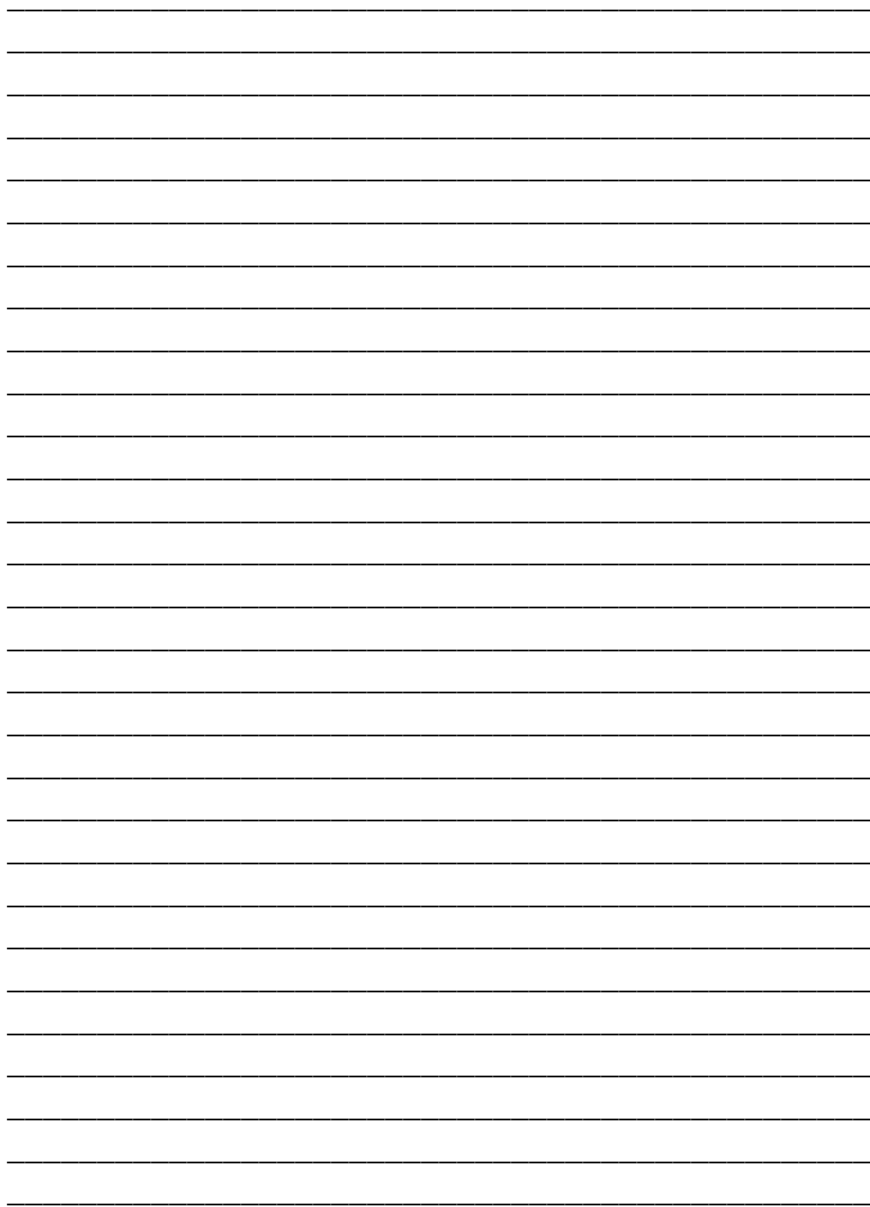
This scene is indelibly etched into my mind from watching the musical GODSPELL in the ’70s. At that time, there wasn’t much that we could watch on television, and indeed, not much we could watch on Sabbath. We had a VHS tape of some nature documentary, a series on the life of Paul with Sir Anthony Hopkins—I still think Paul looks like Hannibal Lecter with a beard—and a pirated version of Godspell (I think my parents may have liked the music).

But they were sitting around the table, saying, “is it me Lord?” in a very staccato pacing. When it comes to Judas, Jesus says, “Do what you must,” and Judas runs off. For some reason, I will never forget that. It must have been awkward and uncomfortable for everyone. Especially as Jesus had just taken a “bowl and a basin and redefined greatness.” (The Celebration of Disciplines, Foster)

This discomfort can be seen in the gospel accounts, almost a foreshadowing of the fateful kiss that he gave to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. To have been in the room must have been a masterclass in what it means to feel uncomfortable for someone. Yet Jesus did not banish Judas but allowed him to do what he had planned to do.

Why is that? I have always wondered why Jesus didn't just stop him from his nefarious machinations and then Jesus could have continued his ministry for a bit longer. For some reason, Jesus seemed resigned to letting this scenario play out how it would. It is easy for us to remind ourselves that Jesus knew what would happen, and had almost ordained it to happen, but the “what if's” still bug me.

1. Have you ever called out someone you knew was in the midst of betraying you?
2. Did you let them get away with it? Or did you call them off?
3. What does betrayal look like in today's world?
4. How would you deal with it if it had to do with church?



DAY 5

GOD CONFIRMS HIS COVENANT WITH ABRAM



Abram Is Named Abraham

Genesis 17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty.’ Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. 2 I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to give you countless descendants.”

3 At this, Abram fell face down on the ground. Then God said to him, 4 “This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of a multitude of nations! 5 What’s more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram. Instead, you will be called Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations. 6 I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them!

7 “I will confirm my covenant with you and your descendants after you, from generation to generation. This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 And I will give the entire land of Canaan, where you now live as a foreigner, to you and your descendants. It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God.”

The Mark of the Covenant

9 Then God said to Abraham, “Your responsibility is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility. 10 This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised. 11 You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 From generation to generation, every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This applies not only to members of your family but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased. 13 All must be circumcised. Your bodies will bear the mark of my everlasting covenant. 14 Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant.”

Well, this is awkward and uncomfortable. And it is not the circumcision that I am talking about. Rather, it is that phrase in the very first verse: “serve me faithfully and live a blameless life.” This is coming to Abram (Abraham) when he is 99 years old, and has not lived a blameless life.

Abram has had a sordid past. And let us not forget about the whole episode with Hagar and Ishmael (Ch.16). God seems to want to start something new with Abram, so much so that he was willing to give Abram a new name and even give his wife a new name.

Have you ever had a nickname that you didn't like? I've had a few, and I always loved going to a new place because those nicknames would usually be left behind with the old crew and place. It would usually take a while for the new crew to develop something that captured who I was for those new people and that new situation.

Abraham, who has not made the best decisions over the last few years or decades, is now admonished to be faithful and blameless from here on out. This is uncomfortable because he was still the same guy who had been asked to leave the city of Ur and follow where God was leading him. To his credit, he did just that; however, he also made a few mistakes along the way.

What I find uncomfortable is the incredible trust God is willing to put toward Abraham after his foolish mistakes. Is God really ready to love and trust us this much?

He is willing to love and trust us in ridiculous and uncomfortable ways. While this is good news, it can also create an uncomfortable situation in that God seems to charge us more than we often trust. Is God

DAY 6

JACOB GETS THE WRONG WIFE.



Genesis 29:14 . . . After Jacob had stayed with Laban for about a month, **15** Laban said to him, “You shouldn’t work for me without pay just because we are relatives. Tell me how much your wages should be.”

16 Now Laban had two daughters. The older daughter was named Leah, and the younger one was Rachel.

17 There was no sparkle in Leah’s eyes, but Rachel had a beautiful figure and a lovely face. **18** Since Jacob was in love with Rachel, he told her father, “I’ll work for you for seven years if you’ll give me Rachel, your younger daughter, as my wife.”

19 “Agreed!” Laban replied. “I’d rather give her to you than to anyone else. Stay and work with me.” **20** So Jacob worked seven years to pay for Rachel. But his love for her was so strong that it seemed to him but a few days.

21 Finally, the time came for him to marry her. “I have fulfilled my agreement,” Jacob said to Laban. “Now give me my wife so I can sleep with her.”

22 So Laban invited everyone in the neighborhood and prepared a wedding feast. **23** But that night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. **24** (Laban had given Leah a servant, Zilpah, to be her maid.)

25 But when Jacob woke up in the morning—it was Leah! “What have you done to me?” Jacob raged at Laban. “I worked seven years for Rachel! Why have you tricked me?”

26 “It’s not our custom here to marry off a younger daughter ahead of the firstborn,” Laban replied.

27 “But wait until the bridal week is over; then we’ll give you Rachel, too—provided you promise to work another seven years for me.”

28 So Jacob agreed to work seven more years. A week after Jacob had married Leah, Laban gave him Rachel, too. **29** (Laban gave Rachel a servant, Bilhah, to be her maid.) **30** So Jacob slept with Rachel, too, and he loved her much more than Leah. He then stayed and worked for Laban the additional seven years.

That might be the most uncomfortable story of all! Jacob really thought he was going to get everything he was hoping for when he tried to marry Rachel. Imagine the shock he must have gone through when all was revealed and he figured out what had happened.

In the text it even says that Jacob “raged” at Laban for the mistake, which didn’t seem much like a mistake. It seemed as if it was a dirty play on Laban’s part.

To even understand this story we have to put away our preconceived notions of what marriage is supposed to be. While Laban certainly pulled a “fast one” on Jacob, it was not so unusual for someone to have more than one wife at that time. The fact that there was deception involved makes it more uncomfortable for us, and Laban’s inability to deal honestly with Jacob is a poor example for us.

But the point is actually that there are a great deal of things that don’t fit our cultural/religious paradigm. When these things were taking place, they were commonplace and no one would bat an eye. We live in different times, and therefore we need to learn to exegete the principles out of the story, and not so much the exact behavior or circumstances.

When we try to make the ancient conform to our understanding of how things should be, we miss a great deal of the point of these stories. As a pastor, one of my jobs is to help create the connection between the principles we see in scripture and our modern lives. In some places in scripture it is easy. But for some of these Old Testament stories, things are a lot more difficult to create that connection.

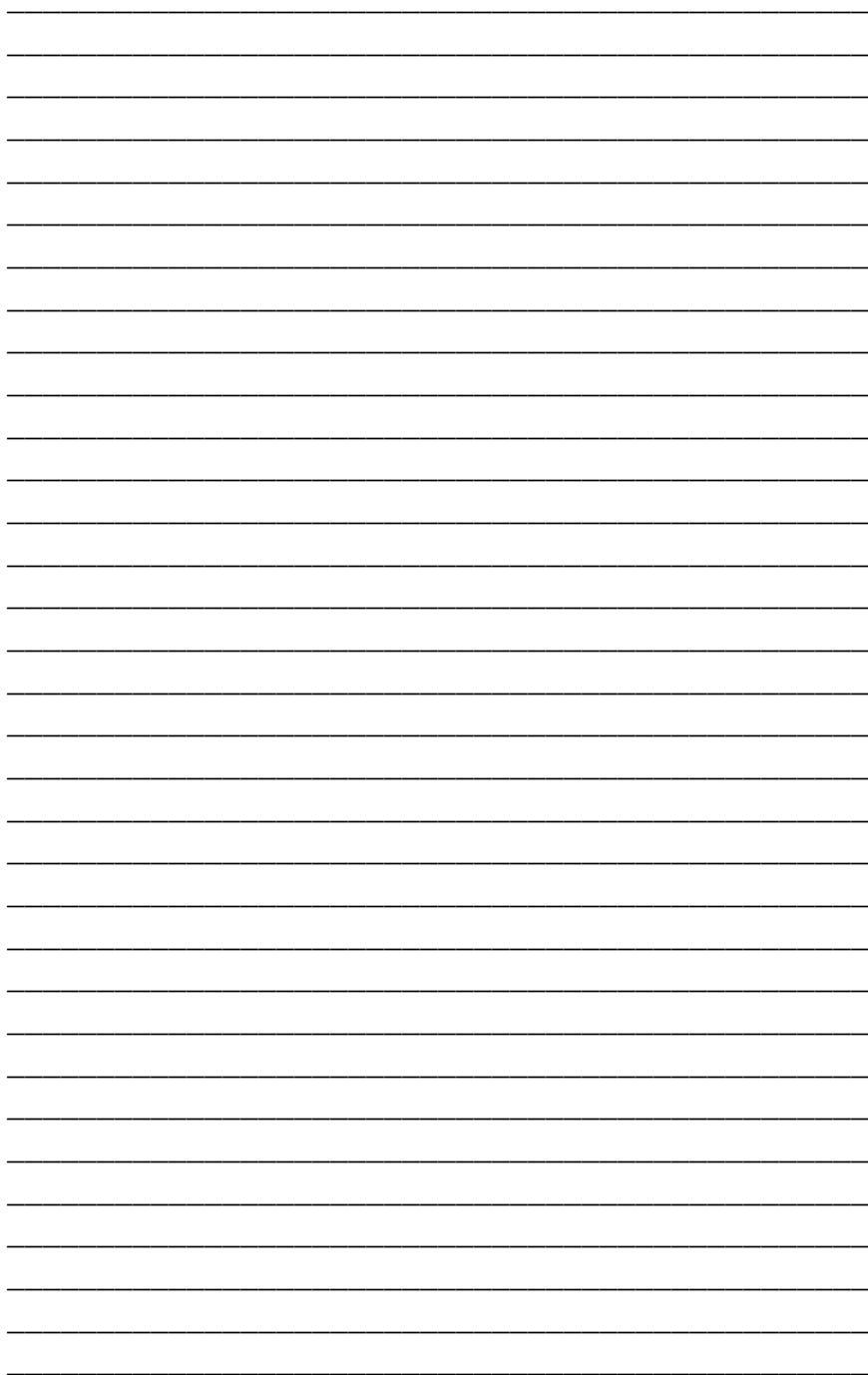
In this story, we see the obvious problem of deceitfulness, but for some reason, Jacob seems to accept it, take Rachel as his wife after a week, and then stays for the rest of the seven years that Laban suggested. What are we supposed to learn from this story? Is that we are to simply take it when

someone deceives us? That we should always make sure to lift the veil at our weddings to make sure we are not being hoodwinked? What is the point that is trying to be made in this story?

It may be a simple point that is to be made. It may be that during the uncomfortable situations that we find ourselves in, there is the possibility of remaining faithful. Even in the uncomfortable situations that we find ourselves in, we should not be discouraged from working toward the result that God has for us.

Well, we can leave you in the uncomfortable not knowing what the exact point could be. What we do know, is that Jacob had an amazing amount of faith, even when he had been deceived in a pretty serious manner.

1. Have you ever been deceived but still had to make good on your promise?
2. What does this story tell us about honesty, commitment, and following through?
3. Would you ever work for seven years for a wife/husband?



DAY 7

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

What are some of your all-time pet peeves that other people do that drive you crazy? Have you ever had someone in your life who you never thought you'd become friends or allies, but at some point that change? What happened?

HEAD

The call to lovewell, means loving those that we may disagree with, or in Jesus' terms, even in our enemies. This study dives into some concepts of our call to love, to listen, and to seek to live at peace with others.

1. Read the following verses together, then reflect on any any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come from the reading: Matthew 5: 43-48, Matthew 18: 15-20, James 1: 19, John 17: 20-21, Romans 12: 14-18.
2. In the Matthew 5 text, Jesus ends that text by saying, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”. What is the context of this type of “perfection”? Is it morality, behavior, or something else?
3. What does loving enemies, praying for those who persecute you, or as Jesus said a few verses earlier, “turning the other cheek,” do to help build relationships and bring a little of heaven to earth?
4. In both Matthew 18 and James 1: 19, what are some key takeaways as to how to deal with disagreements or issues with a brother/sister in Christ? (remember, this was talking about people in the family of God)
5. Jesus prayed for us to have unity. What is unity? Is it agreeing on everything? Is it uniformity? Why do you think unity is important for believers and how does it help others to know we are His followers?
6. Romans 12 gives us some tough commands, uncomfortable commands. How do we go about living in harmony with those different than us? The line, “as far as it is possible, live in peace with one another;” what can we take from this thought that both challenges us and comforts us?

HEART

1. Why do you think Jesus and the NT make such a point to teach us how to get along with one another?
2. It seems the art of truly listening to people's stories, instead of jumping to conclusions or judging them, seems to be going by the wayside. How can you and I practice listening more and judging less?
3. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He said, "blessed are the peacemakers," not the peacekeepers, but peacemakers. How do we go about making peace in the world around us?

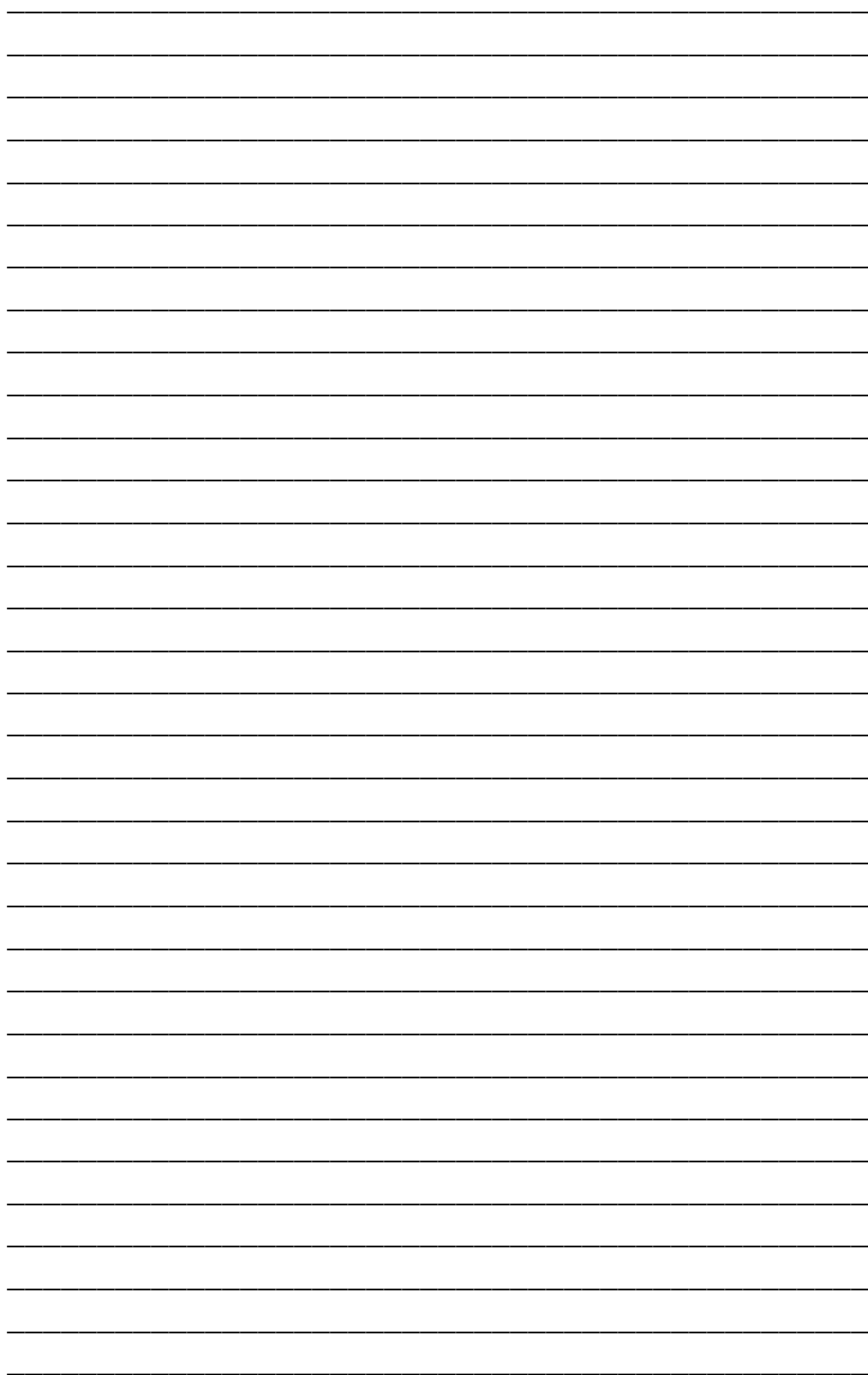
HANDS

This week, consider someone you struggle to connect with, or share a lot of differing opinions with, or struggle to understand. Pray about a way to connect with them. Maybe ask them out for coffee to listen to their story, perform an act of kindness for them, or see where the Spirit leads to build a bridge of connection even if it's uncomfortable.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

-Romans 12:9-13 NIV



DAY 8

THE COST OF WORSHIP



2 Samuel 24:**18** On that day Gad went to David and said to him, “Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” **19** So David went up, as the Lord had commanded through Gad. **20** When Araunah looked and saw the king and his officials coming toward him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground.

We see David following the will of God. This is a quick truth that we need to recognize. Worship starts with obedience. We go where God leads, and worship is often the fuel that takes us there. However, there is a price to be paid. Obedience is that price. So we see David again following God in what he should do and his next steps.

He was told to build an altar. An altar is a memorial to something in the past. It's the same idea as a gravestone or a

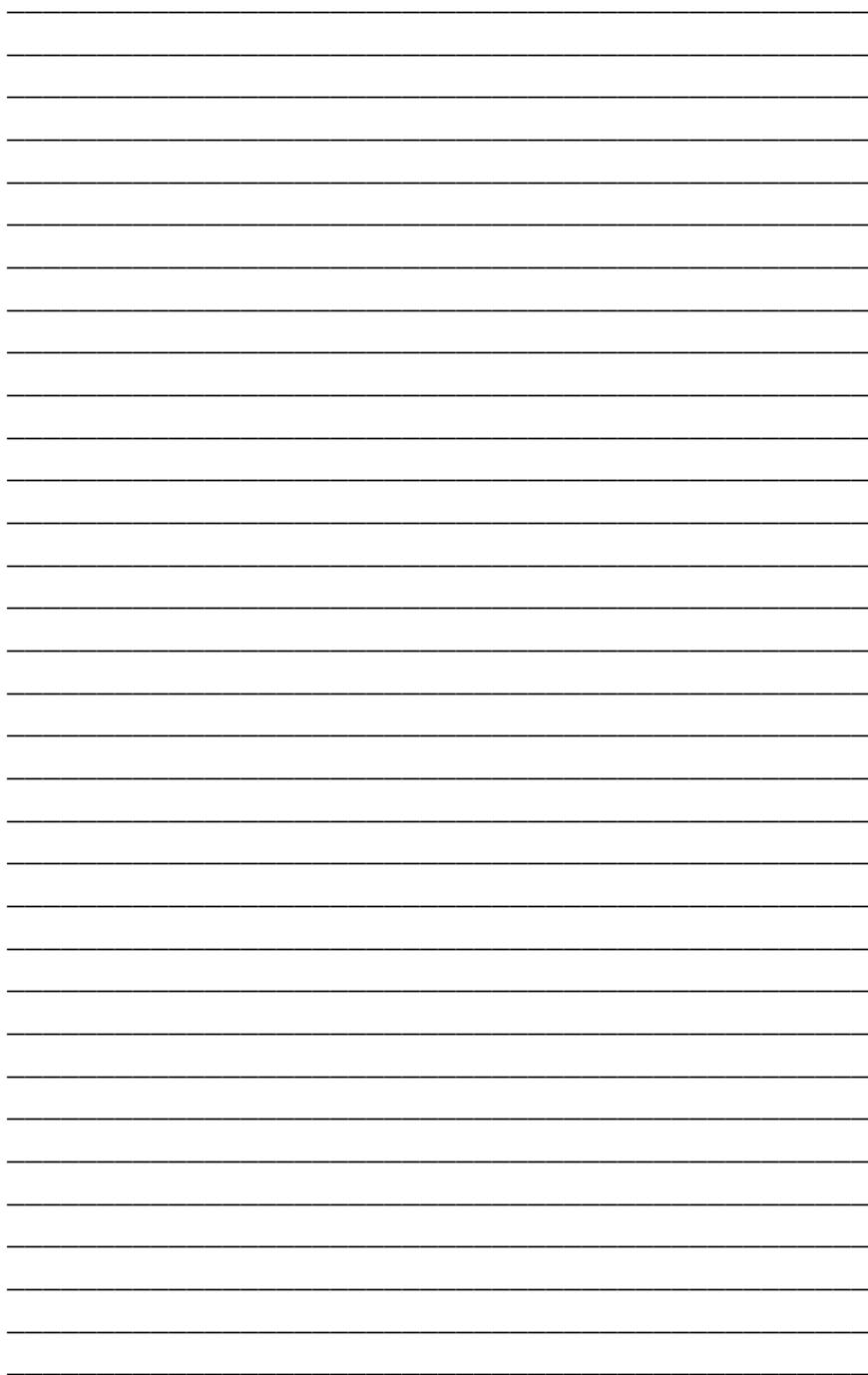
sign on the freeway commemorating someone who has gone before. But an altar, usually a pile of stones, commemorates how God has moved in the past and teaches us how God will move in the present and future.

So the Israelites were walking into the future backward, always keeping their eyes on what God was doing. Walking backward into the future lets us recognize and keep in our hearts the way that God has been good to us. We recognize his good works, hopes, and dreams for us, and we always keep present in our minds the goodness of God.

We also see the obedience of Araunah the Jebusite. When he saw his king and the entourage show up, he threw himself on the ground. This is obedience to his king. He was not too proud that he wouldn't bow to his king. While there might have been civic consequences if he didn't, we see this Jebusite honoring the hierarchy of Israel.

In the same way, our worship begins with obedience. God asks us to do big things, but they usually begin with a small ask of God in our lives. For the disciples, it was to go to the hill God had asked them to go to. It might be something else for us, but the cost of worship begins with obedience to the ask of God in our lives.

1. What price would you pay to worship God?
2. Have you ever thought about what you can give God before you worship?
3. What is God asking for obedience for in your life right now?



DAY 9

HOLY GROUND?



21. Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?”

“To buy your threshing floor,” David answered, “so I can build an altar to the Lord, that the plague on the people may be stopped.”

A few things are happening in this text that are worth noting. The first is that Araunah asked a reasonable and thoughtful question about what was happening. He knew something important was going on but wanted to ensure he knew his role. Secondly, David recognized that placing an altar of protection where the Lord had asked him would be a shield for the people and the plague would be stopped.

I have always thought that this text reminds us that when we create altars to God, places where people might be able to

worship and remember God, those places become Holy and consecrated.

But those places don't always start out that way. David was buy a threshing floor for grain. Not something particularly holy, but it was useful. It would have had enough space to build the altar with stones, and it would have been where people could see it. However, it wouldn't be holy until God inhabited their worship.

This somewhat reminds me of when Moses was in the desert in Sinai and saw a burning bush. The voice in the bush told him that he was standing on Holy Ground. However, he wasn't. He was standing on dirt. It was probably the same dirt that he had been standing on for years at this point. But when God showed up, the mundane becomes extraordinary, the things you think are secular or neutral become holy, and their meaning and existence change.

The same is true when we build an altar to God through worship. We are then standing on Holy Ground, or driving in a Holy Car, or our homes become sanctuaries for the Holy Spirit. Worship doesn't make things holy, but it allows for a space for the Holy Spirit to show up, and then everything changes to holy and sacred, and the presence of God can be seen.

1. What is God making Holy in your life through where and when you worship?
2. What can we give to God with the places and spaces of our lives where God can show up and be remembered?
3. Where is your holy ground?

DAY 10

THE ABUNDANCE OF WORSHIP



22 Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take whatever he wishes and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. **23** Your Majesty, Araunah^[d] gives all this to the king.” Araunah also said to him, “May the Lord your God accept you.”

The story continues, and we see something amazing. Araunah tells David that he can have whatever he wants. Now, why did he do this? Did he do it because David was king and it would be good to give the king anything he wants?

Perhaps.

Could it be because Araunah wanted to make sure that God had everything that was needed to create an altar of protection for his people? That could absolutely be true as well.

But I don't want to forget a principle that we live by at Crosswalk Church, and that is that we believe in the abundance of God. We believe that when God asks us to do something, then God also provides the means, the space, the time and the people to make it happen. We worship God in his abundance for all of the great things that he has done and that he will do for his people, and Araunah understood this, and wanted to be part of the solution, part of the miracle, and part of the protection that the altar would provide.

A quick note. I don't believe, and neither should you, that the group of stones that made up the altar had any supernatural significance. Rather, it is simply a reminder of what God has done and a promise of what God will continue to do in our lives. What we see in this story is that both of these men were willing to create a space for worship, for remembering, for protection and a place for God on that threshing floor. That floor is nothing special, until God shows up.

Where is the threshing floor in your life right now? That place where God can come inhabit? What is God looking to make holy in your life through his presence and your remembering the good that God has done in your life?

DAY 11

COUNTING THE COST



24 But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

Let’s sit on this phrase momentarily: I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.

Do we say that? I know that we don’t offer burnt sacrifices to God, at least not how we used to in biblical times. Rather, we do offer our burnt-out lives, our over-retailed, over-worked, overly-connected mess of the lives that we live and give them to God in worship.

While we don’t offer burnt offerings, we do often offer burnt-up lives. We have sacrificed our lives on so many altars

over the years that it sometimes feels like we have nothing to offer God.

But here is the beautiful thing: God is willing to take those sacrifices, as burnt-up as they already are, and make something beautiful and new. We are without blemish and mark when we are made new by Christ. We are new creations.

Back to the text. David understood that there is a cost to worshiping God, and there is a cost to living our lives for Christ. David was unwilling to sacrifice things that he had not paid a price for. He couldn't give God something that was not his, something that was someone else's and he was only borrowing.

In the same way, our worship must come from us, from our hearts. I have watched people who didn't want to be in Worship and couldn't get the words from their hearts. Some stand in our congregations who cannot worship because they cannot see the altars in their lives. They cannot see where God has been good, has walked with them, and has been for them. They are in a place where they cannot connect with the goodness and greatness of God.

It would be easy to say that they are unwilling to submit or need to open their hearts more. That is too simplistic. Worship, true worship, comes from a desire to honor God for what he has done, to recognize his goodness, and to present ourselves, in all our mess, to God and allow him the power over our lives. But when we can't see where God has been good, then we can't find a place in our hearts to worship.

DAY 12

DAVID BUILDS AND ALTAR



25 David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt and fellowship offerings. Then the Lord answered his prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.

So, having sacrificed and understood the cost of this worship, David goes about building an altar. These altars were not works of art; they were essentially heaps of stones that were placed conspicuously to help people remember what it is that God had done. It is a reminder of God's goodness and willingness to partner with his people repeatedly. When we look to the future, we always keep one eye on the past to know how good God has been and will be.

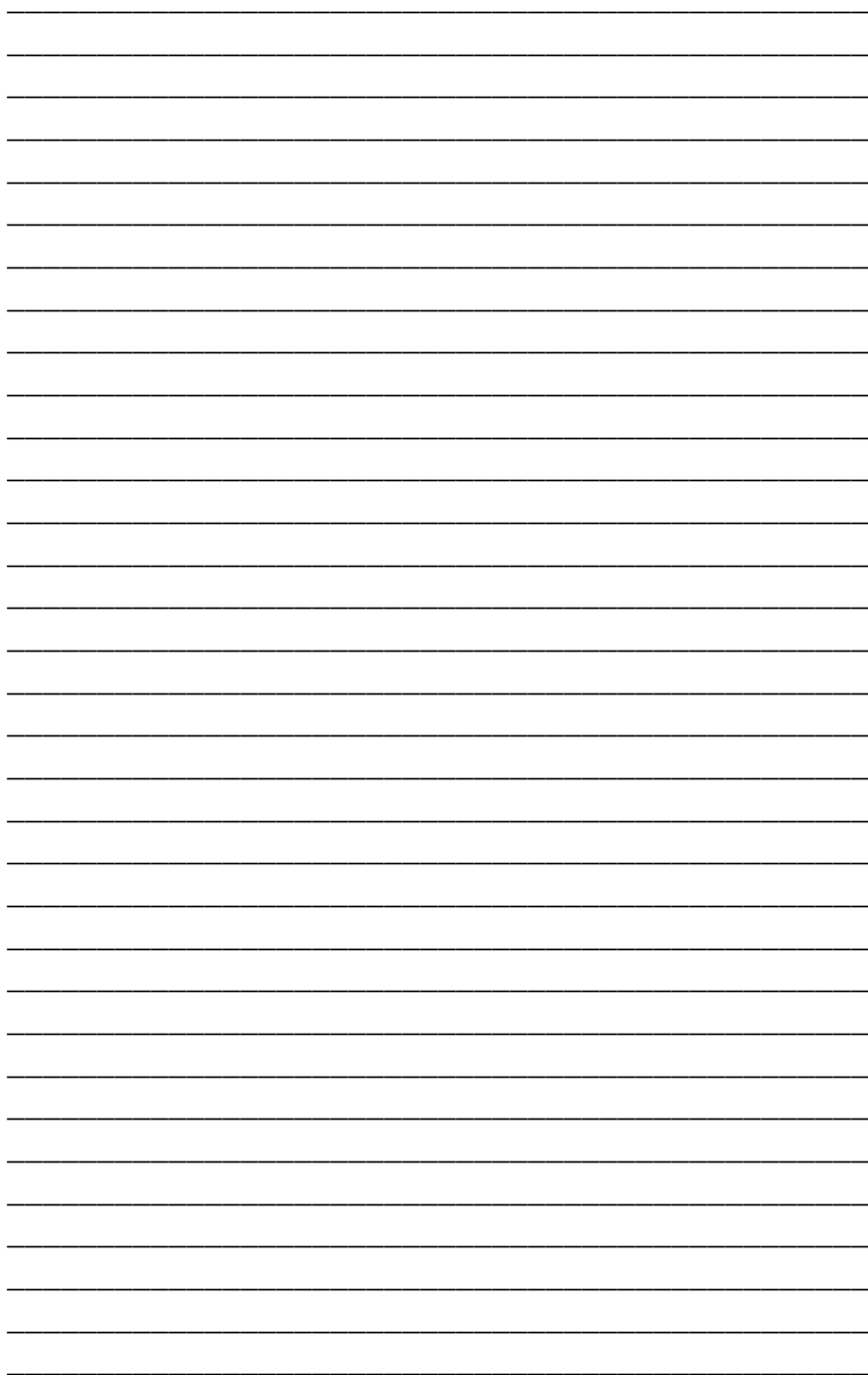
David took the time to build this altar by hand. He had paid the price for the sacrifice, but his hands' work also mattered. While he is king, he builds this with his own hands, his own

sweat, and his own blood. It is a form of worship, the back-breaking work of putting those rocks in place to look back and always see what God has done. Also, there was a promise that the plague would end, becoming another reminder of God's graciousness and love for us.

I am sure you get it at this point. Altars point to the past and how God has been good, but they also point to the future as we anticipate God's continued goodness. So why do we live as if there is no hope, no point, and no joy to the lives we have been given in Christ? (I know painting with such a massive brush is unfair.) But we sometimes live like we have forgotten God's goodness and grace. There is always a danger in forgetting the past!

Unfortunately, forgetting the past is dangerous because it affects our understanding of the future and what God is doing. We are repeatedly reminded that there is a hope that we live with that gives us motivation and security, drives us forward, and propels us to the next blessing of God in our lives. While we can't always see what God is doing in the present, the past reminds us of our future. Walking toward the future backward, with an eye on the past, allows us to continue the journey in the sight and security of God.

1. What altars remind you of what God has done do you have in your life?
 2. How do you walk backward into the future?
 3. There are always times when God is working; what can you put in place as a reminder?
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DAY 13

HOW TO BUILD AN ALTAR



As we finish this week, I want you to think about how you build altars in your life to the goodness of God.

Many of us collect things. Some do it as a hobby, some as a vocation, and some of us get weird about it. I spent years collecting Coca-Cola cans, bottles, pins, and other paraphernalia. I started this when I was about eight years old. I'm not even sure if I was the one who decided that this would be a good thing to collect; it might have been my parents. Needless to say by the time that I was 16 I had way too much of this stuff. Not all of it was junk. It turned out that when you collect something, everyone helps. I had commemorative cans, shirts, hats, and so much other stuff that finally found its way to the thrift stores of the Inland Empire.

I had collected so much that a single item didn't mean much to me anymore. This is the problem with gathering too much; it becomes less valuable.

When building an altar for the good things God has done in your life, be selective, lean into the big things that God has done, and make the altar something you can't ignore.

The next things I collected in my travels were the Asterix comics that are popular in Europe. There are only about 30 of these books; it took me years to get them all. They are funny, artistic, historic, and mean a great deal to me. I have them all, and my kids have read them all as well. I even now have them all on a PDF that I take with me at all times.

However, there are 30 of them, and I don't have times and places attached to each. Still, too many.

Then there is the art that we have inherited from my parents. Miro's, Hundartwasser, Agam, and many more. I can remember when each was purchased, and they have meaning to me. There are only a few, and scarcity creates a bit more meaning.

We probably won't build altars to the everyday work of God in our lives, and our simple living should be those living altars. But when something big happens, make something memorable and unignorable so that when you look at it, you realize that God has been so good to you that you cannot forget.

1. Do you have anything that marks a big occasion? (Tattoos, Piercings, or anything else?)
2. What kind of altar would be unignorable?
3. What is the biggest thing God has done for you?

DAY 14

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Has there been a time in your life when you worshipped with reckless abandonment, not hindered by the thoughts of those around you? Or, has there been a time you wanted to, but couldn't because you worried about how you might be perceived? Share.

HEAD

Our worship, when done fully and completely to the glory of God, can be uncomfortable for us at times and for the people around us. Let us see what we can glean from the following two experiences about worshipping God with all of our heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6: 5)

1. Read 2 Samuel 6: 13-16 and 20-22 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts from the reading.
2. The ark of the covenant, which represented the Lord's presence with His people, was being returned to God's chosen. David, danced before the Lord with all his might. Why do you think David was so excited in this moment?
3. Do you think David cared much about what the people around him were thinking about his behavior? Why or why not?
4. In your opinion, why was his wife Michael so embarrassed by David's behavior?
5. David said he was willing to become even more undignified if it would bring glory to God. What allowed him this posture of devotion to the Lord?
6. Read Luke 19: 28-40 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts from the reading.
7. The children of Israel began thinking that this was the moment when the Messiah would be crowned king and finally rescue them from their oppressors. It was a moment to rejoice. Why was it so uncomfortable, even seen by the Pharisees as in need of rebuke?
8. Jesus said in verse 40 that if the people kept quiet, the very stones would cry out. What do you think this meant?
9. How do you and I worship freely when facing opposition?

HEART

1. When we're instructed to worship the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, it means our entire being. What holds us back from this, at least in corporate settings?
2. If you've ever been able to worship like David, what was that like and what was happening that allowed you to enter into that space?
3. How can you and I practice unhindered worship, even in spaces where others might judge? Is there ever a reason to hold back in worship (ex: a place where you're unhindered worship may be a distraction to someone else)?

HANDS

This week, take some time privately to worship God in a way that maybe you haven't done before, or you haven't done in a way. Push yourself to worship with all your heart, soul, and strength, even if it's uncomfortable, whatever that means for you. If that means hands lifted high, or mouth closed and listening, or memorizing a passage in scripture until it becomes a part of you. Try some different things to seek in your way to dance before the Lord.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

“Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise

*him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.”*

Psalms 150:1-6 NIV

DAY 15

UNCOMFORTABLE DIVERSITY



All people were created in God’s image. It is really that simple. The story of creation gives us an understanding that everyone who God has created has been imbued with God’s own image, and that image is not only excellent but reflective of God’s values.

In Genesis the author tells us: **1:26** Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image. He created them in God’s image; male and female, he created them.

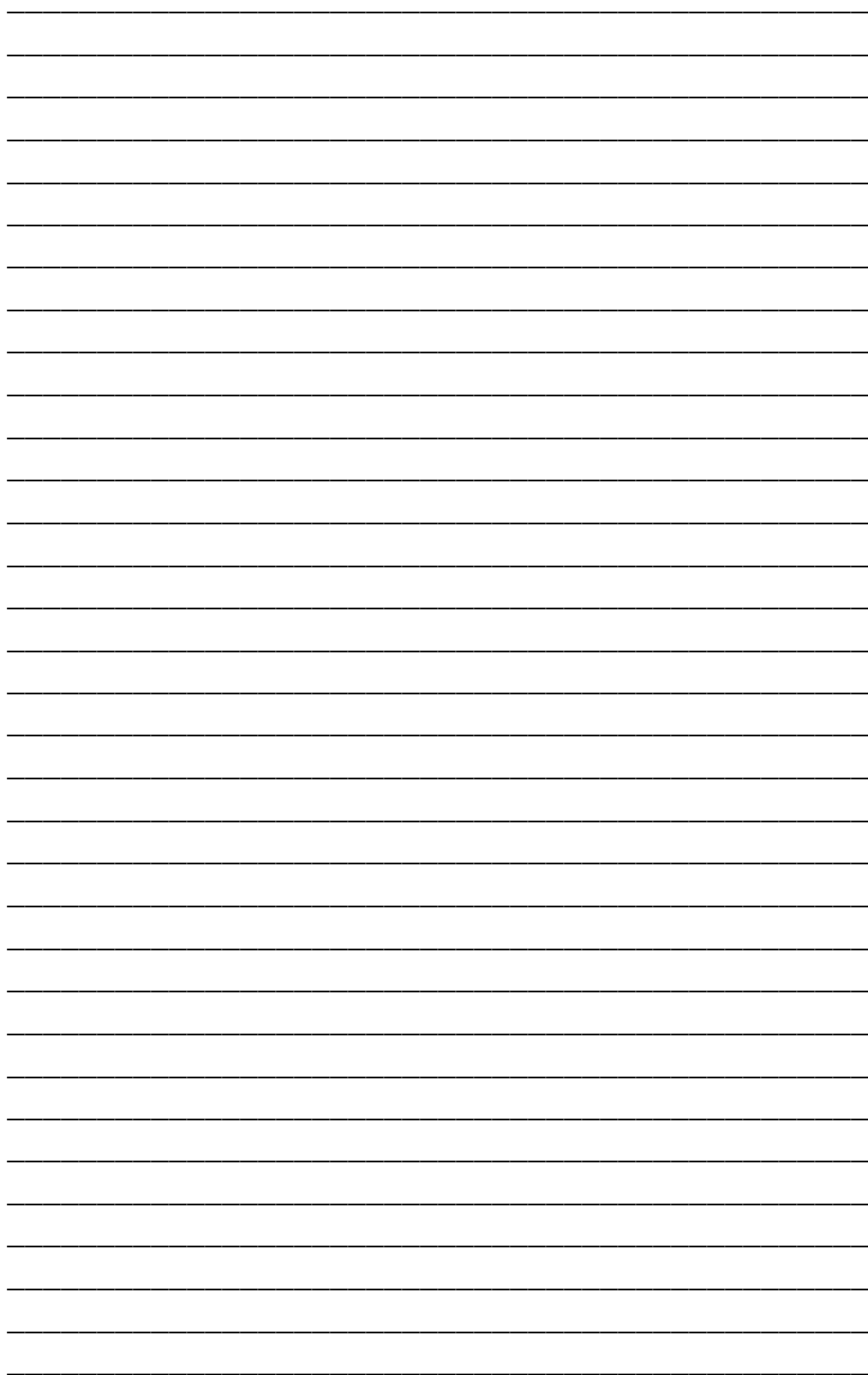
The above texts make a few very salient points. The first is that there is no distinction of race other than the human race. But before we get too specific, let’s look at what that means to each of us.

It means that we are ALL made in God's image; as such, we should be willing to see one another as a child of God, a brother, a sister, and a beautiful expression of God in the world.

There are also clear implications to this. Wherever someone is not being treated as a child of God, we must remind those mistreating the individual of this truth. We have to stand in the way, we have to advocate, we have to listen to those who are marginalized and mistreated, and we have to believe that God accepts many more people than we might. We have to open up in ways that might be uncomfortable for us.

It also means that our understanding of race as something that separates us should be looked at in the light of God's desire for his children. Race should not divide but should be seen as an expression of the creativity and incredible variety God is interested in for the world. The expression of humanity is varied on the outside, but we are the same inside. Seeking love, belonging, support, and grace from both God and one another.

1. What are your preconceived notions about Race?
2. Is it possible that we are all family as part of the Human Race?
3. What do you think has kept you away from others who might not look or act like you do?



DAY 16

ISRAEL WAS ETHNICALLY DIVERSE.



We have many examples of diversity within the stories and characters of the Old and New Testaments. As it has always been, the world then was multi-ethnic, and the biblical characters reflected that.

While many of the characters in scripture are Semitic (and thus looked like modern-day inhabitants of that geography), the story often includes individuals or groups from a wide variety of ethnicities. Abraham was from Mesopotamia, and ethnically was probably Aramean/Amorite. He and his family migrated to Canaan, where two of his descendants (Judah and Simeon) married Canaanites, while their brother Joseph married an Egyptian.

Later, when God delivered Abraham's lineage from Egypt, a "Mixed multitude" went with them as they left Egypt. (Ex. 12:38). This implies that people from other ethnic groups accompanied them and thus became part of Israel. Indeed,

throughout the Old Testament, there is a frequent influx of persons from other ethnicities into the people of God, including Rahab the Canaanite (Joshua 2-6), the Cushite wife of Moses (Numbers 12), Ebedmelech the Cushite (Jeremiah 38-39), and so on.

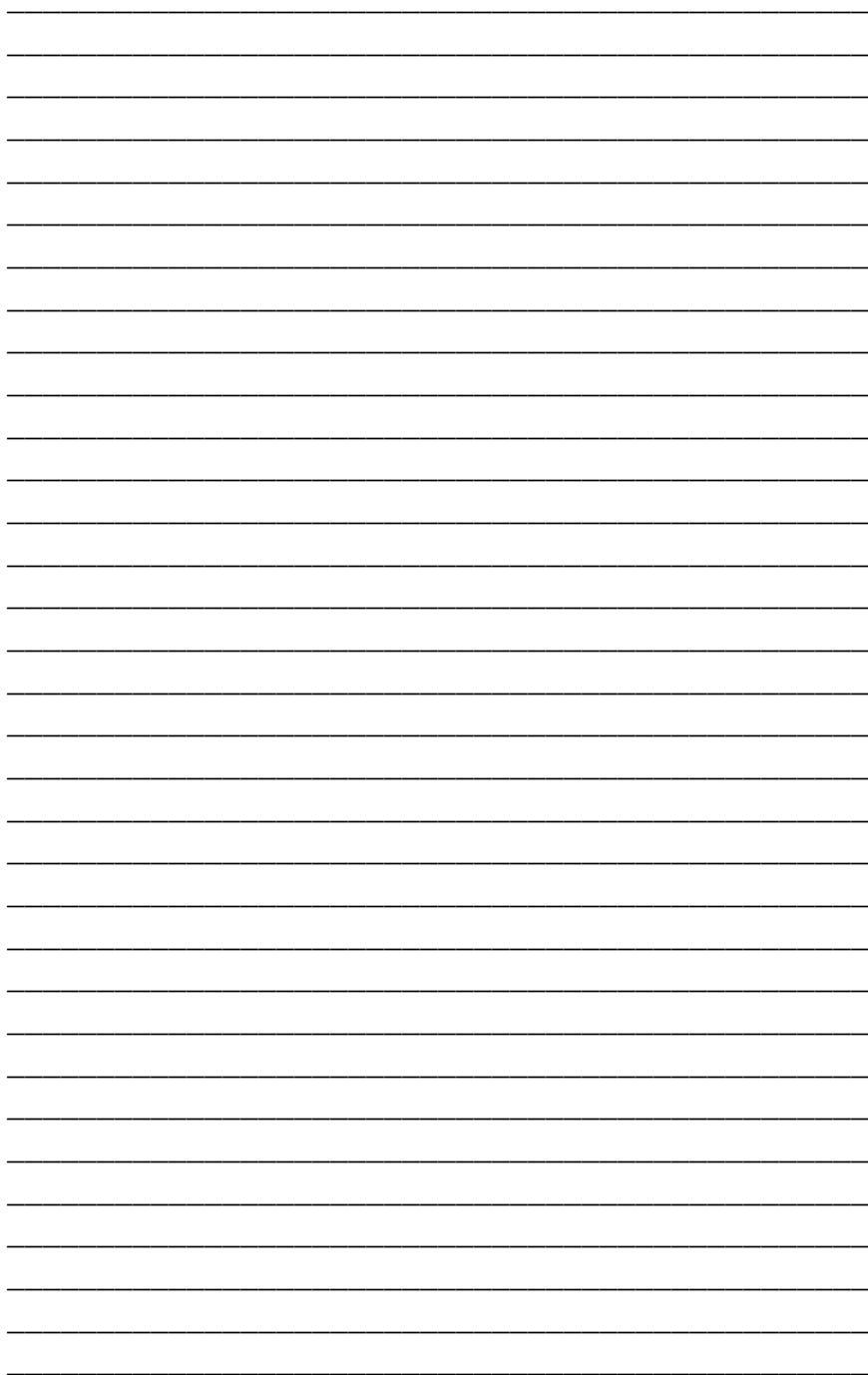
This gives us a clear understanding that Israel was a place where many different ethnicities would gather, as it was the crossroads of the ancient Middle East, and that those of differing origins were seen as valuable, acceptable, and needed.

This is true today. Nothing has changed.

What I love about Crosswalk Churches is that they are not homogenous. They are full of people who look different than one another, who speak different languages, who want to grow together, and who can do that in a better fashion due to their diversity. We must learn to listen, to share, and to recognize that while our experiences of life are different, we have something that brings us together in a powerful way:

We are all children of God. And when we walk into the worship centers of each Crosswalk church, we are the same. First and foremost, we are finding out identity and our citizenship coming from the God who loves us. It is pretty simple. If we believe that God comes first, then that is where our value comes from. Our image is the image of God, and our worth comes from that same love.

So why are we so divided?



DAY 17

GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION HAD MANY CULTURES AND ETHNICITIES INVOLVED.



While many ethnic groups appear in scripture, one distinct group repeatedly appears. The Cushites occur in the Hebrew Bible more than 50 different times. In English translations, it is often translated as “Cush,” but sometimes as “Nubia” or “Ethiopia.” Cush was a powerful Black African kingdom located along the Nile River, just south of Egypt.

Cushites were active players in the geopolitics and economics of the ancient Near East throughout most of the Old Testament period. At one point, they even briefly controlled Egypt during the time of Isaiah and allied themselves with Jerusalem against the Assyrians. Later, Ebedmelech played a crucial role in Judah’s theological history, saving the prophet

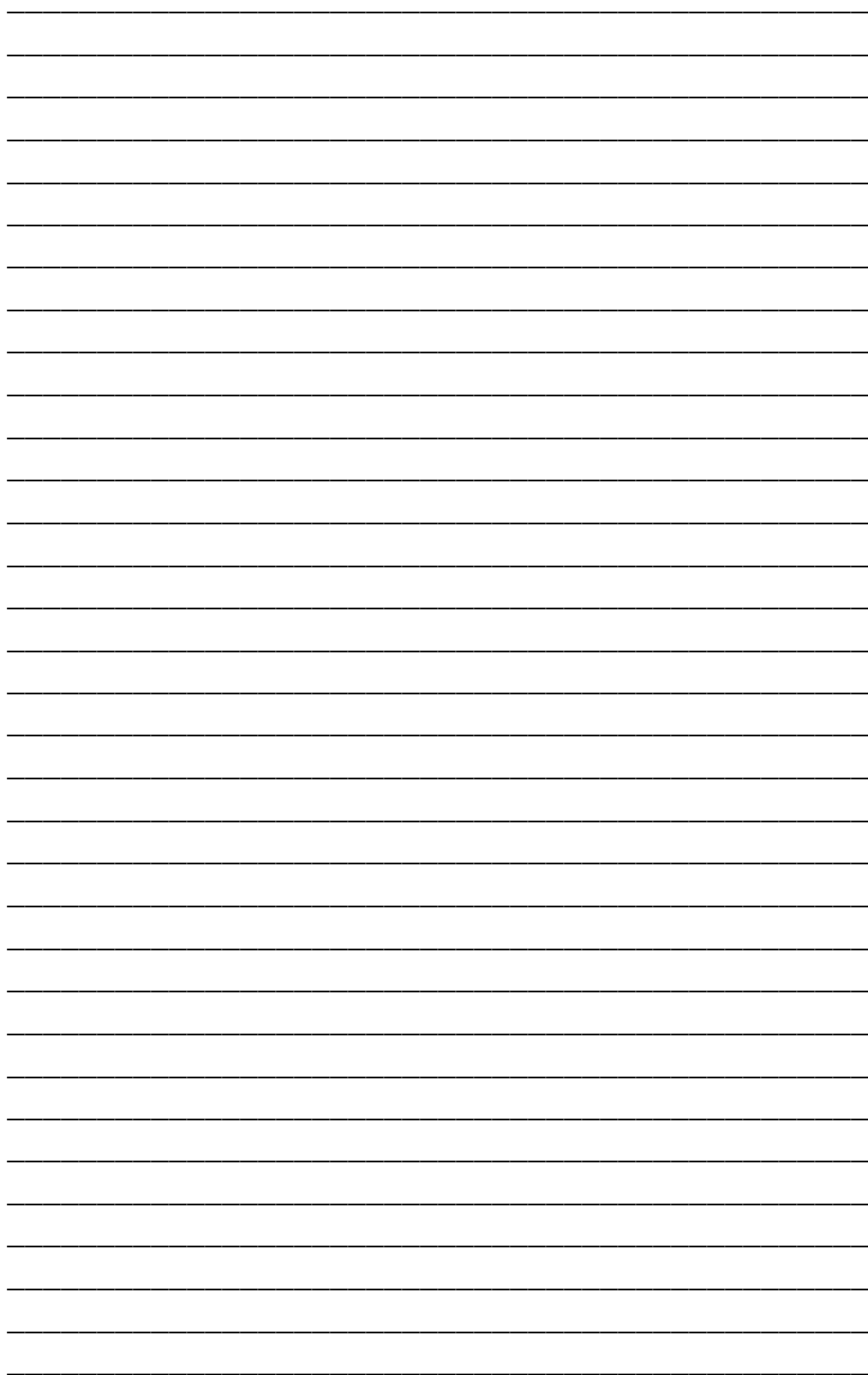
Jeremiah and symbolizing the inclusion of future Gentiles who would come to God by faith.

We usually see this area in the New Testament as “Ethiopia,” even though it differs from modern Ethiopia. The “Ethiopian Eunuch” in Acts 8 was a Black African from this region along the Nile River, south of Egypt. He is recorded as the first non-Jewish believer in the New Testament, and, like Ebedmelech in the book of Jeremiah, he seems to symbolize or foreshadow the approaching Gentile inclusion in the rest of the book of Acts.

So what does this mean? It means that perhaps the narrative Western Christians have been given about the church looking like they do is incorrect and historically inaccurate. Not to mention the thousand-year history of the ancient church moving to the East and not simply the West. For more information, please read “The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How it Died.” By Philip Jenkins. (See link below)¹

It should start becoming clear that the history of the church is diverse, inter-cultural, and incredibly interesting. Unfortunately, we in the West have been given a history of the church that was only in one direction. This undermines the worldwide effect that the gospel had on the first thousand years of Christian History.

¹<https://www.amazon.com/Lost-History-Christianity-Thousand-Year-Asia/dp/0061472816>



DAY 18

PEOPLE OF ALL ETHNIC GROUPS ARE UNITED IN CHRIST.



In the New Testament, we see that Paul demands active unity in the church. This unity joins different ethnic groups because of their common bond in Christ. In essence, Paul proclaims that a new humanity is formed in Christ. (Rom 4; Gal. 3-4; Col. 3; Eph. 2)

He insists that the primary identity of Christians is that they have a first and profound identity that comes from being IN Christ. Therefore, ethnicity, demographic, geographic, and even tribal connections pale in comparison to the identity given to us through the grace and love of Jesus Christ. This

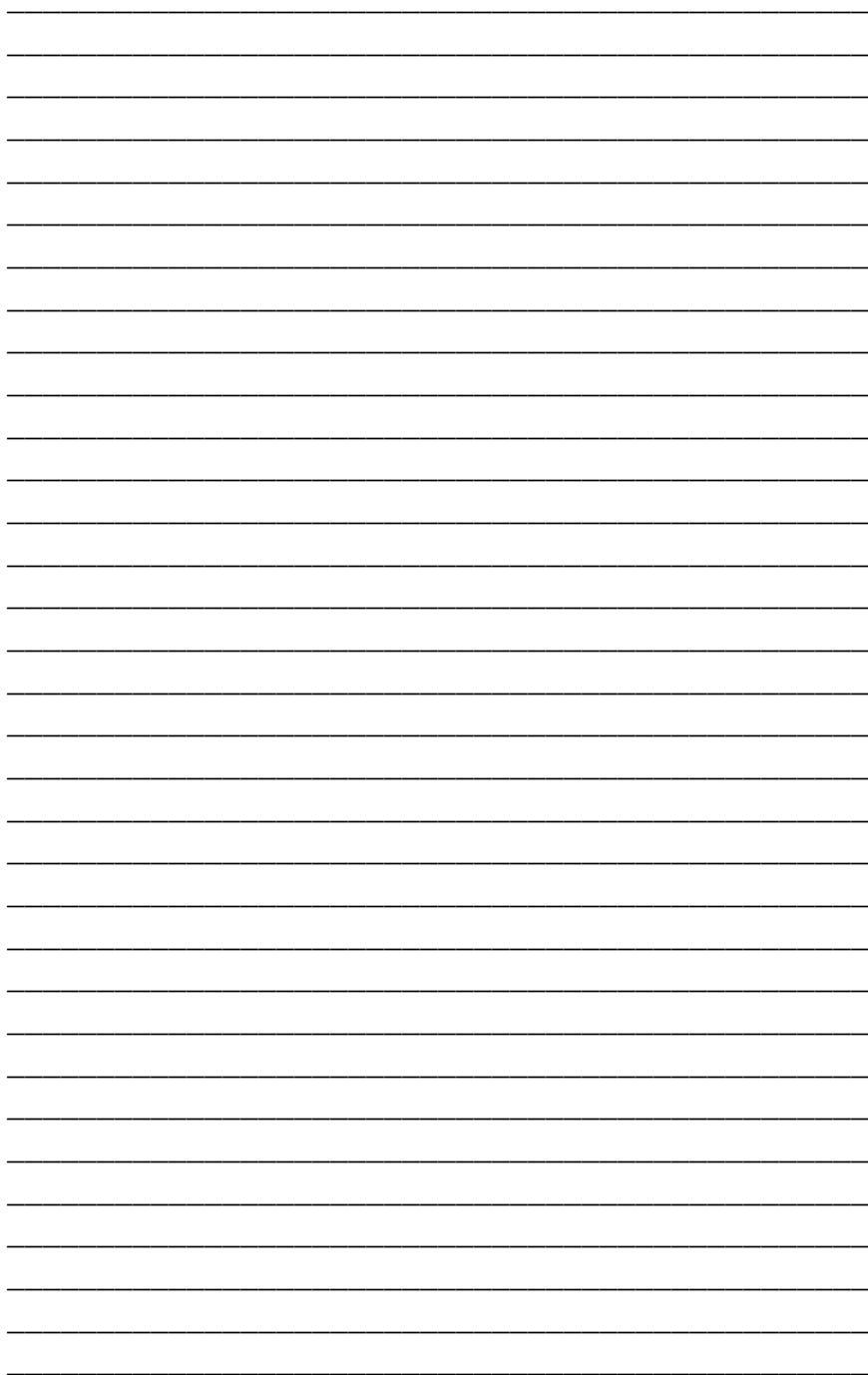
identity transcends language; it transcends borders, and certainly ethnicity as well.

This means that other races are not just equal to us, but they are JOINED to us in Christ. They are brother and sister, but they are also part of the same body as we are. This should change our understanding of those who are different from us.

When we are told that we have a citizenship that lies beyond our countries' borders, it means no place for nationalism seeking priority beyond our identity as Christians. This world is no longer your home; therefore, to take undue pride in one's place of birth is anathema to the Christian.

Let me unpack this a bit before anyone gets a little upset. Recognizing that we come from different places is appropriate and valuable. However, when this identity becomes more important than our identity in Christ that unites us, it becomes a problem. Borders tend to separate people. Jesus unites people. We have to be unifiers, not dividers if we are to follow the way of Jesus. This precludes unreasonable "pride of place" in our understanding of who we are and where we are from.

Many Christians, particularly in the United States, have been willing to buy into the ideas of Christian Nationalism. This is an ideological perspective that runs counter to what we find in the gospels and in the writings of Paul. The New Testament does not hold citizenship on earth as a privilege or a right that transcends our citizenship of heaven. We are not told to worship civic power or to seek to expand empires. Rather, we are to be more concerned with expanding the Kingdom of



DAY 19

HEAVEN SPEAKS OF A GREAT MULTITUDE FROM EVERY NATION AND TONGUE.



in the book of Revelation we see a temple scene that holds a great multitude of people who are praising God forever, singing the same refrain over and over. This multitude is said to come from every tongue and nation, which means from every ethnicity, every country, and even every language group. This vast gathering is the culmination of the eschatology and a scene from heaven.

But what it does not show is division, rather diversity and unity. It is from this great multitude that the choir of heaven is raised. How can we be set on division when it is so clear

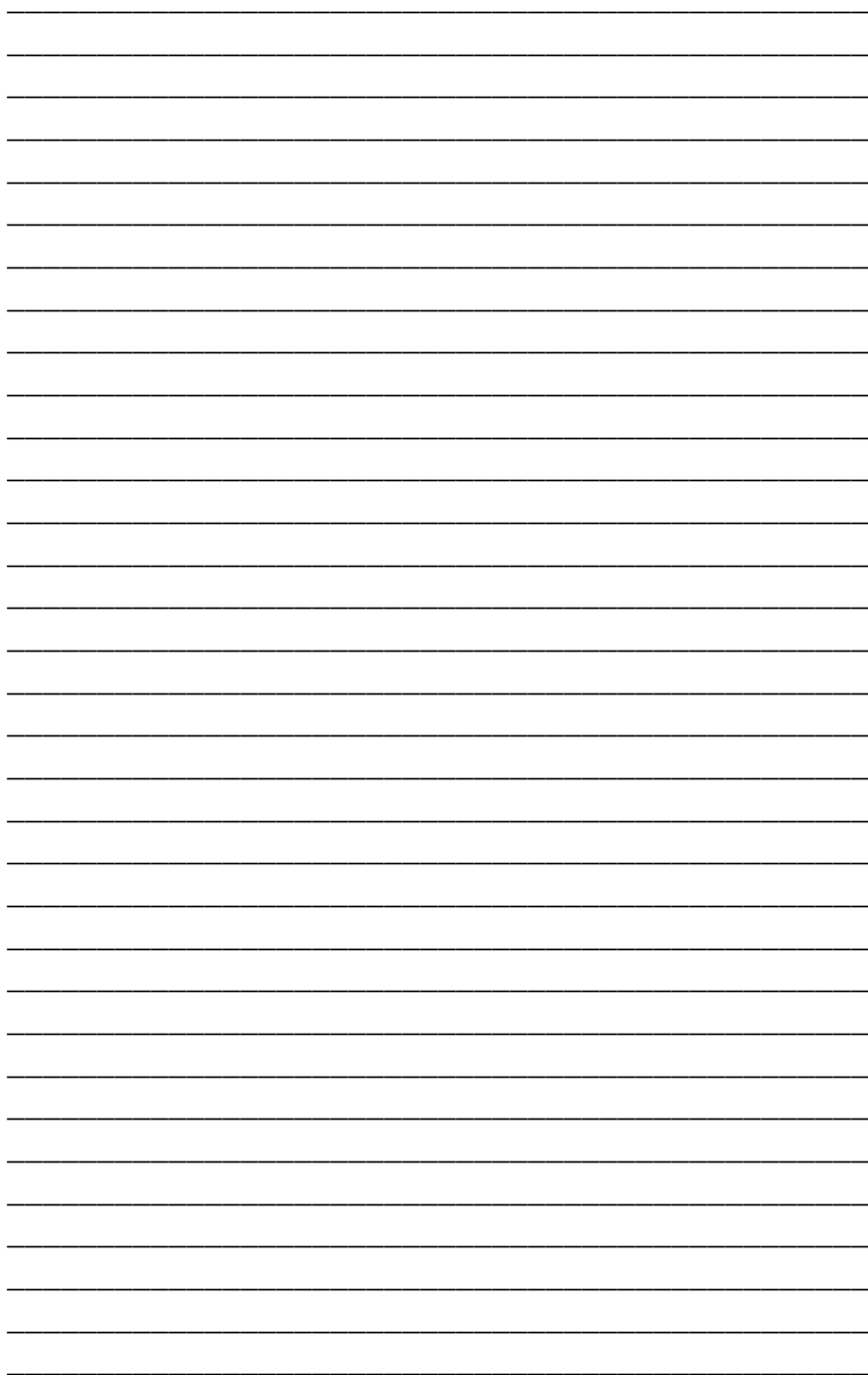
that the scene we see in heaven is anything but divided? The unity that is shown in this text is beautiful, harmonious, and other-worldly.

I grieve, like most do, when I see the division that we have in the world. As I am writing this, there is a war raging in Israel. This is a war that has raged for thousands of years, but particularly since 1948 and the establishment of the Nation-State of Israel, a place for the Jews to call home. The history of the region is a deeply painful history of skirmishes, human rights violations, apartheid-style division, and terrorism. Having spent many years living part of the year there, I had friends on both sides of the conflict, both were taught to hate the other, and both expressed their hatred in violence.

I am not condoning either side, and I want to recognize that terrorism must be condemned at every turn. Israel must live amongst enemies and must protect itself, and governance in this situation is complicated at best.

What I am saying is that division has no place in the kingdom of God, and if we are to be a people of the kingdom, we must work toward being the kind of people that convene and unite, rather than the kind of people that divide.

1. In your personal life, do you find yourself creating more unity or division?
2. Why do you think that is?
3. How can you make sure you are someone who brings more peace into the world? What does that look like on a daily basis?



DAY 20

WHILE THE BIBLE FOCUSES ON ONE PART OF THE WORLD, THERE IS NO REASON TO THINK THAT THIS WAS THE ONLY OR MOST IMPORTANT GROUP OF PEOPLE.



When Jesus came to Israel, it was at a particular place and a particular time, to a particular group of people and to a particular religious expression. However, does this mean that God wasn't working anywhere else in the world, and does it also mean that these people were more important to God than any other people groups that were in the world at the time?

This is a fascinating question as we don't have a great deal of biblical information about God working in other places. In John 10:16, Jesus says, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

What does this mean exactly? Does it mean that there are those who were outside of Israel, outside of the Jewish tradition, or even outside of the Christian tradition (not that there was a tradition at this point)?

What are the implications for us and understanding how to treat others if there are God's children that are completely outside of what we thought God's flock to be?

Maybe it means that we need to make sure that we are not creating division by not accepting people that God has chosen to accept. But how do we know who is in the other "flocks" that Jesus spoke of?

well, we don't know, and perhaps that is the point. Rather than trying to figure out who we should exclude, we have to figure out how to include more people into our understanding of the kingdom of God.

It would, of course, make sense that God is not relegated to working with just one group of people, as He is God and boundaries do not exactly work in the same way. Why would we think that God will only work with us, and not with others whom God finds just as important. What if they don't even call themselves Christians? Would that be okay?

DAY 21

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

"How do you believe diversity within the body of Christ enriches our faith and our understanding of God?"

This question encourages participants to reflect on the positive aspects of diversity in the context of their Christian community. It invites them to explore how differences in backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives can enhance their collective spiritual journey and deepen their understanding of God's character and plan. It also sets the stage for a meaningful discussion on the value of diversity and unity within the Church.

OPEN

How diverse is your life? Where do you see diversity expressed in your job, your family, your church, and other places in your life?

HEAD

- What does the Bible teach about God's creation of diversity in humanity? (Genesis 1:27, Acts 17:26)
- How did God use diverse individuals in the Bible for His purposes? (Consider figures like Moses, Ruth, and Paul as examples.)
- How does the Bible emphasize the importance of loving and accepting people from different backgrounds and cultures? (Galatians 3:28, James 2:1-4)
- What biblical principles guide our interactions with people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs? (Matthew 22:39, Romans 12:16, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7)
- How can we apply the biblical concept of unity in diversity within our church or Christian community? (Ephesians 4:3, Colossians 3:14)
- What lessons can we learn from the biblical accounts of diversity-related challenges and conflicts, such as those in the early church? (Acts 6:1-7, Acts 10:1-48)
- In light of Revelation 7:9-10, how should our understanding of diversity and unity in the body of Christ shape our attitudes and actions today?

These questions provide a starting point for exploring the biblical perspective on diversity and its relevance to Christian living. They encourage reflection on how God's Word guides our interactions with diverse individuals and communities, promoting love, unity, and understanding among believers.

HEART

- How can we actively seek to embrace and appreciate diversity in our everyday interactions and relationships, following the biblical principle of loving our neighbors as ourselves? (Matthew 22:39)
- In what practical ways can we promote inclusivity and unity in our church or Christian community, considering the example of the early church's efforts to overcome cultural and ethnic differences? (Acts 6:1-7, Acts 10:1-48)
- How might we address prejudice, discrimination, or division within our society or faith community, drawing inspiration from the biblical call to pursue justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God? (Micah 6:8)

These questions encourage individuals to translate the biblical teachings on diversity into concrete actions and attitudes in their daily lives. They emphasize the importance of actively living out the principles of love, unity, and justice found in the Bible.

HANDS

- **Expand Your Social Circles:** Make a deliberate effort to broaden your social circles and connect with people from diverse backgrounds. This could involve joining clubs, organizations, or social groups that are inclusive and welcoming to individuals of different races, cultures, and beliefs. Attend events and activities that celebrate diversity and provide opportunities to meet new people. Building friendships with individuals from diverse backgrounds can enrich your life and foster understanding.
- **Educate Yourself:** Take the initiative to educate yourself about various cultures, religions, and social issues. Read books, watch documentaries, and follow

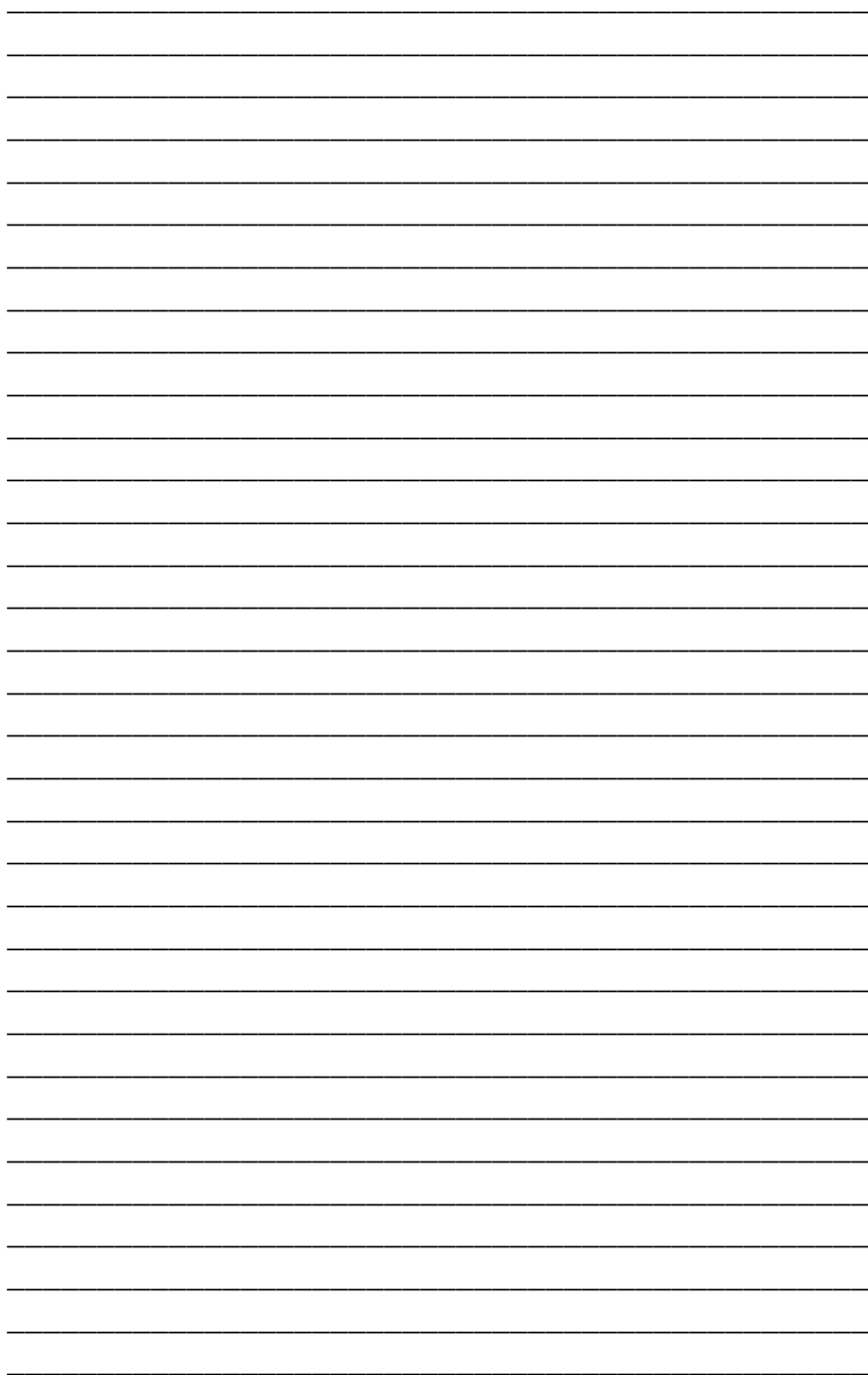
reputable news sources covering diversity and inclusion topics. Seek to understand the experiences and challenges faced by people from different backgrounds. Consider taking courses or workshops on diversity, equity, and inclusion to deepen your knowledge and empathy.

By actively expanding your social circles and educating yourself, you can create a more diverse and inclusive environment. These actions promote understanding and unity and contribute to a richer and more empathetic perspective on the world.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

A great biblical verse on diversity is found in the Book of Revelation, chapter 7, verse 9 (Revelation 7:9):

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands."



DAY 22

UNCOMFORTABLE UNITY



Unity in the Bible is a recurring theme that emphasizes the importance of oneness, harmony, and cooperation among individuals, communities, and with God. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, the concept of unity is woven into the very fabric of scripture, offering valuable insights into how it should guide human behavior and faith.

In the Old Testament, unity is often portrayed as a source of strength and blessing. Psalm 133:1 is written, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" This verse highlights the beauty and goodness that arise when people unite in harmony. It is a reminder that unity is not just a desirable state but also a divine ideal.

The Old Testament also frequently presents the idea of a covenant between God and His people. The covenant, such as

the one with Abraham in Genesis 17, demonstrates a sacred agreement between God and humanity. This covenant underscores the idea that unity with God is foundational to the faith of many believers, and it is through this unity that blessings and guidance are bestowed upon them.

In the New Testament, the theme of unity takes on new dimensions. In John 17:20-21, Jesus prays for the unity of believers, saying, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Here, Jesus emphasizes the profound unity between believers and God Himself, highlighting that this unity is a testament to their faith and a means to draw others to the message of Christ.

The apostle Paul further elaborates on unity within the Christian community. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, he implores believers, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." This verse underscores the importance of unity in thought and action within the church, as divisions can undermine the faith and effectiveness of the community.

Unity in the Bible is a central theme that underscores the importance of oneness, harmony, and cooperation among individuals and communities. It is not just a desirable state but a divine ideal that brings strength, blessings, and serves as a testament to faith. Whether in the Old Testament's portrayal of covenants or the New Testament's teachings of unity in Christ, the Bible's message is clear: unity is a fundamental principle that should guide the lives and faith of believers.

DAY 23

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10 AND UNITY



1 Corinthians 1:10, is a powerful and instructive statement made by the apostle Paul to the Christian community in Corinth. This verse reads: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."

In this verse, Paul addresses a significant issue plaguing the Corinthian church: division and disunity. He passionately implores the believers to come together in unity, emphasizing several key points:

1. In the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Paul appeals to the authority and identity of Jesus Christ. He reminds the Corinthians that their unity should be rooted in their shared faith in Christ. It's a call to prioritize their common belief in Jesus as the foundation of their unity.

2. Agree with One Another: Paul encourages agreement among the believers. This doesn't mean that everyone should

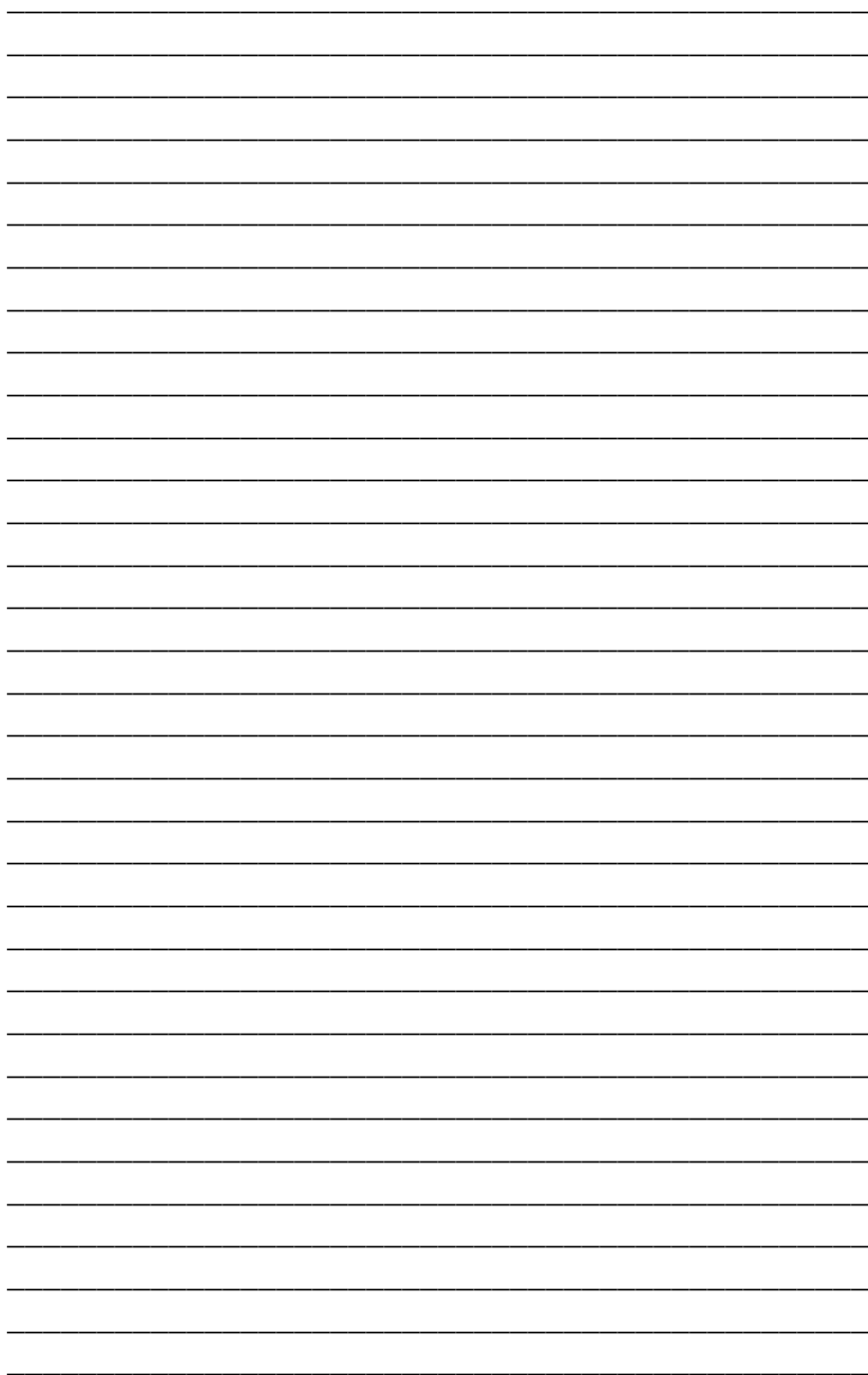
have the same opinions, but rather that they should strive for harmony, cooperation, and a shared purpose in their Christian walk.

3. No Divisions: Paul firmly condemns divisions within the church. These divisions could be related to various issues, such as leadership disputes, theological disagreements, or personal conflicts. Paul emphasizes that such divisions are detrimental to the body of believers.

4. Perfect Unity in Mind and Thought: Paul sets a high standard for unity, calling believers to be "perfectly united in mind and thought." This implies outward unity and a deep, inward alignment of their hearts and minds. It's about having a shared perspective and purpose in their faith.

This verse remains relevant for Christians today. It serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of unity within the church and the broader Christian community. It encourages believers to prioritize their common faith in Christ over divisive issues and to work together in a spirit of love and cooperation. It's a call to transcend differences for a greater unity that reflects the teachings of Jesus Christ.

None of these things are easy to do, but we are called to work toward unity for the good of the church and the good of the Kingdom of God.



DAY 24

DISCOMFORT IN UNITY



The discomfort of unity in Christ is a paradoxical aspect of the Christian faith that highlights the challenges and sacrifices often associated with pursuing a harmonious community of believers. While unity is a hoped-for ideal within Christianity, achieving and maintaining it can be a demanding and uncomfortable journey.

One of the primary sources of discomfort in pursuing unity in Christ lies in the diversity of believers within the faith. Christians come from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and traditions, bringing many perspectives and beliefs. This diversity can lead to theological differences, cultural clashes, and varying interpretations of scripture. Addressing these differences requires humility, patience, and a willingness to engage in difficult conversations, which can be uncomfortable.

Furthermore, unity in Christ may require individuals to put aside personal preferences and desires for the greater good of the community. This selflessness can be uncomfortable, as it may mean sacrificing one's own comfort, convenience, or

desire to serve others. The apostle Paul captures this idea in Philippians 2:3-4, where he encourages believers to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but, in humility, consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others."

Another discomfort associated with unity in Christ is the challenge of forgiveness and reconciliation. In any community, conflicts and misunderstandings are bound to arise. Christ calls believers to forgive one another and seek reconciliation, even when it is difficult. This can be profoundly uncomfortable, as it often involves confronting hurtful actions or attitudes and extending grace to those who have wronged us.

Unity in Christ can also be uncomfortable when it requires Christians to step out of their comfort zones and engage with those who are different from them. This may involve reaching out to marginalized groups, embracing individuals from different backgrounds, or participating in mission work in unfamiliar places. These experiences can be uncomfortable because they challenge preconceived notions and push individuals to develop empathy and compassion.

Despite the discomfort, unity in Christ remains a central and essential aspect of the Christian faith. It reflects the teachings of Jesus, who prayed for the unity of believers in John 17:21, saying, "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." This unity, though uncomfortable at times, is seen as a witness to the world of God's love and transformative power. Ultimately, it is a discomfort borne out of a commitment to following Christ's example and fulfilling his command to love one another as he has loved us.

DAY 25

DISCOMFORT



Hope in unity in Christ is a profound and inspiring aspect of the Christian faith. It represents the belief that through shared faith in Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, believers can come together, transcending differences, and find strength, purpose, and renewal in their collective journey. Here are some key dimensions of hope in unity in Christ:

- 1. Hope for Healing and Reconciliation:** Unity in Christ offers hope for healing and reconciliation in a fractured world. It acknowledges that humanity is often divided by cultural, ethnicity, and belief differences. However, through Christ's transformative power, there is hope that these divisions can be overcome and individuals from all walks of life can find common ground and reconciliation.
- 2. Hope for a Common Purpose:** Unity in Christ provides hope for a common purpose. It unites believers in pursuing a shared mission – to spread the love and teachings of Jesus Christ. This common purpose gives life meaning and

direction, offering hope and fulfillment as individuals work together toward a greater goal.

3. Hope for Strength in Diversity: Unity in Christ recognizes the strength that arises from diversity. Believers from various backgrounds and experiences can come together, each contributing their unique gifts and perspectives to the body of Christ. This diversity is a source of hope, as it enriches the faith community and allows it to address a wider range of needs and challenges.

4. Hope for Resilience in Adversity: In the face of trials and adversity, unity in Christ provides hope for resilience. A Christian community's shared faith and support can help individuals navigate difficult times with courage and perseverance. Knowing they are not alone in their struggles offers a powerful source of hope.

5. Hope for Transformation: Unity in Christ inspires hope for personal and collective transformation. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, believers believe that they can be transformed into better versions of themselves and that communities can be transformed into beacons of love, compassion, and justice.

6. Hope for Eternal Unity: Ultimately, hope in unity in Christ extends to the promise of eternal unity with God. It is the belief that through faith in Jesus Christ, believers will one day experience perfect unity in the presence of God in heaven. This hope provides comfort and assurance in the face of life's uncertainties.

Hope in unity in Christ is a fundamental aspect of our faith. It offers us the assurance that through our shared faith in Jesus, we can overcome divisions, find common purpose, draw strength from diversity, persevere through adversity, and

DAY 26

ACHIEVING UNITY



Achieving unity in a congregation is a noble and essential goal for any faith community. Unity fosters a sense of belonging, strength, and purpose among members. Here are some practical steps to help achieve unity in a congregation:

1. **Strong Leadership:** Effective leadership is crucial for promoting unity. Leaders should model unity in their actions and attitudes. They should lead with humility, transparency, and a commitment to serving the congregation's best interests.
2. **Clear Vision and Values:** Develop a clear and compelling vision statement and core values for the congregation. This shared vision gives members a common purpose to rally around and provides a foundation for unity.
3. **Open Communication:** Encourage open and honest communication within the congregation. Provide opportunities for members to express their thoughts, concerns, and ideas. Listen actively to one another to foster understanding.

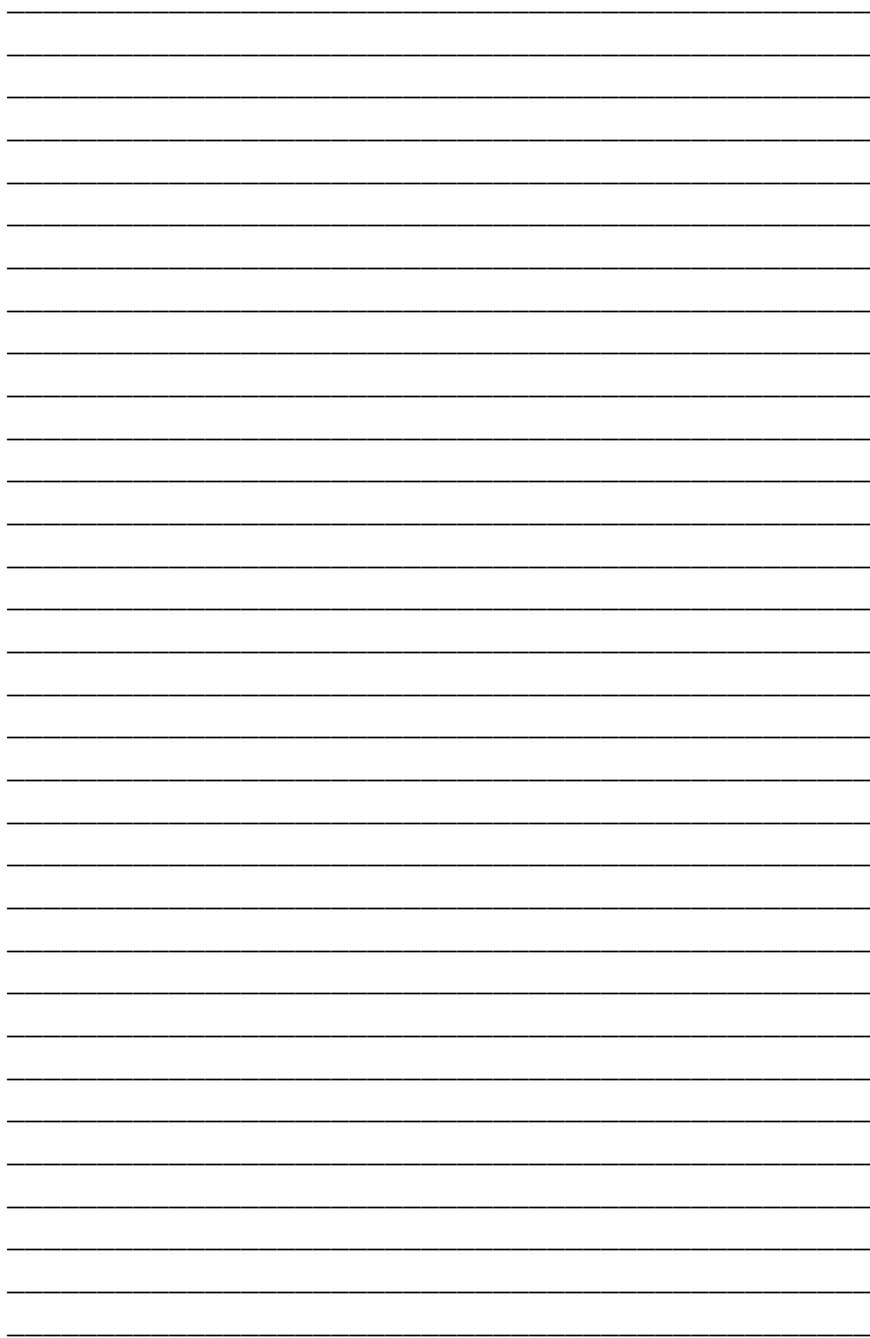
4. **Conflict Resolution:** Develop a healthy approach to conflict resolution. Teach members how to address conflicts in a constructive and Christ-like manner. Encourage forgiveness and reconciliation when disputes arise.
5. **Biblical Teaching:** Base the congregation's teachings and beliefs on sound biblical principles. A shared understanding of scripture can help unify members in their faith and beliefs.
6. **Inclusive Worship:** Ensure that worship services and activities are inclusive and welcoming to all members, regardless of age, background, or preferences. Celebrate diversity within the congregation.
7. **Small Groups:** Encourage the formation of small groups or fellowship groups within the congregation. These smaller communities can foster deeper relationships and provide opportunities for members to support one another.
8. **Service and Outreach:** Engage in service and outreach activities together. Serving the community and helping those in need can bring members together in a shared mission.
9. **Prayer and Spiritual Growth:** Prioritize prayer and spiritual growth within the congregation. Regular prayer meetings, Bible studies, and spiritual retreats can deepen members' faith and sense of unity.
10. **Leadership Development:** Invest in developing leaders within the congregation. Equipping members with leadership skills and responsibilities can help distribute the load and promote unity.
11. **Regular Evaluation:** Periodically evaluate the health of the congregation's unity. Seek feedback from members and make adjustments as needed.

12. **Celebrate Milestones:** Celebrate significant milestones and achievements as a congregation. Recognize and appreciate the contributions of members, both individually and collectively.

13. **Focus on Christ:** Above all, emphasize that unity is grounded in Christ. Remind members that their ultimate identity is in Christ, and it is through Him that true unity is achieved.

Remember that achieving and maintaining unity is an ongoing process. It requires commitment, patience, and continuous effort from leaders and members. While challenges may arise, the pursuit of unity in a congregation is a worthwhile endeavor that reflects the teachings of Christ and strengthens the faith community.

1. Does Crosswalk have these particular points in place, in your experience? Where can we grow?
2. While this seems a bit like a recipe for a good church, where have you found yourself?
3. What can Crosswalk do to become more unified in its approach to community and to Christ?



DAY 27

WHAT DOES UNITY LOOK LIKE IN CHURCH?



A unified congregation is characterized by several key attributes that reflect a strong sense of harmony, purpose, and shared faith among its members. While the specific appearance may vary, a unified congregation often exhibits the following qualities:

1. **Love and Respect:** Members genuinely love and respect one another. They show care and concern for each other's well-being, both within and outside the church walls.
2. **Common Vision:** The congregation shares a common vision and mission. They are aligned in their purpose and are committed to fulfilling their collective calling.

3. Healthy Relationships: Healthy interpersonal relationships are evident. There is a sense of friendship and camaraderie among members, and conflicts are resolved constructively and Christ-like.

4. Diverse Yet Inclusive: The congregation embraces diversity. While members come from various backgrounds and walks of life, there is a commitment to inclusivity and a welcoming atmosphere for all.

5. Worship in Spirit and Truth: Worship services are characterized by heartfelt and authentic worship. Members engage in worship with sincerity and unity of spirit.

6. Shared Beliefs: There is a shared understanding of core beliefs and doctrine based on the teachings of the faith. Doctrinal disagreements are minimal and are approached with humility and grace.

7. Active Involvement: Members actively participate in the congregation's life. They serve in various ministries, contribute their talents, and participate in church activities.

8. Prayerful Community: Prayer is central to the congregation's life. Members regularly pray for one another, the church, and the broader community.

9. Community Outreach: The congregation is engaged in meaningful outreach and service to the local community. They have a positive impact on the lives of others through acts of kindness and service.

10. Generosity: Members are generous in giving financially and willing to help those in need. The congregation often supports charitable causes and missions.

11. **Leadership Unity:** Leadership within the congregation is characterized by unity and collaboration. Leaders work together in harmony to shepherd the flock.

12. **Joy and Celebration:** The congregation has a sense of joy and celebration. Milestones and achievements are celebrated with gratitude and enthusiasm.

13. **Steadfast Faith:** Members exhibit steadfast faith in Christ, even in the face of challenges. They encourage one another to grow spiritually and deepen their relationship with God.

14. **Influence on the Community:** The congregation positively influences the surrounding community. Its unity and love are evident to those outside the church, drawing others to inquire about the faith.

15. **Resilience:** The congregation remains resilient in the face of adversity. They come together to support one another during difficult times and trust in God's guidance.

It's important to note that unity in a congregation is not about uniformity but a shared commitment to Christ and His teachings. A unified congregation may still have different opinions and preferences, but these differences are approached with grace and a focus on the greater mission of spreading God's love and truth. A unified congregation is a vibrant and inspiring reflection of Christ's presence in the world.

I have been on lists for this week. But we need clarity on what Unity looks like here at Crosswalk. So thanks for leaning into these thoughts this week.

1. How can you help Unity reign here at Crosswalk?

DAY 28

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our small group study on unity as depicted in the Bible. Unity is a profound and transformative theme that runs through the entirety of Scripture, revealing its significance to our faith and its divine purpose. As we embark on this study, we will explore how unity is not merely a desirable aspect of the Christian community but a divine mandate with profound implications for our lives.

The Bible presents a multifaceted perspective on unity, encompassing unity within the body of believers, unity between humanity and God, and even cosmic unity in God's grand plan for creation. Our study will delve into these different dimensions of unity and draw practical lessons that we can apply to our lives as individuals and as a community of faith.

OPEN

One important question that helps explore the biblical concept of unity is:

What does the Bible teach about the source and foundation of Christian unity?

HEAD

Here are seven questions on biblical unity for a small group study:

- **What does the Bible say about the importance of unity among believers?** (Encourage participants to find and discuss relevant passages.)
- **How does the concept of unity within the body of Christ relate to Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-23?** (Explore the idea that our unity reflects the unity of the Father and the Son.)
- **What are some biblical examples of unity among believers or communities?** (Consider stories like the early church in Acts 2:42-47 or the unity in the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 1:10.)
- **What are some common obstacles to unity within the body of believers, and how can we overcome them?** (Discuss issues like division, doctrinal differences, and personal conflicts.)
- **How does the apostle Paul describe the unity of the Spirit in Ephesians 4:1-6?** (Examine the qualities and principles that contribute to unity in the church.)
- **In what ways can we actively pursue and promote unity in our church or small group?** (Brainstorm practical steps and strategies for fostering unity.)
- **What is the role of love in maintaining and nurturing unity, as mentioned in Colossians 3:14?** (Discuss how love is a key component of unity and

how it should manifest in our interactions with fellow believers.)

These questions serve as a starting point for a meaningful and insightful discussion on the biblical concept of unity within a small group setting. They encourage participants to explore relevant Bible passages, share personal experiences, and brainstorm practical ways to cultivate and preserve unity within the body of Christ.

HEART

here are 4 questions that focus on the application of biblical verses on unity in everyday life:

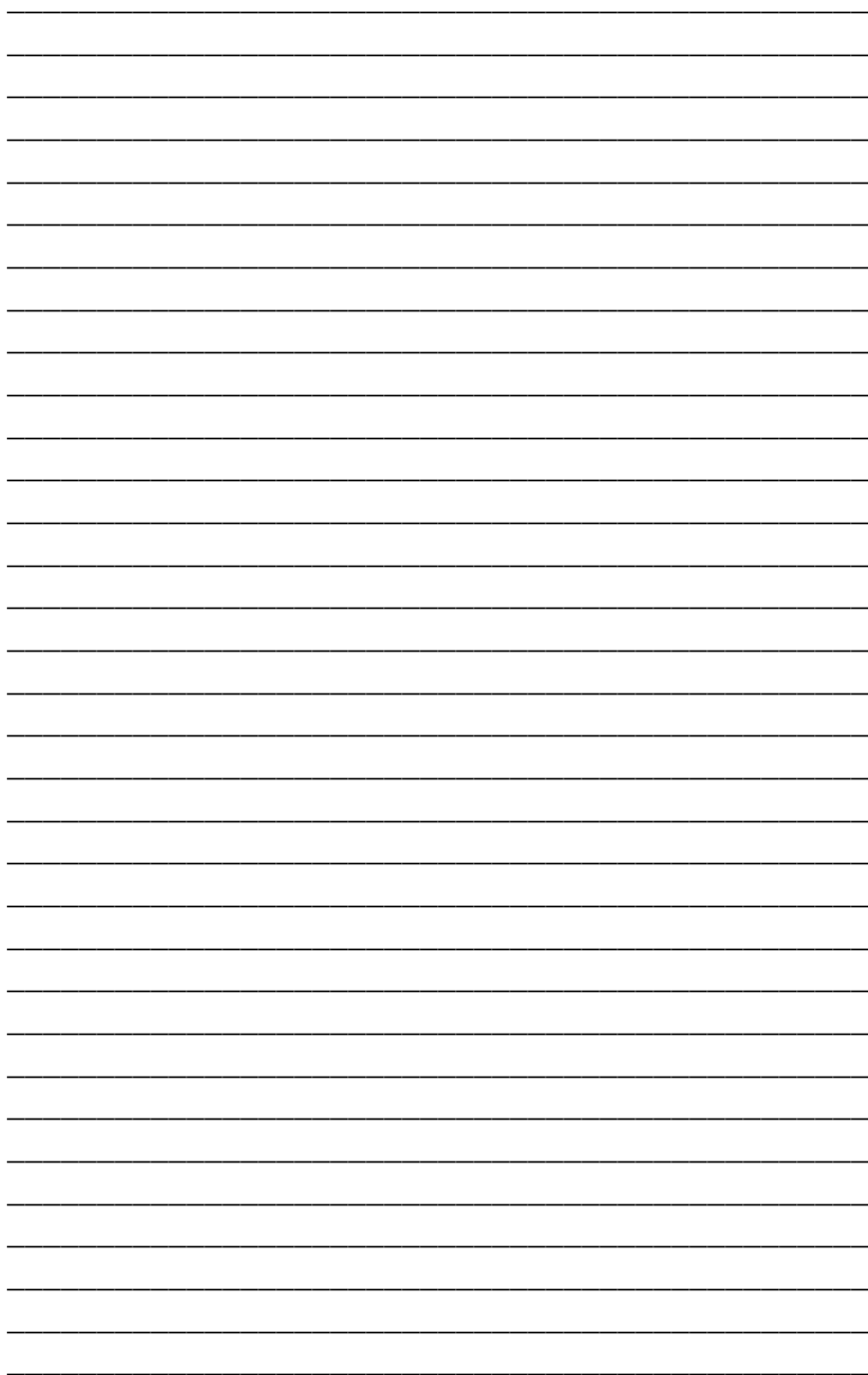
1. How can you apply Romans 12:16 ("Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.") to foster unity within your family, workplace, or community?
2. Considering Ephesians 4:2-3 ("With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."), how can you practice these qualities in your interactions with others to promote unity?
3. In light of Colossians 3:13-14 ("Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."), how can you actively cultivate forgiveness and love within your relationships and daily interactions?
4. How can the principles found in 1 Corinthians 1:10 ("I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.") guide you in seeking unity and

resolution in moments of disagreement or division within your church or small group?

These questions encourage participants to reflect on specific Bible verses related to unity and consider practical ways to apply these principles in their everyday lives, whether in their families, workplaces, or faith communities. They promote a deeper understanding of unity as a lived-out reality rather than a theoretical concept.

HANDS

- **Active Listening and Empathy:** Practice active listening and empathy in your interactions. This involves genuinely understanding the perspectives, feelings, and concerns of those you interact with. Instead of rushing to express your own views or judgments, take the time to listen attentively. Ask clarifying questions and show empathy by acknowledging the emotions and experiences of others. Active listening and empathy create an atmosphere of respect and understanding, essential for fostering unity in any context.
- **Conflict Resolution Skills:** Equip yourself with effective conflict resolution skills. Conflicts and disagreements are inevitable in any group or community, but how they are managed can greatly impact unity. Learn and apply techniques for constructive communication, compromise, and problem-solving. Be willing to address conflicts directly and respectfully, seeking common ground and resolution rather than allowing issues to fester. By proactively addressing conflicts and finding mutually agreeable solutions, you can contribute to a more unified and harmonious environment.



DAY 29

LIVING COUNTERCULTURALLY AGAINST CONSUMPTION IS UNCOMFORTABLE



According to the Bible, several problems are associated with excessive consumption and materialism. The scriptures offer profound insights into the pitfalls of prioritizing worldly possessions over spiritual and moral values. It behooves us to take a look at these so that we understand how uncomfortable it is to live in a way that is different from what we are usually asked to live.

Idolatry is a big theme in scripture: The Bible consistently warns against making material possessions, wealth, or even desires for such things into idols. In the Ten Commandments, it is explicitly stated, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). The pursuit of material wealth and possessions can become a form of idolatry, where one's devotion and focus shift away from God. But of course, there are a ton of other things that can become

idolatry to us if we are not careful. This is why we constantly and constantly seek first the Kingdom of God.

The Bible condemns covetousness, an intense desire for what belongs to others. The Tenth Commandment instructs, "You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17).

Excessive consumption often arises from coveting what others have, leading to discontent and sinful desires. And there are complete industries that are built for us to want more and to want what we don't have. This is perhaps

Scripture famously states, "For the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). This verse underscores how an excessive desire for wealth and possessions can lead to various moral and ethical transgressions, including dishonesty, exploitation, and disregard for the welfare of others. How do we live counterculturally to this value?

We see scripture repeatedly emphasizing caring for the less fortunate. Proverbs 22:9 reminds us, "Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor." Excessive consumption can lead to selfishness and a lack of concern for those in need.

By doing this, we tend to diminish our desires for money and the things we lust after.

The Bible encourages believers to focus on eternal, spiritual values rather than fleeting material possessions. In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus advises, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Excessive consumption distracts individuals from investing in

their spiritual well-being.

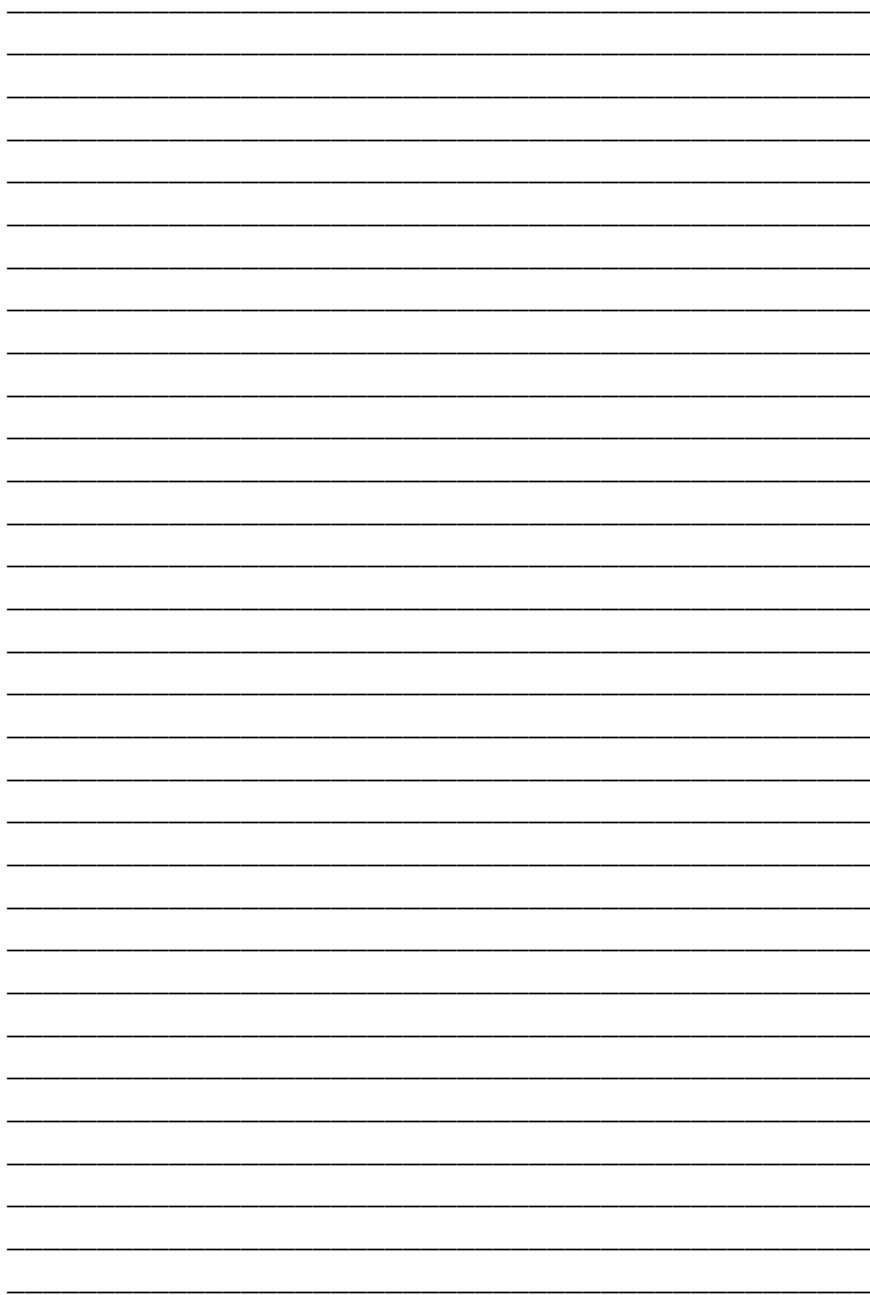
Many of us grew up doing great things, knowing that our “crown” in heaven would be pretty heavy with all those jewels encrusted in it. This may seem funny now or a joke at times, but we did think it was something we might get as a reward. The older we get, the less of a reality this is. But it was a motivation tied to this text for sure.

Consuming beyond one's means can lead to financial stress and anxiety. The Bible advises against worrying about material needs, as seen in Matthew 6:25-27, where Jesus teaches that God provides for His creation, including humanity. Excessive consumption can foster pride and a sense of self-importance contrary to biblical humility. Proverbs 16:18 warns, "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."

The pursuit of material wealth can strain relationships. The Bible underscores the importance of healthy, loving relationships over wealth accumulation.

The Bible cautions against excessive consumption and materialism, highlighting how these pursuits can lead to idolatry, covetousness, moral corruption, neglect of the poor, misplaced priorities, anxiety, pride, and damaged relationships. Instead, scripture encourages believers to prioritize God, spiritual values, and the welfare of others. By heeding these teachings, individuals can find greater fulfillment and live in harmony with biblical principles, fostering a more compassionate and just society.

What is interesting is how uncomfortable we are with the lives that we lead when we are focused on these things mentioned above.



DAY 30

OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF COUNTERCULTURAL LIVING



Daniel, a figure known for his unwavering faith and adherence to his beliefs despite the prevailing culture. Daniel's life in the Babylonian exile is a powerful illustration of living counterculturally.

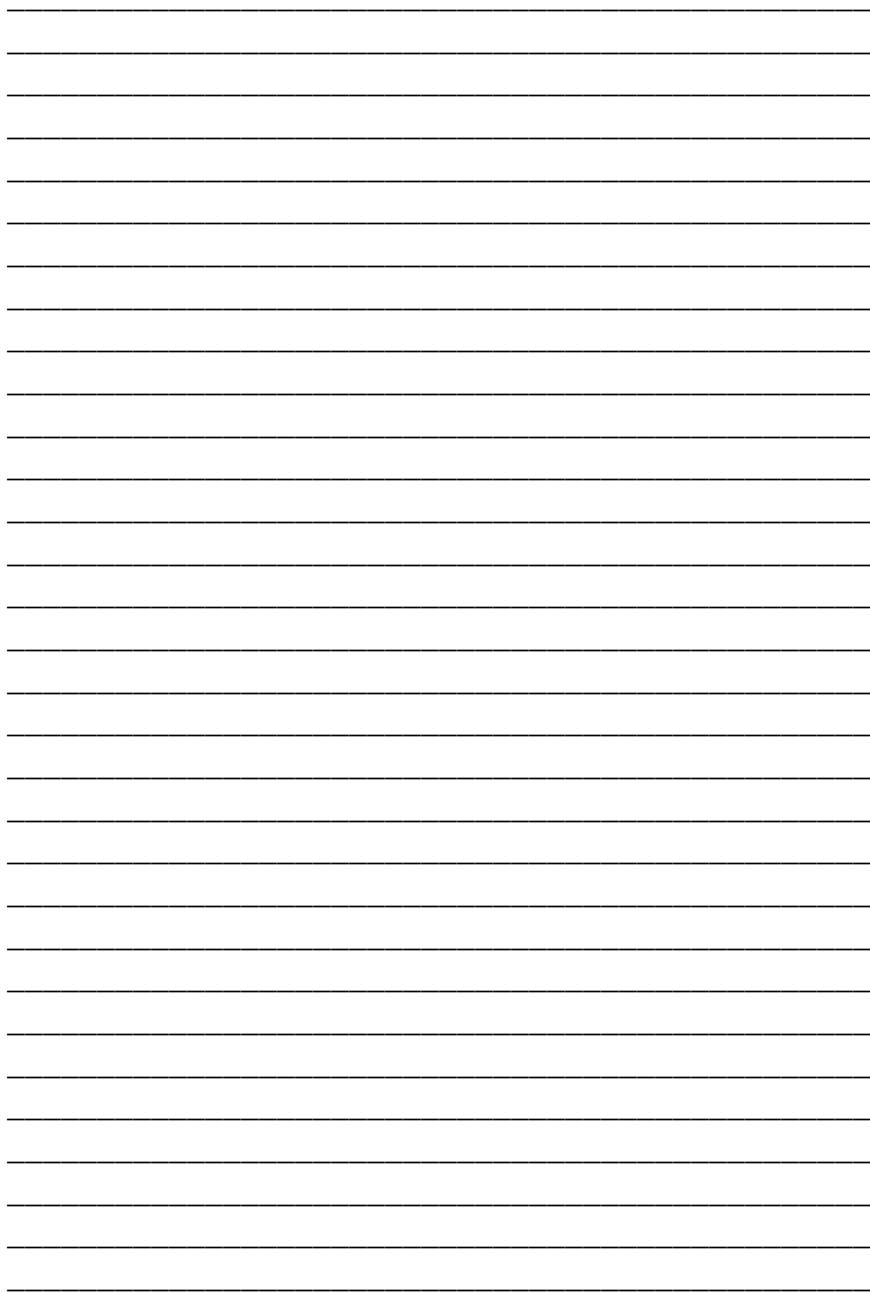
- **Dietary Choices:** In the court of King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel and his companions were offered rich and luxurious foods, but they chose to abstain from the king's delicacies and wine. Instead, they requested a diet of vegetables and water, adhering to their Jewish dietary laws (Daniel 1:8-16). This choice set them apart from the Babylonian culture, which placed great importance on sumptuous feasts.
- **Refusal to Worship Idols:** When King Nebuchadnezzar erected a golden statue and commanded everyone to worship it, Daniel's three friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—defied the king's orders and refused to bow down. They were thrown into a fiery furnace but miraculously saved by

God (Daniel 3:10-30). This act of defiance challenged the idolatrous practices of Babylon.

- **Prayer Life:** Daniel was known for his disciplined prayer life and continued to pray to his God, facing the lion's den as a consequence (Daniel 6:1-23). Despite a decree against it, his unwavering commitment to prayer demonstrated his allegiance to God over the dictates of the Babylonian culture.
- **Interpretation of Dreams:** Daniel gained a reputation for his ability to interpret dreams and visions, which set him apart as a man of wisdom and understanding (Daniel 2:19-23). This contrasted with the reliance on astrologers and magicians in Babylonian culture.
- **Loyalty to God's Law:** Throughout his life in exile, Daniel remained steadfast in his loyalty to God's law and teachings, even when facing persecution and danger. His commitment to God's commands made him a countercultural figure in a society that often promoted idolatry and pagan beliefs.

Daniel's life in Babylon is a powerful example of countercultural living in the Old Testament. Despite the pressures and temptations of a foreign culture that contradicted his faith and values, he remained unwavering in his commitment to God. Daniel's resilience, integrity, and faithfulness inspire believers to stand firm in their convictions and live counterculturally when necessary, trusting in God's guidance and protection.

1. How have you tried to live differently in the place where God has planted you?
2. Do you feel like it has created a resilience in you that can take you through difficult times?
3. Why does Daniel stick out in our minds as someone who is so subversive, yet so incredibly impactful?



DAY 31

LIVING WITH GRATITUDE AS RESISTANCE



Gratitude is a transformative attitude that has the power to impact our lives, shaping our character and perspective profoundly. From a biblical standpoint, gratitude is not merely a pleasant disposition; it is a virtue that holds the potential to change us in meaningful ways. It can be used as resistance to the lives we sometimes feel are full of desperation.

- **Cultivating Humility:** Gratitude reminds us of our dependence on God's grace and the generosity of others. In the Bible, James 4:10 states, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." Gratitude fosters humility by acknowledging that we receive blessings not solely through our efforts but also through divine providence and the kindness of others.
- **Strengthening Relationships:** Gratitude promotes compassion and strengthens relationships. In the book of Colossians (3:12-14), believers are encouraged to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, all of which are virtues

closely tied to gratitude. When we express gratitude to others, we foster deeper connections and show appreciation for their kindness and support.

- **Fostering Contentment:** Gratitude helps us find contentment in our circumstances. Philippians 4:11-13 states, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." Gratitude encourages us to focus on our blessings rather than fixating on what we lack, leading to a more content and peaceful heart.
- **Enhancing Resilience:** Gratitude can increase our resilience in the face of adversity. Romans 8:28 reminds us, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." Gratitude allows us to see potential blessings even in challenging situations, helping us navigate difficulties with greater strength and faith.
- **Inspiring Generosity:** Gratitude begets generosity. In Luke 6:38, Jesus teaches, "Give, and it will be given to you." When we are grateful for our blessings, we are more inclined to share our blessings with others, reflecting the spirit of Christian charity.
- **Promoting Joy:** Gratitude is closely linked to joy and happiness. Psalm 100:4 encourages us to "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise." When we approach life with a heart full of gratitude, we are more likely to experience joy in our daily existence.
- **Transforming Perspective:** Gratitude shifts our perspective from entitlement to appreciation. It reminds us that everything we have is a gift. In 1 Corinthians 4:7, we are reminded, "What do you have that you did not receive?" Gratitude helps us view life's blessings as undeserved gifts rather than entitlements.

In sum, gratitude is a biblical virtue that changes us by fostering humility, strengthening relationships, promoting

DAY 32

LIVING IN GRATITUDE



Living a life of gratitude to God is a profound and transformative way that transcends mere lists of blessings. It is a holistic and all-encompassing approach to life that shapes our attitudes, actions, and outlook on the world.

Living a life of gratitude to God means recognizing the inherent goodness in all aspects of existence. It is a perpetual state of mindfulness, a way of perceiving the world through a lens of appreciation and thanksgiving. This outlook extends to both the extraordinary and the mundane, from a sunrise's beauty to a loved one's comforting embrace.

Living in gratitude is an ongoing dialogue with God. It is a conversation with God where we express our thanks not only for the tangible blessings but also for the intangible gifts – the moments of grace, the lessons learned through challenges, and the growth that emerges from adversity. It's an acknowledgment that even in the most trying times, there is a divine purpose and a reason to be thankful.

Gratitude to God also involves a deep sense of contentment. It's about finding fulfillment in what we have rather than endlessly pursuing what we lack. This contentment is not

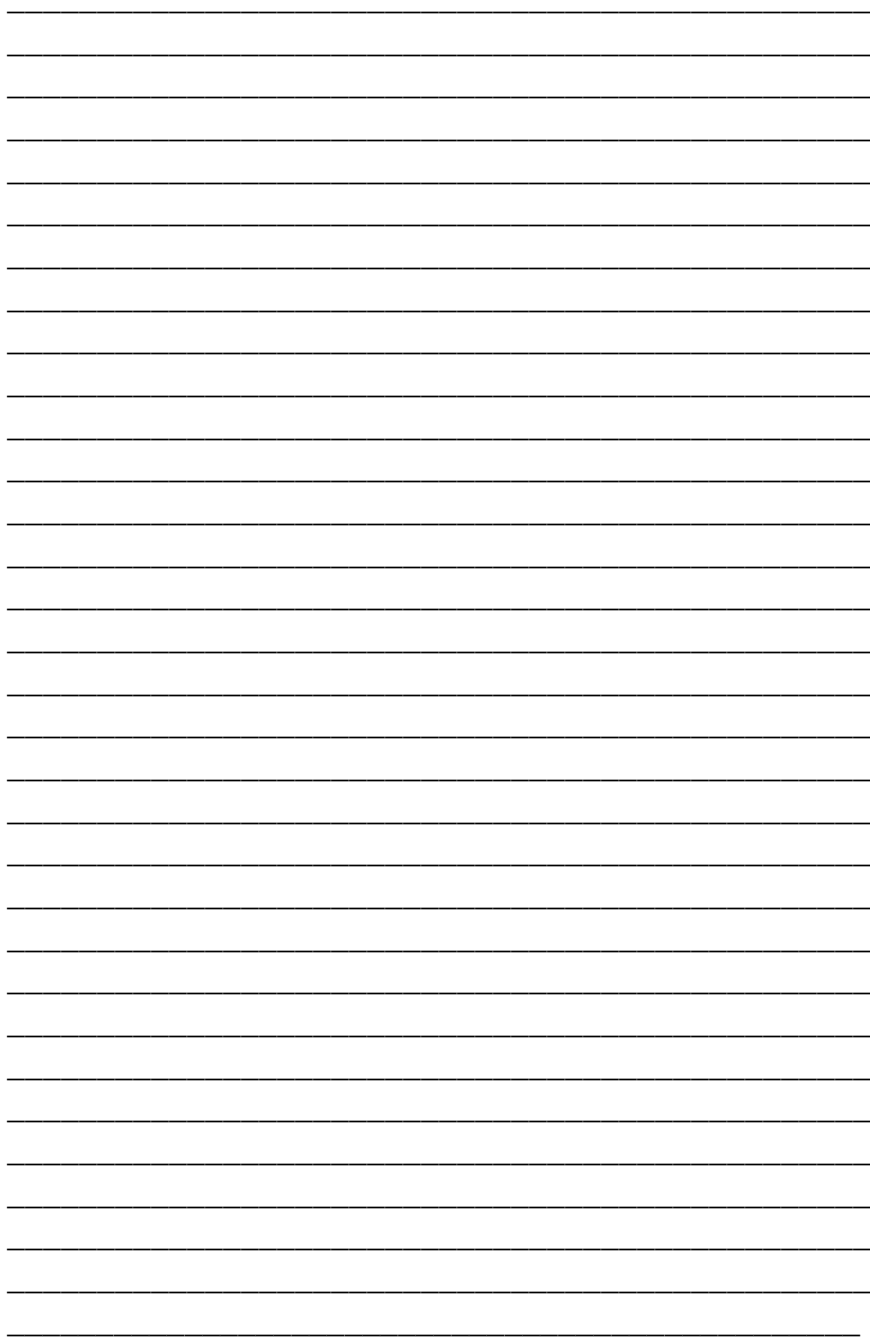
complacency but a recognition that God's provision is sufficient and His plan is perfect.

In living a life of gratitude to God, we experience a profound sense of interconnectedness with all of creation. We recognize that every living being is a part of God's creation and deserves respect and care. This leads us to act with kindness and compassion toward all, seeking to alleviate suffering and promote justice.

Furthermore, gratitude encourages us to live with a generous heart. We become more willing to share our blessings, knowing we are merely stewards of God's gifts. This generosity extends beyond material possessions to our time, talents, and love.

Living in gratitude to God also fosters resilience and strength. It helps us face challenges with a sense of hope, knowing that every difficulty is an opportunity for growth and deeper reliance on God's grace. We learn to trust His timing and wisdom, finding peace in His presence.

Ultimately, living a life of gratitude to God is a spiritual journey that transforms every aspect of our lives. It's about embracing each moment as a gift, loving and serving others as an expression of God's love, and finding joy and purpose in the awareness of God's constant presence. Gratitude to God is not a mere act; it is a way of being that enriches our lives and allows us to experience God's love and grace.



DAY 33

WHAT CAN WE GIVE THANKS FOR TODAY?

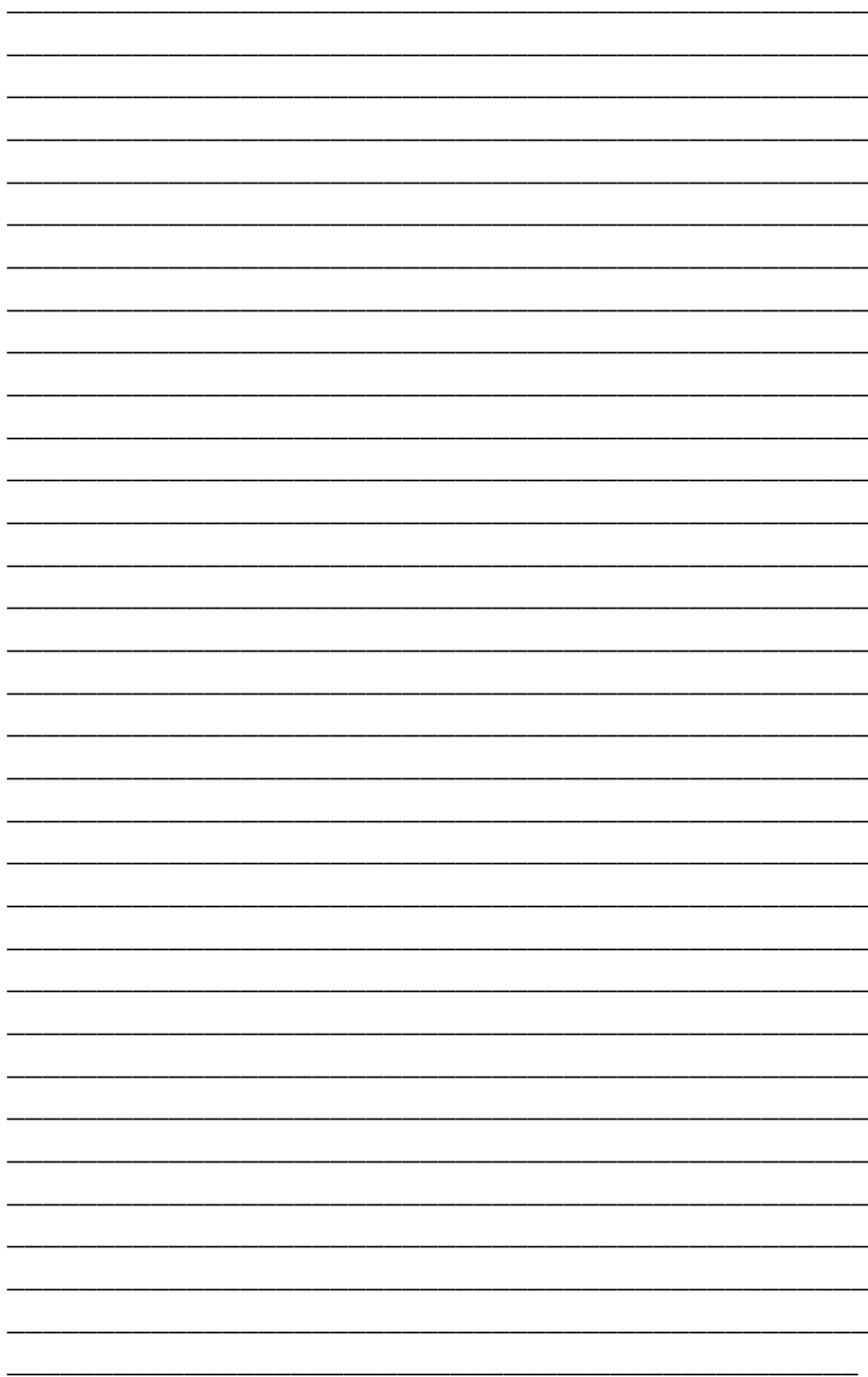


The Bible encourages believers to give thanks for many blessings and aspects of life that remain relevant and meaningful today. While our time's specific circumstances and challenges may differ from those in biblical times, the core principles of gratitude remain constant. Here are some things the Bible prompts us to give thanks for today:

- **Salvation through Christ:** The central message of the Bible is salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We are urged to give thanks for the gift of salvation, as seen in Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."
- **God's Love and Faithfulness:** The Bible emphasizes God's love and faithfulness. In Psalm 136:26, we are reminded to thank the Lord for His steadfast love, which endures forever. Today, we can thank God for the unchanging love that sustains us.
- **Creation and Nature:** The beauty and wonder of God's creation are celebrated in the Bible. We can express gratitude for the natural world around us and

our stewardship of it, recognizing that "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1).

- **Daily Provisions:** The Bible teaches us to give thanks for our daily provisions, including food and shelter. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus encourages us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11), acknowledging our dependence on God for sustenance.
- **Family and Relationships:** We can give thanks for the gift of family and the importance of healthy relationships. Proverbs 18:22 reminds us, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." We can express gratitude for our loved ones and the support they provide.
- **Freedom and Peace:** People enjoy freedom and peace in many parts of the world. We can give thanks for these blessings and pray for those in regions affected by conflict and oppression, as the Bible instructs us to "pray for one another" (James 5:16).
- **Spiritual Growth:** The Bible encourages us to give thanks for opportunities for spiritual growth and sanctification. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, we are told, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
- **Trials and Challenges:** Even in difficult times, we are prompted to give thanks, recognizing that challenges can lead to growth and a deeper reliance on God. Romans 5:3-4 teaches, "we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."
- **God's Word:** We can express gratitude for the Word of God, which guides our lives. Psalm 119:105 states, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."



DAY 34

ONE LAST CHANCE FOR THANKSGIVING



This Thanksgiving week has been an opportunity to share, so remember to thank and eat. I don't want you to spend time with this study I want you to spend time with family, having fun with friends, and sharing a safe space together in love and joy. I will say this: Thank you for being a great community of belonging. May God bless you all. Happy Thanksgiving!

DAY 35

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Thanksgiving is always a great time to get together and think about what God has done for you in the past, now, and future. We know that God will remain faithful, and we want our faithfulness to God to reflect that.

OPEN

As your connect group gathers. Put this question on a white sheet of paper: “What are you grateful for today?” This should keep the group occupied for a little while!!

HEAD

1. What does the Bible say about the importance of gratitude?

This question can lead to a discussion of key Bible verses that emphasize the significance of gratitude, such as 1 Thessalonians 5:18, which states, "Give

thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

2. What are some biblical examples of individuals or communities expressing gratitude?

This question can encourage exploration of specific stories or passages in the Bible where characters or groups of people express gratitude to God. For example, the account of the leper who returned to thank Jesus in Luke 17:11-19.

3. How does gratitude relate to faith and trust in God?

This question can delve into the connection between gratitude, faith, and trust in God's providence. It invites discussion on how a thankful heart can deepen one's relationship with God and strengthen one's trust in His plan.

4. What practical ways the Bible suggests we can cultivate gratefulness in our lives?

This question encourages exploring practical advice from the Bible on nurturing a spirit of gratitude. It may lead to discussions on prayer, counting blessings, and fostering a thankful attitude.

5. How can we express gratitude towards God and others in our daily lives as Christians?

This question prompts reflection on how believers can put gratitude into action. It may lead to conversations about acts of kindness, service, and expressions of thanks toward God and fellow humans.

HEART

Applying biblical texts about gratitude involves more than just reading and understanding the verses; it requires practicing the principles in our daily lives. Here are some practical steps on how to apply biblical texts about gratitude:

- **Prayer and Thanksgiving:** Begin each day with a prayer of thanksgiving. Thank God for the gift of a new day, for His love, and for the blessings in your life. Be specific in your thanksgiving, acknowledging both the big and small blessings.
- **Count Your Blessings:** Regularly take time to count your blessings. Consider keeping a gratitude journal where you write down things you are thankful for. This practice can help you become more aware of God's goodness.
- **Express Gratitude to Others:** Show gratitude to God and the people in your life. Express your appreciation to family members, friends, coworkers, and anyone who has positively impacted you. Acts of kindness and words of thanks can go a long way.
- **Trust in God's Providence:** When facing challenges and uncertainties, trust in God's providence and express gratitude even in difficult circumstances. Remember that God's plan may not always align with your immediate desires, but trust His plan is for your ultimate good.
- **Serve Others:** Gratitude can be expressed through acts of service. Look for opportunities to serve those in need through volunteering, acts of kindness, or offering your time and resources to help others.
- **Foster a Content Heart:** Avoid constantly desiring more material possessions. Instead, cultivate contentment with what you have, recognizing that true wealth is found in spiritual and relational treasures.
- **Attend Worship Services:** Regularly attend worship services or gatherings where you can come together with other believers to express gratitude and praise to God. Corporate worship can reinforce the importance of thanksgiving.

- **Practice Forgiveness:** Gratitude is closely tied to forgiveness. Forgive those who have wronged you, as harboring grudges can hinder your ability to be truly thankful and at peace.
- **Teach Gratitude to Others:** Share the principles of gratitude with your family, friends, and children. Please encourage them to cultivate a thankful attitude as well.
- **Reflect on Biblical Examples:** Study the lives of biblical figures known for their gratitude, such as David, who expressed gratitude through the Psalms, and Paul, who frequently offered thanksgiving in his letters. Their examples can inspire and guide your own practice of gratitude.
- **Pray for a Thankful Heart:** Ask God in your prayers to help you develop a thankful heart. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in you and enable you to maintain an attitude of gratitude.
- **Be Mindful of God's Presence:** Throughout your day, be mindful of God's presence. Recognize He is with you in every situation; His love and grace are constant sources of gratitude.

Applying biblical texts about gratitude is an ongoing and transformative process that involves consciously choosing to live with a thankful heart, seeking to honor God and bless others through your attitude and actions.

HANDS

Expressing gratitude in a small group can strengthen relationships and foster a positive and appreciative atmosphere. Here are two activities that convey gratitude in a small group:

- **Gratitude Circle:**

- Have participants sit in a circle.
- Start by having one person express something they are thankful for. It could be a recent blessing, a positive experience, or a quality they appreciate in someone present.
- After sharing, that person will gently toss a small object (like a ball or a beanbag) to someone else in the circle, while mentioning something they appreciate or are grateful for about that person.
- The person receiving the object then shares their gratitude for someone else in the circle and passes it to them. This continues until everyone has had a chance to express gratitude.
- Encourage participants to be specific in their expressions of gratitude and ensure that everyone has an opportunity to share.

- **Thankful Tree:**

- Provide a large sheet of paper or a poster board and markers.
- Draw or create a simple tree on the paper, leaving empty branches.
- Distribute leaves made of paper or sticky notes to each participant along with markers.
- Ask each person to write something they are grateful for on a leaf.
- Invite participants to take turns attaching their leaves to the "Thankful Tree" branches and briefly sharing their gratitude with the group.
- As the tree fills with leaves, it becomes a visual representation of the collective gratitude within the group.
- Leave the "Thankful Tree" displayed in the meeting area as a reminder of the things the group is thankful for.

These activities encourage participants to openly express their gratitude, promote a positive atmosphere, and help group members feel appreciated and valued. They also create opportunities for deeper connections and shared experiences of thankfulness within the small group.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

One great biblical text on gratitude is found in the book of **Psalm 100:4-5:**

"Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."

This passage from the Psalms beautifully encapsulates the essence of gratitude. It encourages believers to approach God with thanksgiving and praise, acknowledging His goodness, enduring love, and unwavering faithfulness. The text reminds us that expressing gratitude is a fundamental aspect of worship and integral to our relationship with the Lord. It emphasizes that God's love and faithfulness are not fleeting but endures for all generations, underscoring the timeless importance of gratitude in our faith journey.

