

# COMMISSIONED

THE ART OF LIVING OUT THE  
WORDS, WAYS, & MISSION OF JESUS

## 4.2 Pursuing Wholeness and Identity Way of Formation

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The Good News begins with good news.

You were created in the image of God.

Hey I'm Pastor Ryan!

Too often, we begin our understanding of the Gospel as “we are sinners in need of a Savior.” We begin the story of God with, “in the beginning, we messed up. In the beginning, sin entered the world. In the beginning, we were broken.”

We have a tendency to skip right over Genesis 1 and 2 and start with Genesis 3.

But that's not how the story began.

In the beginning, God. It begins with Him and it ends with Him.

And in the beginning, God created... and He said it was good.

And when we come to the apex of creation in Genesis 1:26-27, we read this...

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

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

We were created in God's image. I think we forget how astonishing that is.

But then, of course, sin *did* enter the picture. Relationship with God was broken. The image of God was distorted. Distorted, but not destroyed.

Jesus came to restore that image. To call us back to being the people – the image-bearers – we were created to be. To bring restoration, wholeness, and healing.

In fact, the Greek word “sozo” which we often translate to mean “saved” also means to make well, to heal, and to restore. Jesus didn't just come to “save” us, but to make us whole.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

In Christ, we are loved, chosen, forgiven, redeemed, and adopted. And yet we find it so hard to accept and live in that reality.

Many of us have experienced deep hurts, wounds of trauma or abuse, abandonment or betrayal, rejection or neglect. Those hurts lead us into false beliefs about ourselves or others, creating bitterness and resentment, anger and insecurity, fear and anxiety. We allow labels and messages from others – or from ourselves – to name us as unworthy, unlovable, and unimportant. As shameful and tainted. As not enough.

And all these hurts and hang-ups can lead us into unhealthy and destructive habits, addictions to drugs or alcohol or sex or porn or shopping or food or Netflix in an effort to make ourselves feel better or to simply check out. Our relationships suffer as well as we judge and condemn others in a fruitless effort to make us feel better about ourselves, or avoid conflict and people please in an effort to avoid rejection and win approval.

But that's not what Jesus wants for us. He said in John 10:10 I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.

Does that sound like abundant life to you?

Jesus longs for us to find our value in Him, not in what other people think of us. We are His beloved. We are His children, the apple of His eye.

There are four core truths we need to understand and embrace:

- 1) We are children of God made in His image. In 1 John 3:1, John writes, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” And in Romans 8:14-16, Paul writes, “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”

- 2) Secondly, we must understand that God loves us. 1 John 4:16 declares, “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” We don’t just know *about* the love God has for us, but we *rely* on it.
- 3) Third, we must understand that He wants a relationship with us. Revelation 3:20 declares, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”
- 4) Finally, we must recognize that He has plans for us because we are fearfully and wonderfully made. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul writes, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

As we understand these core truths and look to Him for our identity and worth and value, we can be set free from the need to perform for others – or to judge them.

Christ wants to heal our wounds and break the bondage of sinful habits we have found ourselves trapped in. He wants us to accept His forgiveness, forgive ourselves, and forgive those who sin against us.

He wants us to find intentional, loving community where we can be honest about our desperate need for a Savior and find healing and restoration as others serve as His hands and feet in our lives, and we step out to do the same for others.

Depending on what you’re dealing with, scheduling an appointment with a licensed, professional Christian counselor may be the best first step. A professional counselor can help you discover what lies behind the problems you may be struggling with, process and deal with past traumas, and help in countless other ways, depending on their methodologies and specialties.

In addition, inner healing prayer such as Sozo can also help you get to the root of issues hindering your personal connection with God or others as you engage in an interactive conversation with God with the help of trained prayer ministers.

However, a key part of healing is community. It’s been said that the opposite of addiction is connection, and indeed connection with others is a key component of any healing journey as we seek restoration and wholeness.

If you’re walking through a trial, trauma, or tragedy, a support group or small group of safe others facing a similar situation can be hugely beneficial. Groups like GriefShare and DivorceCare meet for a set period of time and take you through a curriculum to help with the healing process. Other support groups meet weekly or monthly over the long-term, providing you with safe community to process your struggles and be reminded that you are not alone.

If you’re struggling to overcome a hurt, hang-up, or habit, visit Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered 12 Step program for all issues that meets year-round and that you can join at any time. In this safe and confidential space, you can share your struggles and find freedom in Christ.

The 12 Steps outline a recovery-focused path of spiritual growth and development that everyone can benefit from. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Step, you create a list of all the objects of your resentment and

bitterness – basically everyone who has ever harmed you and everyone you’ve ever harmed – as well as a list of those who have blessed you and who you’ve blessed so you don’t feel too overwhelmed. But then you use your list to offer forgiveness, to make amends, and to identify character defects that you need God to change.

The freedom and healing people have found through Celebrate Recovery and the Christ-centered 12 Steps is nothing short of miraculous.

Regardless of which path to wholeness you pursue, key ingredients will include recognizing and embracing your identity as God’s beloved; accepting from and offering forgiveness to yourself and others in your life; dealing with the wounds and bondage in your life; and growing in intentional, loving community.

God bless you on your journey into restoration, healing, and wholeness.