WHEN GOD SAYS "IT'S GOOD"

IS IT GOOD?

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Part 1 of 2

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In the beginning God created… and He saw that it was GOOD. In this study we will be looking at Genesis 1-4, the beginning record of His creation and discovering what He calls GOOD. As you read and discuss these things you may find yourself in tension between what God established and where the world is at today; you may even find yourself in conflict between your definition versus His definition of GOOD. I want to encourage you to embrace the conflict this may cause in your life. Mankind's first act after disobedience in the garden was to hide from God, avoiding the conversation and confrontation of their sin. It is within our nature to run. Yet, the only way to find restoration and to see the world brought back to God's order and GOOD, we must stop this game of hide and seek. Be intentional about laying every thought, paradigm, and assumption you have before the Lord. Fight the desire to avoid, run from, or hide.

In 2nd Chronicles we read the recorded deeds and history of the kings of Israel and Judah. Many of these kings did evil in God's sight, but some remained faithful and true to the Lord. One of these faithful kings was Hezekiah. When he became king, he tore down the pagan worship shrines and idols that had plagued the nation. He restored the temple, reinstated the priests, and returned the nation to faithful worship of God. Unlike his father and kings before him, he chose submission to God's established Law and Word, using royal decrees to glorify God rather than himself.

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2 Chronicles 31:20-21 New International Version (NIV)

20 *This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God.* ***21*** *In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands,* ***he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered.***

My prayer and hope for you throughout this study is that you would strategically position yourself like Hezekiah, choosing humility and submission, in full pursuit of God's declared GOOD. That in your pursuit, you would find yourself prospering because of the decision to seek and return back to a Biblical knowledge and understanding of God's created GOOD.

Pastor Brad

WEEK ONE
Can We Believe the Bible?

At Hillside our first core value is, *"We Believe the Bible."* All of our core values are important and guide us in ministry focus, and while they are not listed in order of importance, this one is foundational to all the others. Without the Bible we are unable to know God's character and love for us, how we are to live before God and others, and how to have a thriving relationship with Him. The Bible was written by 40 authors over the span of 1500 years. It details the accounts of real events, people, places, and nations; sharing success and failures of kings, priests, prophets, apostles, and disciples. It has one consistent message: The God who created us desires a relationship with us, and even through our repeated failures, He remains faithful.

Now that we know the importance and value of the Bible as a religious text, we still need to answer whether we can believe the Bible. This week we will be looking at three reasons why you can believe that the Bible is not merely a religious textbook or collection of fables depicting the Judeo-Christian God. The Bible is so much more than that. In Paul's words it is "breathed out by God" and is the truth we measure our lives up against. It is the key to understanding how God designed the world and is "living and active." It is not just a historical narrative, but it is a guide for how God interacts with his creation throughout time. Before we can study Genesis 1-4 discovering God's GOOD, we need to know we can trust it.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

*[16] **All Scripture** is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

In Paul's letter to Timothy he tells him ALL SCRIPTURE is important. A recent study recently showed that only 20% of Christians in America have read the Bible in its entirety and over 50% have read less than half. The entirety of God's Word is vital to us becoming complete and equipped as Christians. If you are in the majority of Christians who have yet to read the Bible all the way through, let this encourage you to begin a consistent reading plan today! If you don't know where to begin ask your Group Leader.

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Three Reasons You can Believe the Bible

Reason #1 | Historical Accuracy

Can you trust that it is historically accurate?

Archaeologists have consistently discovered the names of government officials, kings, cities, and festivals mentioned in the Bible -- sometimes when historians didn't think such people or places existed. For example, the Gospel of John tells of Jesus healing a cripple next to the Pool of Bethesda. The text even describes the five porticoes (walkways) leading to the pool. Scholars didn't think the pool existed, until archaeologists found it forty feet below ground, complete with the five porticoes.[1]

The Bible has a tremendous amount of historical detail, so not everything mentioned in it has yet been found through archaeology. However, not one archaeological find has conflicted with what the Bible records.[2] Many of the ancient locations mentioned by Luke, in the Book of Acts in the New Testament, have been identified through archaeology. "In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities and nine islands without an error."[3]

Archaeology has also refuted many ill-founded theories about the Bible. For example, a theory still taught in some colleges today asserts that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), because writing had not been invented in his day. Then archaeologists discovered the Black Stele. "It had wedge-shaped characters on it and contained the detailed laws of Hammurabi. Was it post-Moses? No! It was pre-Mosaic; not only that, but it was pre-Abraham (2,000 B.C.).

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Three Reasons You can Believe the Bible

Reason #1 | Historical Accuracy

Can you trust that it is historically accurate?

It preceded Moses' writings by at least three centuries."[4]

Not only do we have archaeological evidence supporting the Bible, we also have testimony from both Jewish and Roman historians concerning the Gospel's representation of Jesus. The gospels report that Jesus of Nazareth performed many miracles, was executed by the Romans, and rose from the dead. Numerous ancient historians back the Bible's account of the life of Jesus and his followers:

- Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55-120), an historian of first-century Rome, is considered one of the most accurate historians of the ancient world.[5] An excerpt from Tacitus tells us that the Roman emperor Nero "inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class...called Christians. ...Christus [Christ], from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus...."[6]
- Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian (A.D. 38-100), wrote about Jesus in his *Jewish Antiquities.* From Josephus, "we learn that Jesus was a wise man who did surprising feats, taught many, won over followers from among Jews and Greeks, was believed to be the Messiah, was accused by the Jewish leaders, was condemned to be crucified by Pilate, and was considered to be resurrected."[7]

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Three Reasons You can Believe the Bible

Reason #1 | Historical Accuracy

Can you trust that it is historically accurate?

- Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, and Thallus also wrote about Christian worship and persecution that is consistent with New Testament accounts.
- Even the Jewish *Talmud,* certainly not biased toward Jesus, concurs about the major events of his life. From the *Talmud,* "we learn that Jesus was conceived out of wedlock, gathered disciples, made blasphemous claims about himself, and worked miracles, but these miracles are attributed to sorcery and not to God."[8]

This is remarkable information considering that most ancient historians focused on political and military leaders, not on obscure rabbis from distant provinces of the Roman Empire. Yet ancient historians (Jews, Greeks and Romans) confirm the major events that are presented in the New Testament, even though they were not believers themselves.

Footnotes: (1) Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), p. 132. (2) The renowned Jewish archaeologist, Nelson Glueck, wrote: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference." cited by McDowell, Josh. (3) Geisler, Norman L. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). (4) McDowell, Josh. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (1972), p. 19. (5) McDowell, Josh. *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p. 55. (6) Tacitus, A. 15.44. (7) Wilkins, Michael J. & Moreland, J.P. *Jesus Under Fire* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 40. (8) Ibid.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Three Reasons You can Believe the Bible

Reason #2 | Repeated Accuracy

Can you trust that it is the same book Jesus believed?

Some people have the idea that the Bible has been translated "so many times" that it has become corrupted through stages of translating. That would probably be true if the translations were being made from other translations. But translations are actually made directly from original Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic source texts based on thousands of ancient manuscripts. The accuracy of today's Old Testament was confirmed in 1947 when archaeologists found "The Dead Sea Scrolls" along today's West Bank in Israel. "The Dead Sea Scrolls" contained Old Testament scripture dating 1,000 years older than any manuscripts we had. When comparing the manuscripts at hand with these, from 1,000 years earlier, we find agreement 99.5% of the time. And the .5% differences are minor spelling variances and sentence structure that doesn't change the meaning of the sentence.

Regarding the New Testament, it is humanity's most reliable ancient document. All ancient manuscripts were written on papyrus, which didn't have much of a shelf life. So people hand copied originals, to maintain the message and circulate it to others.

- Few people doubt Plato's writing of "The Republic." It's a classic, written by Plato around 380 B.C. The earliest copies we have of it are dated 900 A.D., which is a 1,300 year time lag from when he wrote it. There are only seven copies in existence.

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Three Reasons You can Believe the Bible

Reason #2 | Repeated Accuracy

Can you trust that it is the same book Jesus believed?

- Caesar's "Gallic Wars" were written around 100-44 B.C. The copies we have today are dated 1,000 years after he wrote it. We have ten copies.
- When it comes to the New Testament, written between 50-100 A.D, there are more than 5,000 copies. All are within 50-225 years of their original writing. Further, when it came to Scripture, scribes (monks) were meticulous in their copying of original manuscripts. They checked and rechecked their work, to make sure it perfectly matched.

What the New Testament writers originally wrote is preserved better than any other ancient manuscript. We can be more certain of what we read about Jesus' life and words, than we are certain of the writings of Caesar, Plato, Artistotle and Homer.

Reason #3 | Prophetic Accuracy

Can you trust that God inspired it?

The Old Testament, written hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, contains over 300 prophecies that Jesus fulfilled through His life, death and resurrection.

Mathematically speaking, the odds of anyone fulfilling this amount of prophecy are staggering. Mathematicians put it this way:

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Three Reasons You can Believe the Bible

Reason #3 | Prophetic Accuracy

Can you trust that God inspired it?

1 person fulfilling 8 prophecies:

1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000

1 person fulfilling 48 prophecies:

1 chance in 10 to the 157th power

1 person fulfilling 300+ prophecies: Only Jesus!

It is the magnificent detail of these prophecies that mark the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Only God could foreknow and accomplish all that was written about the Christ. This historical accuracy and reliability sets the Bible apart from any other book or record.

As we study God's GOOD in Genesis 1-4 we hope these three reasons will help you trust the Bible and trust God as you wrestle through the concepts coming up in this study. The Bible is our foundation and throughout the next several weeks our goal is to allow it to be the truth that we measure everything else in our lives up against.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Discussion Guide

1. Is the Bible the foundation you build your life upon? Why or Why not? What parts of the Bible do you have a hard time believing or putting into practice?

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2. In your Group read Matthew 7:24-27. What stands out to you in this parable? What was the difference between the wise man and the foolish man?

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3. What has been the most effective way for you to read the Bible and to stay consistent with it (Randomly, Chronologically, Bible Plan, etc.)? Do you read to connect mentally, emotionally, and spiritually with the Scriptures, do you read to complete a discipline or reading plan, or a little of both? What are the pros and cons of each?

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4. What has been a scripture or passage of scripture from the Bible that has been transformational for you or that you have built your life on.

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Discussion Guide

5. In your Group read 2nd Timothy 3:16-17. Have members of the Group share moments where the Bible has been used for teaching, reproof, correction, or training in righteousness. What was this process like (it can be from a personal experience or an experience from a leader/mentor in your life)?

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6. How has the Bible helped shape you as a Christian in areas of business, home, relationships, etc?

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7. What would you say to someone struggling to find time to read the Bible? What about where to begin? (The "someone" might even be yourself in this situation, but we often know the answer to our own questions if we take the time to talk it out)

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WEEK TWO

Eternal Power & Divine Nature

Scriptures: *Genesis 1:1-5; Romans 1:20; Job 12:7-10; Psalm 19:1-4*

Genesis 1 English Standard Version (ESV)

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. *[2] The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

Genesis begins with this profound statement. It doesn't just introduce God or begin the Bible, it is a statement establishing God as one who was there before time began and the one who had power to create. In Romans, Paul writes:

Romans 1:20 English Standard Version (ESV)

[20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

We see evidence of God's eternal power and divine nature by looking at the world He created. Every moment you have a breath-taking experience in nature you are witness to the goodness of God. These things have been happening to mankind since the dawn of time, yet even when we forget to acknowledge the God who created it, His power and nature are on display for us. We are still held without an excuse. God has been clearly perceived

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since the creation of the world.

Genesis continues the account of creation starting in verse three and we are given this three word statement before each line:

"And God said…"

Simple, right? Yet within this impactful phrase we read a declarative statement of the power in each word that comes from God's mouth. Imagine for a moment, close your eyes if you must, a time where you witnessed something in nature that took your breath away. God created that wonderful scene simply with His words! His words have power. His words bring forth existence. His words declare what is GOOD.

This is important for us to recognize because we often forget that the same God who tells us to love our neighbor is the same God who created the mountain peaks. This same sound that brought forth the sunrise speaks to you and I today. This voice declares to us what is GOOD. The next time you struggle listening or obeying what God says, take a moment to look. Go and open your eyes to see God's nature and power all around you.

Job 12:7-10 English Standard Version (ESV)

7 "But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; 8 or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. 9 Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? 10 In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.

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Psalm 19:1-4 English Standard Version (ESV)

19 *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.[2] Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.[3] There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.[4] Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun,*

Take a few moments this week to slow down and allow the Lord to reveal Himself to you. Be aware of what He is showing you and give yourself time to be in awe of Him. Sometimes we become too busy to even recognize the opportunites He gives, so this week let the phrase, "stop and smell the roses" be a reminder to slow down and reflect on the awe inspiring God we serve.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Discussion Guide

1. Where do you feel most connected to God in His creation (in the forest, around people, oceans views, sunsets, etc.)? Where do you see God's creativity reflected the most?

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2. What thoughts do you have when we say God is good? Is it easy or hard for you to believe God is good? Why or Why not?

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3. When God speaks to you do you believe His words are both good and powerful? Is one or the other easier to accept? Why is it important to have both?

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4. What are other characteristic traits of God that are easy for you to believe?

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Discussion Guide

5. In your Group read Job 12:7-10 & Psalm 19:1-4. What stands out to you as it was read?

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6. When you read the order of the creation account in Genesis 1 what thoughts do you have? Is it easy or hard for you to believe God as creator of the world? Why or Why not?

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7. In your Group read Revelation 21:5-8. Is it comforting to know that the same God who was there in the beginning will also be there in the end?

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WEEK THREE

Image of God

Scriptures: *Genesis 1:26-31; Romans 1:21-23; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 22:20-21*

Genesis 1:26-27 English Standard Version (ESV)

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

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

Mankind has been given a unique gift, we are the only living creatures on earth with the ability to make creative, willful, and purposeful decisions. We have been placed at the top of creation not because of our intellect or physical ability, but because we have been created in the likeness of God. Like a child who carries the DNA and physical appearance of a parent, we reflect and resemble the God whose image we bear. We are intrinsically designed to reflect the glory of God and rule over the earth. Yet when we reject this role, we become worshippers and slaves to the very things we were created to rule over.

Romans 1:21-23 English Standard Version (ESV)

21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

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[23] and ***exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.***

Paul continues in Romans describing our identity found in Christ, this restored and redeemed version of life that is found through Christ. He speaks on the freedom from sin through the Spirit, he shares on the mercy and grace of God, He continues to expound upon the life Christ has called us to. In many ways he lays out God's original plan and the way we should have lived in His image. In Romans 12 he shares this statement:

Romans 12:1-2 New International Version (NIV)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. [2] Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Our greatest act of free-will is to freely offer our lives back to God. Our ability to make creative, willful, and purposeful decisions should be used to honor God, this is our proper act of worship. Jesus said it this way in response to a question about taxes,

Matthew 22:20-21 English Standard Version (ESV)

[20] And Jesus said to them, ***"Whose likeness and inscription is this?"*** *[21] They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them,* ***"Therefore render to Caesar the***

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things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." [22] *When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.*

Our desire is to live a life where we fully surrender and offer anything that belongs to God to Him.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Discussion Guide

1. What impacts you the most about being made in the image of God? Why does this impact you?

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2. Does being made in the image of God cause you to value human life more? Why or Why not?

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3. In your Group read Romans 1:21-23. What are areas of your life that you should be master of, but because you place them over God they end up ruling over you? How can you realign these areas of your life?

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4. In your Group read Romans 8:12. Have you ever felt that sin has control over you? What does this verse say about our relationship to sin through Christ?

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Discussion Guide

5. What does Romans 12 say is our true and proper worship? Does your life match this level of worship to God? What might be the things that hinder you from fully surrending to God?

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6. How does knowing we are created in the likeness of God dictate how you view those around you, especially toward unsaved friends or family? Do you think this information would be helpful to hear? Why or Why not?

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WEEK FOUR
Biblical Identity & Reproduction

Scriptures: *Genesis 1:11,21,24; Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 139; 1 Corinthians 6:17-20; 1 Timothy 1:1-11*

When God created life, He established laws and order in the earth. We see their governance within the law of gravity, the tides and seasons, and numerous other natural occurrences. Can you imagine a world without these things? What would life be like without the forests producing oxygen or gravity keeping things in place? Without God's established order life would not be GOOD, it would be chaos. In the same way God established a GOOD natural order for life to continue, a law that life reproduces "according to their kind (Genesis 1:11,21,24)." God established this GOOD order for all life, but in Genesis 2 we are given more intimate details for mankind.

Genesis 2:18-24 English Standard Version (ESV)

*18 Then the Lord God said, **"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."** 19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a*

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woman and brought her to the man. [23] *Then the man said,*

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

[24] ***Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.***

What a beautiful passage detailing God's goodness and divine care toward mankind! Over the past couple of weeks we have been looking at the trust we can have in the Bible, God's divine nature and eternal power, and our designed image. This week we will be addressing our sexuality.

Before we begin, we want to submit a few guiding principles. First, we believe the Bible. This is and needs to be our foundation for any and all topics. It is our guide for living and discovering God's established GOOD. Second, God is our creator. He was the one who formed us, breathed life into us, and wants relationship with us. In His words are power and life. Third, God sent his Son to redeem mankind because of His love for us. This act of redemption enables us to come back to God's established GOOD. Our identity can be found through Him. He alone knows your innermost thoughts, He alone fashioned you in your mother's womb, He has precious thoughts toward you that outnumber the grains of sand (Psalm 139). In His words we find power, authority, and love. Whatever questions or thoughts you have, He has the answer. Our goal is to simply see what His established GOOD and original design for us is.

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When God created mankind the Bible says, "*male and female he created them.*" First, we want to address that God's original design for mankind is male and female. In today's culture there is a push away from God's design and identity, but the truth is He created us, and any other label is not His. This tension between our freedom and God's order is not new. Mankind has continually been at odds since the fall with God's GOOD and our own desire in a multiple of ways. Yet, His established order is still in effect regardless of opinion or modern agenda. In fact, the Bible teaches that He had a role in our formation.

Psalm 139:13-16 English Standard Version (ESV)

13 *For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.****14*** *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.****15*** *My frame was not hidden from you,when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.****16*** *Your eyes saw my unformed substance;in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

We read earlier that God created an order for each living creature to reproduce "according to its kind" but humanity is unique in that every person has been formed and fashioned by God. We are not simply products of reproduction. We are products of a God intimately involved in our design and life before we were even known to others!

Second, we want to address the original design of our sexuality is between a man and a

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woman. Throughout the Bible there are a handful of verses directly addressing homosexuality, and in each verse the context is in rebellion or contradiction of God's will and order, yet there are 23,145 verse in the Bible and not one affirms homosexuality. On the other hand, there are numerous Scriptures and teachings from the Old Testament, Jesus, and New Testament writers that address appropriate relationship between a man and woman. Specifically, the Bible teaches that sexual expression between a man and woman is only appropriate within a marriage covenant and any other sexual act outside of that is inappropriate.

1 Corinthians 6:17-20 English Standard Version (ESV)

[17] But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. [18] Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. [19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? ***You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.***

Paul expresses it so well in his letter to the Corinthians, *"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."* We understand that you may have questions or concerns that cannot be answered by simple statements, you may need a conversation to address specific things. Your small group and the pastoral staff are here to help you navigate these things, if you need to schedule a meeting please

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reach out. If your Group has questions that are left unanswered please reach out to Pastor Brad, he would love to meet your entire Group and discuss these issues. Our goal here at Hillside is to live as Timothy was instructed.

1 Timothy 1:3-11 English Standard Version (ESV)

3 As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. 5 ***The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*** *6 Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, 7 desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.*

8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and ***whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine****, 11 in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.*

Our desire is to believe the Bible and to teach it in its entirety, holding on to and teaching *"sound doctrine"* in accordance to the entirety of Scripture and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Discussion Guide

1. In your Group read Psalm 139:13-16. What stands out to you in this passage? Does knowing God formed, fashioned, and knows your days affect how you view yourself? What about the people around you?

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2. In 1st Corinthians 6:17-20 we read, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." What does it mean, "you are not your own?" Does this change the way you live? How are we to "glorify God in our body?"

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3. What stood out to you in this week's lesson. Why is it so important to know what the Bible states about the topics we face today?

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4. In your Group read John 14:15-17. What does Jesus say is the mark of our love for Him? What is the role of the "Advocate" in our life?

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Discussion Guide

5. Do you find it difficult to love where you live and still follow the commands of God? Why or Why not?

6. Questions are a part of every person's journey and God is able to receive and answer your questions. We want to give you extra space to write down any additional questions you might have.

WEEK FIVE
Order of Rest

Scriptures: *Genesis 2:1-3; Luke 10:38-42; Mark 2:27*

Genesis 2 English Standard Version (ESV)

2 *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.* ***2*** *And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.* ***3*** ***So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.***

When God finished creating the world he rested; not only did he rest, it was mankind's first day on the job. Think about that… our first interaction with God was not one of duty, action, or accomplishment. No, our first responsibility was to rest with God! Jesus, answering a question about the Sabbath, in Mark 2:27 said, *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."* We were created for God and the Sabbath was set apart as a permanent reminder to spend time in rest with Him. If we commit to this holy rest, we will partake in the fullness of blessing that God bestowed upon it.

Let us look at a story in the New Testament that reveals this concept in further detail.

Luke 10:38-42 English Standard Version (ESV)

38 *Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.* ***39*** *And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his*

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teaching. [40] But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." [41] But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, [42] but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Throughout mankind's history we often judge others based upon their achievements. Greatness is a label given only to those deserving based upon the culmination of their good deeds. Yet in this story Jesus does not affirm Martha. You would think that the person who served Jesus best would be the one who would receive His praise. Martha certainly thought so. She went to Jesus demanding Him to recognize her good deeds and to tell her sister to join in the activity. Jesus responded to her frustrations with a gentle correction, *"you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary."* Maybe you need to hear that today. Have you been busy trying to earn accolades or approval from God by your actions? Perhaps you are upset that God has not elevated you to "greatness" despite your many accomplishments. Remember Genesis 2, mankind's first pleasing act was to rest with God.

This story was also chosen because it clarifies the concept of rest, this concept of a Sabbath. It is more than a religious commandment or yet another command we must be careful to observe, it is a life-giving blessing. *"Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."* Mary recognized that Jesus was in the room and chose to

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sit at His feet. How often do you choose to sit with Jesus? The story of Mary and Martha gives us a plain example of how easy it is to be in the presence of God and miss out, and how simple it is to position yourself in His presence. Mary chose GOOD and Jesus said, *"[It] will not be taken away from her."*

Now this doesn't mean we never work, this next chapter will cover what work looked like in God's GOOD garden, but it does mean that we need to prioritize rest with God. A GOOD relationship with God does not begin with doing more; it begins with a day of rest, a moment at His feet, and a pause in our busy lives to acknowledge Him.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Discussion Guide

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to rest? Have you ever taken a day to rest with the Lord? Why do you think the Lord made it so important to take a Sabbath?

2. In the story of Mary and Martha who do you think you are?

3. Have you ever missed the blessing of being in God's presence? What caused you to miss out on the moment? How do you overcome these things so that you don't miss the next opportunity?

4. What are your thoughts on God creating the earth and resting with Adam on the 7th day? Is this something you have ever considered before?

Discussion Guide

5. Have you ever ran to Jesus with concerns or attitudes He needs to correct you on? What was this process like? What was the result?

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6. Do you feel inspired to take time to rest with God? Why or Why not? What would need to change in your schedule?

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WEEK SIX
Order of Work

Scriptures: *Genesis 2:4-17; Matthew 25:14-27; Colossians 3:23*

Genesis 2:15-17 English Standard Version (ESV)

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

After the day of rest with the Lord, God took Adam and gave him responsibilities overseeing the Garden. In Genesis 1:28 God blessed and mandated mankind to, *"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."* God entrusted us to oversee his world. His GOOD creation was now handed over to man to steward.

We use the word steward because it is a more accurate representation of how we partner with God in our work. A steward is someone who manages, oversees, and supervises someone else's affairs as if it were their own. A steward acts on behalf of the owner and works with the knowledge that everything ultimately belongs to the owner. A steward is entrusted with the affairs and business of a master and is expected to bring about a fruitful return. We have been placed in authority over God's GOOD creation but we are expected to bring a return to the Lord.

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In Matthew 25 there is a familiar parable about the three servants and the talents. As you read through this passage keep in mind the concept of a steward and the mandate given man in Genesis.

Matthew 25:14-27 English Standard Version (ESV)

*14 "**For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property**. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. 17 So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 Now after a long time **the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them**. 20 And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' 21 His master said to him, '**Well done, good and faithful servant**. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 22 And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' 23 His master said to him, '**Well done, good and faithful servant**. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 24 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you*

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*have what is yours.' [26] But his master answered him, '**You wicked and slothful servant**! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? [27] Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest."*

This parable is a wonderful example of stewardship. We aren't told what the first two men did to multiply the master's property, but we do see that the master was well pleased with them. As stewards they were given complete freedom and autonomy to decide what to do with what they were given. The master left them with the ability to make their own decision, this concept is often expressed as free-will.

Each one of us have been given unique abilities, interests, and passions. We are free to decide what to do with them, but ultimately the master is still in control and has the right to come and "settle accounts." People who grasp this concept find great joy and fulfillment in serving God, they are free to take part in work that matches with their abilities, interests, and passions. They fulfill the command in Colossians 3:23, *"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,"* with eagerness they can "work heartily" honoring and glorifying God. We are given freedom within our work, but with that freedom, we are still expected to fulfill the command to "be fruitful and multiply."

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Discussion Guide

1. What stood out to you from this week's study?

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2. In your Group read Colossians 3:23. Would you say this verse describes your attitude about work? Why or Why not? What needs to change in you for this to be true?

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3. In your Group read Malachi 3:8-10. Does the concept of stewardship change the tone of this verse for you? Why or Why not? If you entrusted someone to manage your affairs, would you think it unfair to expect a return?

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4. How would behaving like a steward change how you view your work life here on earth?

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Discussion Guide

5. Do you feel that you can take great joy and fulfillment in serving God? If yes, how has serving God affected your life? If no, what keeps you from experiencing joy?

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6. In the parable the master returned to "settle accounts." If the Lord were to return today what do you think He would say to you about what you've done with what he has given you?

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7. Why did fear keep the last servant from investing what he was given? Have you ever let fear keep you from doing what God asked/expects of you?

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