



Stepping into God's Story – Episode Eight – A Better Beginning

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BIG IDEA – Knowing how it all ends helps us endure the messy middle.

scripture focus - Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

How many times have you gone somewhere to eat or gathered at a party and had some “first impressions” of your experience? We are fairly fickle folks, aren't we? We have these gut reactions to the environment, the people around us, and our interactions with others. **When it comes to first impressions, how do people view Christ? Being the ambassadors of Christ, how are we doing at speaking or behaving like Him?** Let's discover some ways we can embody Jesus in the world around us.

This final piece of Stepping into God's Story is how the story ends! We looked at how it all began with the self-sufficient and eternal God who lovingly creates a perfect creation with humanity as His crowning work. But **humans chose to believe the lie, pitched by Satan, that we could live a better life, our best life by choosing to do things our way. We could gain the knowledge of good and evil and be our own god, choosing our own destiny – our rules, our way, doing whatever we please, whenever we want!**

In this final series message, we will see how **the rescue of Jesus and the formation of a new people does not mean "everyone lives happily ever after... in the end."**

Stepping into God's Story continues even today!

A time is coming where God's people—people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who have been rescued by Christ—will enjoy Him and His rule forever in perfect harmony. **Satan will be crushed, the effects of sin will be reversed, and all things will be made new.**

This is where we all live today in the Kingdom of God, which is "already, but not yet" fully experiencing God here on earth, but there is still so much more to come!

Four things we see about how everything will end – this will happen:

1. **The nations are gathered.**
2. **The curse is reversed.**
3. **Evil is destroyed.**
4. **Christ is enjoyed.**

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

Paul says the sufferings will not even compare to the ending.

Why would the Apostle Paul want us to compare current suffering with future splendor?

When we know the ending, it helps us endure until it comes.

The pain and the struggle are in the messy middle.

The ending is so much better than even beginning.
In the beginning, before sin, there is a **picture of a garden** and a little bit of the geography of the world that existed long ago.

Genesis 2:8-10 The LORD God **planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he placed the man he had formed.** The LORD God caused to grow out of the ground **every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden,** as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **A river went out from Eden to water the garden.** From there it divided and became the source of four rivers.

But in the end of scripture, the last chapter of the Revelation, written by John, we see a city and very similar elements. It is interesting to compare the beginning to the end.

Revelation 22:1-5 Then he showed me **the river of the water of life, clear as crystal,** flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the city's main street. **The tree of life was on each side of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations, and there will no longer be any curse.** The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. **Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.**

Genesis 2 is before sin and Revelation 22 is after sin has been dealt with by Christ himself.

- **The tree of life in Genesis feeds the first couple – it is sustenance versus the tree of life in Revelation feeds all and provides healing for the nations.**
- **The river in Genesis waters the garden versus the river in Revelation waters everything.**
- **In Genesis, Adam & Eve steward the garden. Revelation, we reign with Christ over all things.**
- **Genesis Adam & Eve enjoy God. In Revelation we enjoy God forever.**

We can endure because we know how it ends.

1. The nations are gathered.

John tells us who will be a part of the new heaven and new earth.

In Revelation 7:9 After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, **from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb.** They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands.

If you don't like different ethnic people groups now, then heaven will not be a happy place for you. If you've ever been to a world market in another country, you'll note that there are people from all kinds of different backgrounds, cultures, and tastes. The sites and the smells are definitely overwhelming! Many of those who come to shop are tourists from other countries buying cool trinkets for gifts or to remind them of their trip.

2. The curse is reversed.

Revelation 21:1-4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. **I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,** prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: **'Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God.** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. **Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.**

But also, in this vision, John did not see something he would have been very familiar with... a temple, where God's presence temporarily resided.

Revelation 21:22 I did not see a temple in it, because **the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.**

In the beginning, Genesis unfolds full impact of the fall of humanity – but here in Revelation, we find the curse is reversed, no more sin!

In fact, there are a lot of jobs that will be eliminated in heaven. There are no more:

- Morticians or funeral directors.
- Doctors, nurses or technicians.
- Counselors or trauma therapists.
- Divorce attorneys.
- Soldiers or military personnel, because there are no more wars.
- Bible teachers, because you'll know God so much better, and He will continue to teach and lead us.

3. Evil is destroyed.

Evil will be destroyed. Sin will be no more and evil itself is banished from heaven.

Revelation 20:10 Then the devil, who had deceived them, was **thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur**, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The chief accuser, that sack of flies - Satan will be no more - thrown into the everlasting hell.

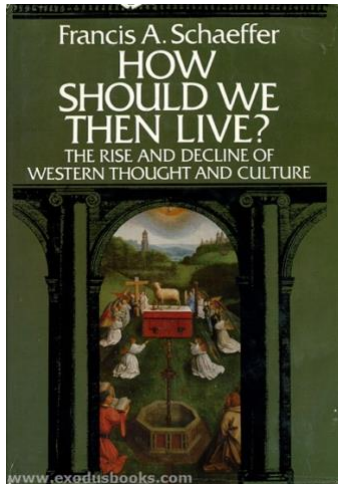
4. Christ is enjoyed.

Everything is right, perfect, and pure. **Heaven is ultimately heaven is because Jesus is there.**

Heaven is not for people just wanting to avoid hell, it's for people who want to be with Jesus forever.

Heaven is **also not for people that just prefer it over hell** – it's all about Christ and being with him.

Theologian Francis Schaeffer published his book in 1976, "[How Should We Then Live](#)," addressing the **wide gap between what we know to be true and the life reflecting the way we behave.**



Knowing how it all ends, can do more than just endure?
Can we live like God's Kingdom has come, like heaven here on earth?

NOTES

Scriptures

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

Genesis 2:8-10 The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he placed the man he had formed. The LORD God caused to grow out of the ground every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden, as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river went out from Eden to water the garden. From there it divided and became the source of four rivers.

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holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: 'Look, **God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.**

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EXPERIENCE 2: JOIN THE STORY

Following Jesus is more than just knowing facts about the Bible—it's an experience. You get to join this epic adventure. God is inviting and empowering you to live it and share it with confidence. Everyone needs to hear the good news of the gospel. Jesus changes lives. He's working in your life and in other people's lives too.

This week, look for an opportunity to share your story with someone you interact with or see on a regular basis. It may come up in a casual conversation; it doesn't need to be forced. After you have shared, reflect on how God showed up as you shared. How did it go? What did you learn? Thank God for giving you an opportunity to share your story as part of His story. Pray He will continue to move in the life of the person you shared with, and pray He will open up more opportunities for conversation.

Here are some other helpful tips about sharing your story with others:

Be Relational

Don't think of the sharing your story as a goal to accomplish—think of the person. Jesus' love flowing through you to other people is the priority; so, relationship is key.

Write It Out

Think of your story like a drama (or maybe a comedy) with three parts. Using the next page write your story in bullet points that you can use as the main ideas when you share. Then, practice sharing your story using a timer. Try to keep it under three minutes. This leaves room for you to listen to others, and answer any questions they may have. Don't eliminate the passion or emotion from your story, and remember to acknowledge God's faithfulness, and your need for

Christ, His forgiveness, and His grace. Now you should have a summary of your faith journey that is easy to remember and easy to tell.

Translate It for Your Audience

Try to take out any “Christian-ese” or “church words,” and phrases as these can alienate your the person you are talking to, or at the very least, confuse them and keep them from identifying with your story (for example, words like “gospel” and “repent”). Replace them with words that are more relatable and conversational. Prayerfully lean into points you think will resonate with the person you are sharing with. Ask God: “What part of my story will connect with their story?”

Experiential Discipleship

Discipleship is experiential learning—knowing and doing what Jesus taught and modeled. We are called to follow Christ. The Christian life is one of faith in action.

Too often, Christian discipleship or “disciple making” focuses on *knowing*, with less emphasis on *doing*. According to this approach, what Christians should do will naturally flow out of what they know. In other words, teach people the right things and they’ll begin doing the right things too. This is a particularly “Western” approach to knowledge and learning. Certainly, there is some truth to this; however, historically and even presently in many cultures, doing something is the primary method of teaching and learning. In this approach, a person truly knows something only after they’ve experienced it.

Discipleship is not passively learning information about the Christian life—it’s not just theology, the study of God.

Discipleship is participating in the life-transformation throughout the Christian life— it’s joining others in the mission of God

This Deep Dive study includes two intentional experiences outside of the regular group time. The following tips will help you make the most out of the experience.

Personal Study

As the disciples preached the resurrected Christ, the Christian faith spread rapidly from Jerusalem. In the Book of Acts, we see God using Peter and Paul to declare the gospel and plant churches in cities. After these churches were launched, the apostles wrote letters back to them. The letters, also called epistles, make up the bulk of the New Testament. Often named after the city to which they were written (Galatians to the churches in Galatia, Philippians to the church at Philippi, and so forth), each letter addresses issues in that specific

context, and yet, at the same time transcends the context and has deep application for us. There are common themes throughout the letters, and we will look at four of the themes this week: Who Christ is (Day 1), what Christ did (Day 2), who we are (Day 3), and how we should live (Day 4).

WHERE WE'VE BEEN: A NEW PEOPLE

After His ascension to heaven, Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit and His disciples turn the world upside down preaching the good news of Jesus. In the midst of intense persecution, the gospel spreads, and Gentiles and Jews form a new people. Churches are planted in cities, and apostles write letters encouraging and instructing the people in the grace of Christ and their response to His grace.

WHERE WE'RE HEADED: A BETTER BEGINNING

A time is coming where God's people—people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who have been rescued by Christ—will enjoy Him and His rule forever in perfect harmony. Satan will be crushed, the effects of sin will be reversed, and all things will be made new.

DAY ONE: Christ Is Above All

Your perspective on what is ultimate or supreme will deeply impact how you order your life. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he made clear who he viewed as supreme. He wrote, "All things have been created through Him and for Him ... and by Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16).

Sometime between AD 161 and 180, Marcus Aurelius wrote his famous *Meditations*. Some believe Marcus Aurelius was a great leader, a great emperor. He is portrayed favorably, for example, in the movie *Gladiator* as the elderly leader whom Russell Crowe loves and admires. We also know, from history, that persecution of Christians escalated under his rule. He either directed or allowed the torture and death of believers. In his classic work, *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius wrote: "Nature. All things come of you, have their being in you, and return to you."¹¹

Clearly, the apostle Paul and Marcus Aurelius held two very different perspectives on what is ultimate. Marcus Aurelius' perspective was that nature is supreme—that what we can taste, touch, see, and smell is where we find our meaning. Many men live as if they believe what Aurelius wrote, searching for meaning and identity in nature, in the things of this world. The Christian perspective is very different, though. We believe that the one God, who created all things, is ultimate and we find meaning and significance in Him. And we believe that Jesus the Christ is God.

In many letters in the New Testament, the apostles devoted time to teaching who Jesus is and to correcting false teaching and beliefs about Him. In the following incredible passage, the apostle Paul reminded his readers and us that Jesus is above all.

Read Colossians 1:15-20.

HE IS THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD.

God created us in the image of God, but we are not the image of the invisible God. Jesus is different. He is not created in the image of God because He is not created; He is the image of God.

Remember the second commandment in the Ten Commandments? (See Ex. 20:4- 5.) One of the reasons God was so adamant to His people not to make any image of Him was because every image we create falls woefully short of the reality of who God is. But Jesus is different. He is not a created image. He does not fall woefully short. He is the image of God.

... THE FIRSTBORN OVER ALL CREATION.

The word, firstborn, in the original language refers primarily to position or rank, not chronology. The firstborn son, in this culture, was given authority and rank from the father. The firstborn would receive the inheritance. Jesus is the firstborn. He is first in rank, position, and authority, and He has received all that is the Father's.

FOR EVERYTHING WAS CREATED BY HIM,

Jesus did not come into existence when He was born into this world. He has always existed. He was present in creation. He created the whole world and everything in it. He created the great foods we eat, the beaches we enjoy, the sunset and sunrise we observe. He created Mary, His earthly mother, and He created the trees, which formed the cross He would embrace. Everything was created by Him.

IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH, THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE, WHETHER THRONES OR DOMINIONS OR RULERS OR AUTHORITIES.

The language of "thrones or dominions or ruler or authorities" is used elsewhere in the Scripture, and it describes evil supernatural powers that we do not see. In Ephesians 6:12, Paul wrote that "our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, ... against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens." God created them too. He created all things, even the evil spirits that seek to deceive and destroy. But understand this: the demons were not created evil; they became evil. They sinned against God and were cast from His presence. In the same way, there are good things that God has created that

we distort and ruin in our sinfulness. But this does not change the reality that He has created everything.

ALL THINGS HAVE BEEN CREATED THROUGH HIM AND FOR HIM.

Not only has Christ created all things, but also all things have been created for Him. All things have been created to bring Him glory. He created the sunset and the sky so we can see visibly the creativity of our invisible God. He created the food we enjoy so when we taste it we might say, "Wow, God is really good to us."

He created all things so that all things could bring Him glory. One day even the demons will bow to Him and declare He is God.

HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS, AND BY HIM ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER.

Marcus Aurelius said that all things have their being in nature. However, the text from Colossians teaches and reminds us that everything is sustained by Christ. You are sitting here in this moment because He is holding the universe together. He is, by His mercy, keeping the sun the exact distance it needs to be from the earth. He is the One keeping the blood flowing through your body. He holds all things together.

HE IS ALSO THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH;

He started the church. He is the One who sustains His church. He is the One who keeps us to Himself, who holds on to us despite all our sin and all the junk in our lives. He is the head of the body of Christ.

HE IS THE BEGINNING, THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD...

Just as the firstborn of creation indicates Jesus' rank as the One above all creation and the One who owns all creation—the firstborn from the dead speaks to His supremacy in the resurrection. He is the One who conquered death and has ushered in a new after-death existence for those who follow Him. There is no one greater.

SO THAT HE MIGHT COME TO HAVE FIRST PLACE IN EVERYTHING.

Jesus desires to be first in your life, to have first place over everything in your life. Just as He is the head over all creation, the head over His church, the head over all things, He insists on having first place in your life. He does not want to be a phase in your life, but rather the ruler over all of your life. He is not content to be something you are into for a season or something you think you will get to later. Christ does not want to be a part of your life, but the King over all of your life. He is not a supplement, something we just add to our already full lives. He is not a consultant to give you advice when you think you need it. He is the King who wants first place in everything. His insistence on being first place in everything is good for you.

Because you are giving up less than the best to enjoy Him—who is ultimate.

FOR GOD WAS PLEASED TO HAVE ALL HIS FULLNESS DWELL IN HIM.

Because Jesus is fully God, the holiness, righteousness, power, providence, and sovereignty of God dwell fully in Jesus. The love, mercy, compassion, grace, and kindness of God dwell fully in Jesus. And what is absolutely amazing is that when we become Christians, we dwell in Jesus, too.

Q: What are the false perceptions of Christ in our world today?

Q: How are you living or speaking to defy those perceptions?

DAY TWO: There Is Now No Condemnation

Many refer to Romans 8 as the greatest chapter in the entire Bible. All Scripture is God breathed, so there is not one verse more holy or authoritative than another, but Romans 8 is filled with great news about what Christ has accomplished on our behalf. As the apostles wrote letters to the churches, they continually reminded the believers what Christ had accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection. Because Christ is the center of the story, the apostles preached Him over and over again. Today, let's look at Romans 8:1-4.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, in order that the law's requirement would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:1-4

No condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus! Condemnation is a legal term that speaks to both the declaration of guilt and the punishment associated with that guilt. So, for example, if you are caught speeding, your condemnation includes both being declared guilty of going 68 in a 55-mph zone and receiving the punishment for that offense.

While we deserve condemnation from God because we are sinners, there now exists no condemnation. Condemnation has ceased. All of God's wrath and condemnation has been replaced with His love and mercy toward you. And it is not as if His wrath is on you when you have a bad day or struggle with sin. His wrath, His condemnation, is no more. It has been replaced with His righteousness.

The opposite legal term of condemnation is justification. A judge either declares a person to be condemned or declares a person to be justified. There is no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ because Christ justified us. So why is there no condemnation?

Review Romans 8:1-4.

There is no condemnation for those of us in Christ because the Holy Spirit grabbed our hearts and changed us, setting us free from “the law of sin and death” (v. 2).

The phrase “the law of sin and of death” refers to the general principle that sin has corrupted all of us and that our sin leads to death. We were trapped, imprisoned by sin and death. But the Holy Spirit changed us (the Spirit's law of life).

The law God gave His people in the Old Testament was not bad, it was just powerless to change anyone. It can't save us from our sins; it can only point to our need for a Savior. That's why God sent His own Son in the flesh to be a sin offering. Just as sacrifices in the Old Testament were offered to God so He would be merciful to the people, Christ is our sin offering. Instead of condemning you, God condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus. Your sin was removed from you and placed on Jesus who took your punishment in His flesh. There is no condemnation for you because your sin was condemned in Christ.

And there is more. Because Jesus perfectly obeyed the law, His obedience is given to you in place of your sin. You have fulfilled the law's requirements because Christ's obedience is now yours.

How do we know if we are His? As verse 4 says, those who are His are those who walk with Him, who become more like Him, who walk with the Spirit and don't spend their lives living in the flesh for the things of this world.

For people like that, there is absolutely no condemnation!

Q: How would you explain Romans 8:1-4 to someone who's never heard the gospel?

DAY THREE: Who We Are

Persecution of Christians was very intense during the early days of the Christian faith. When Rome burned to the ground, some believed the Roman emperor Nero had lit fire to his own city so he could launch new building projects. Nero

needed someone to blame, and he chose the Christians. So Christians were blamed with the fire that struck Rome, and the persecution escalated. Christians were dispersed throughout "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1) and wondered how to live while surrounded by disdain in a world that is not really home. The apostle Peter reminded them who they were, of their great identity as followers of Christ. His words are true of all who belong to Christ.

As you read 1 Peter 2:9-12, circle the phrases that describe our identity, such as "chosen race."

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

1 Peter 2:9-12

This passage is incredibly rich.

CHOSEN RACE

Just as God chose Israel in the Old Testament to set His affection upon, God has set His love and affection upon you. You belong to Him because of His promise to you, not because of your goodness. As chosen people, we should rejoice that we belong to Him.

ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

When God instituted the tabernacle system, only the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place and be in the presence of God. But now we are royal priests. Christ's death opened a new and living way for us to enter into God's presence anytime, anywhere. As royal priests, we should enjoy His presence.

HOLY NATION

God adopted and set Israel apart as His own. As Christians, God has formed us as a new people and declared us to be holy. Because He is holy and has declared us to be holy, we are to live holy lives.

PEOPLE FOR HIS POSSESSION

We no longer belong to ourselves. We are His, which is far better than being slaves to our sin and slaves to ourselves.

STRANGERS AND EXILES

Peter reminded believers that the reason we often feel like we don't fit in this world is because we don't. This world is no longer our home, so we are to abstain from indulging in the sinfulness of this fallen world.

In these verses, Peter used the phrase "so that" twice. We have been given this great identity so that:

"So that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (v. 9).

"So that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits" (v. 12).

God gave us a great identity so that we can proclaim His praises to the world. We are surrounded by people who speak against us and the Christian faith. But we are to live good lives so that those far from God may observe us and, by God's grace, be brought to faith in Christ. Then they will join us in glorifying God when He returns.

He is returning. When He does, all that is wrong will be made right. And those who know Him will spend eternity with Him. Until then, we live in a world that is not ours on a mission He has given us. Because of who we are, we are to declare His praises and live honorably among those who do not know Him.

Q: What is the mission Christ has given us?

Q: How does our identity as explained in 1 Peter 2 affect our mission? Explain.

DAY FOUR: How We Should Live

If you are a parent, you have likely tried multiple ways to motivate your kids: threats of punishment, promises of rewards, wielding your authority, and reminding them of all you have done for them. In many ways, pastoring a group of people is a lot like parenting. When the apostles wrote letters to the churches, they cared deeply for the people receiving them and viewed themselves as their fathers in the faith.

How did the apostles strive to motivate people to live in response to God's greatness and grace? How did they encourage them to live the reality of their new identity?

The apostles often rooted the imperatives (the commands) God gave in the indicative (what Christ has done). To understand their letters, it is helpful to understand the difference between imperatives and the indicative.

Imperative = Commands or “Do”

Indicative = What Christ accomplished or “Done”

You will find that the apostles' letters are filled with imperatives, but these imperatives are grounded in what Christ has done (indicative). That's because if our hearts are not refreshed and renewed with what Christ has done for us, our hearts are unable to obey Him. We need to be in awe of His grace to be motivated to live out the commands (the imperatives).

Let's look at some passages written to the churches. Write imperative or indicative on each blank line. (The first one is completed as an example.)

Husbands, love your wives imperative, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. indicative

EPHESIANS 5:25

What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! _____ How can we who died to sin still live in it? _____

ROMANS 6:1-2

And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another _____, just as God also forgave you in Christ. _____

EPHESIANS 4:32

Therefore accept one another _____, just as Christ also accepted you, _____, to the glory of God. ROMANS 15:7

Now as you excel in everything—in faith, speech, knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love for us—excel also in this act of grace [giving] _____. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. _____ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7,9

Do you see the common theme? The imperatives are there—Do this, but they are always rooted in the indicative—because Christ has done that. As your heart is constantly refreshed with what Christ has done, you want to obey Him. You want to follow Him. His commands don't feel like a burden because this world is less and less attractive to you as you view Him as greater and greater.

Let's close with this example: We are to think of others first (imperative) because Christ put our salvation ahead of His comfort (indicative).

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity.

And when he had come as a man he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Philippians 2:3-11

Q: What's the difference in an imperative and an indicative? Explain.

Q: What are some examples of indicatives that motivate you? Why do they motivate you?

Q: What happens if we get the imperative before the indicative? Explain.

Group Questions

Be sure to make time for discussing everyone's insights, highlights, and changes from the entire journey through Scripture.

Don't forget to point out the discipleship experience following this last session. You'll practice sharing your stories with each other. Then, follow up with each other to celebrate experiences with sharing the story of God with other people.

1. Share a quick summary of highlights from Weeks 1–7. Why is this week an important point in redemptive history and the unfolding story of God?
2. What did Pastor mean when he said that the end of the story is just a better beginning? Explain.
3. How has the curse affected you personally? Explain.
4. What did Pastor mean when he said the curse will be reversed?
5. What does it mean that Jesus is the centerpiece of heaven?
6. Pastor said, “Heaven isn’t just for people who don’t want to go to hell.” What did he mean? Is he describing you? Why or why not?

Look up Philippians 2:3-11 from Day 4 (p. 136). Read it aloud.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity.

And when he had come as a man he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—

in heaven and on earth

and under the earth—

and every tongue will confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:3-11

7. How does this scripture summarize the story of God? What gospel truths are mentioned. How does it point to our better beginning?

Look back over the personal study.

8. What else was especially meaningful or helpful? How does it clarify your identity and purpose in the story of God?

- Day 1: Christ Is Above All
- Day 2: There Is Now No Condemnation
- Day 3: Who We Are
- Day 4: How We Should Live
- Day 5: Reflection

9. Where have you grown: in your comfort level with reading the Bible, discussing the Bible, neither, or both? Give one example of a new way you can point to what the Bible is all about: Jesus.

10. How does the takeaway affect your view of Scripture? How will you respond to this part of the story?

11. In what other ways have you grown in your understanding and application of the gospel through this Deep Dive study? Be specific.

We can live in the “messy middle” because we know the glorious ending.

8-week overview

CREATION AND FALL

The self-sufficient and eternal God lovingly creates a perfect creation with humanity as His crowning work. Falling for Satan's temptation, humanity rebels and sin enters the world bringing death, pain, and strife. Instead of giving up on humanity, God promises that from the womb of a woman will come the One who will crush Satan's head.

PROMISE AND A PEOPLE

God pursues Abraham, a man from an idol-worshiping family who has no children with his wife and promises that he will be the father of many nations. God promises land to Abraham and assures him that all nations will be blessed through his offspring. God continues to be faithful to this family. He restates the promise to Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob (who is renamed Israel). A famine strikes the promised land, so Jacob and the family move to Egypt where one of Jacob's sons, Joseph, is already there to provide for the family.

RESCUE AND LAW

The family becomes a nation while living in Egypt, but also becomes enslaved to the Egyptians. God raises up Moses to lead His people to freedom. During a tenth plague, God strikes dead the firstborn son of everyone living in Egypt, but

“passes over” Israel as they put the blood of lambs on their doorposts. After miraculously rescuing His people, God gives His people the law. He also instructs them to build a tabernacle and offer sacrifices so He may dwell among them.

LAND AND KINGDOM

God brings His people, through their leader Joshua, into the promised land. When God's people worship the gods of the nation's surrounding them, God disciplines them through the attacks of surrounding nations. God raises up judges (or rulers) to rescue His people and call them to repentance. They beg for a king to be like other nations, and God gives them Saul. God raises up a new king, David, and promises that his kingdom will never end. The family that turned into a nation is now a kingdom. David's son, Solomon, builds a temple to replace the tabernacle.

EXILE AND RETURN

Solomon takes foreign wives and allows their foreign gods to clutter the land. His son continues the line of rulers, and the kingdom is divided into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Prophets confront the people, but they persist in their idolatry. The Northern Kingdom falls to Assyria and the Southern Kingdom is carried away into Babylonian captivity. When they are freed, they return to a nation and kingdom far less glorious than before and are still unable to keep their promises.

JESUS

A descendant of Adam, Abraham, and David, Jesus is the One who crushes the head of Satan, will bless all nations, and reigns forever. Jesus, the God-Man, enters humanity through the womb of a virgin, perfectly obeys the law that we could never obey, dies as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins, and rises from the dead, conquering Satan, sin, and death. He inaugurates His eternal kingdom and secures salvation for His people.

A NEW PEOPLE

After His ascension to heaven, Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit and His disciples turn the world upside down preaching the good news of Jesus. In the midst of intense persecution, the gospel spreads, and Gentiles and Jews form a new people. Churches are planted in cities, and apostles write letters encouraging and instructing the people in the grace of Christ and their response to His grace.

A BETTER BEGINNING

A time is coming where God's people—people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who have been rescued by Christ—will enjoy Him and His rule forever in perfect harmony. Satan will be crushed, the effects of sin will be reversed, and all things will be made new.

This first week will ease you into the story with just four scriptures setting the stage for our epic journey. Weeks 2–8 will dive deeper into each day's personal study. Ideally, you'll have time to read one passage of Scripture each day for four days leading up to the first group session, plus one day of personal reflection. If you don't have the full week or you didn't receive your book in advance, that's OK—read what you can before your first discussion begins.