



The Story of You

Devotional and Reading Guide

South Ridge Church

This Reading Guide has been designed for use during “The Story of You” Message Series
South Ridge Church - Fall 2018

A Note from Pastor Justin:

Let me share a confession: I’m not as much of a reader as I sometimes make myself out to be. While I read the Scriptures regularly, I need to be pretty intentional with my time if I am to read on a regular basis. But every once in a while, I hit a season in which I can’t read enough. Fiction. Non-fiction. Memoirs. Anything. I’ll devour a book in a week and then move on to the next.

This summer happened to be one of those seasons. I found myself reading through a series of books with the typical plot line: Good vs. Evil. There were good characters, and there were evil characters. Crazy, huh? But despite the typical storyline, I fell in love with the characters and consumed the entire series not once, but twice.

At one point, one of the main characters needed to share with his friends and family everything he had been through. In other words, he needed to share his story. The problem was, he didn’t want to talk about it. He had some really challenging and painful experiences, many of which were a result of his own poor decision-making. But in order for the others to fully understand and offer him the help he needed, he *had* to share his story.

As he told his story, the author Andrew Peterson writes, “...telling the story hurt and helped all at once. Already he could see ways the story had changed him and would go on changing him.”

The quote has tremendous truth. We all have a story. We all have made decisions that have led to challenging and painful experiences. We all need to know our story. We can all *benefit* from sharing that same story.

This 8-Week message series has been designed with two things in mind:

First, what is it that God says about who we are? What story has He written to us, for us, and within us?

Second, What does it look like for us to live out that story?

Those who are connected to a Community Group will have the opportunity to process through and share your story with others in your Group. My encouragement to you is to take advantage of an additional booklet we have available titled *Knowing and Sharing Your Story*. Walking through this process will take time, but like the character in the quote I referenced above, you will likely discover how much your story has changed you and will go on changing you.

For those not connected to a Community Group, my encouragement to you would be to focus on this Devotional & Scripture Reading Guide. And if you’d like, you may also take advantage of the additional booklet we have available at SRC titled *Knowing and Sharing Your Story*, then take intentional opportunities to share your story with others.

The Story of You

DAILY READING EXAMPLE:

DAY 1: CREATED BY GOD

The left side of each daily reading will contain a brief devotional and question for reflection.

READING:

The right side of each daily reading will contain a few Scripture verses to read, and additional questions for reflection. You will most benefit from this study by writing out answers to all of the questions in a notebook. This will help you to pause and reflect on the Scriptures and topics for each reading.

F260 READING:

This is an additional Scripture Reading for those who want to read through the foundational passages of Scripture throughout the year. This F260 Reading Plan paired with the H.E.A.R. method for reflection is an excellent way to *Read, Reflect, and Respond* to God's Word, and gain insight into the overall *Story* God has written to us, for us, and within us.

PRAYER:

The right-side of each daily reading will also contain a brief prayer to read and reflect on.

MESSAGE SERIES OUTLINE:

Created to be an Image Bearer

Created to Connect with God and Others

Created to be a Steward of God's Creation

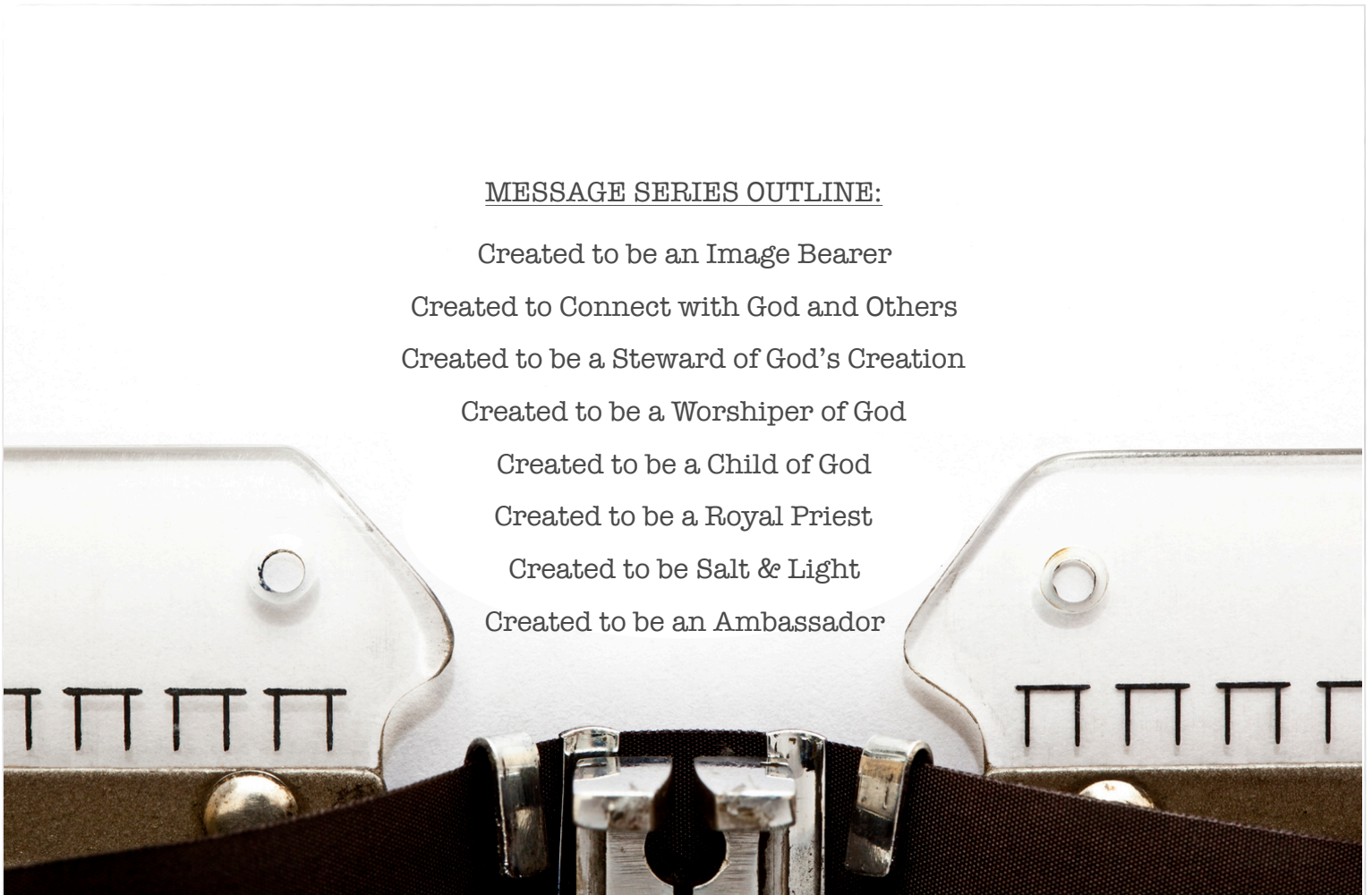
Created to be a Worshiper of God

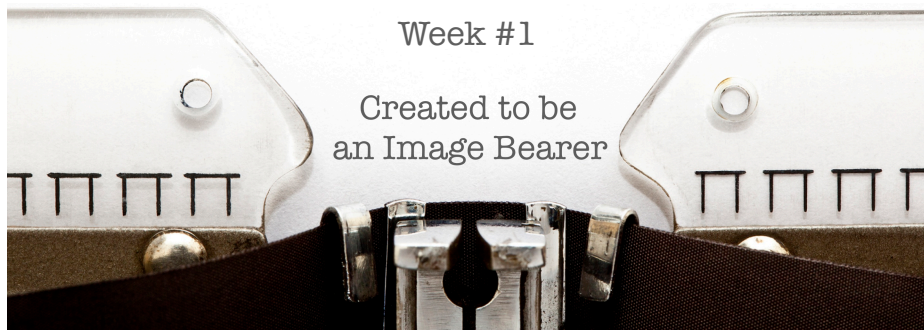
Created to be a Child of God

Created to be a Royal Priest

Created to be Salt & Light

Created to be an Ambassador





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

Genesis 1:27 (NLT)

Day 1: CREATED BY GOD

Picture an elderly Sunday school teacher walking around a small room with eight to ten children. With glue caked to their fingertips and glitter in their hair, the gray-haired lady smiles at each of the young children. Before dismissing them for the day she says, "You've heard me say many things today. But the one thing I want you to never forget is that GOD - MADE - YOU." As she says this, she points to one of the children, ensuring they make eye contact and take in the wonder of what she just said. Then she points to the next child, and the next one, and the next. On and on until she has reassured each child that God, who made all the stars, the earth, the forests and the animals, also made each of them.

As the parents thank her for spending every Sunday morning teaching their little ones, she takes the opportunity to share the same message. With the same level of awe and wonder, she smiles at each parent and says, "Don't ever forget. GOD - MADE - YOU." But the majority of the parents don't seem to absorb the significance of what she says in the way their children did. They smile politely and nod, and then quickly take their children by the hand and leave. As you read today, consider this: Why do you think we as adults aren't completely captivated and awed by the power of this statement, "GOD - MADE - YOU"?

READING:

GENESIS 1:26-27

Why do you think we as adults aren't completely captivated and awed by the power of this statement "GOD - MADE - YOU"?

How would your daily life be different if you woke up each morning reminding yourself that you were created by God?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 1-2

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today I thank You for the wonderful reminder that I was created by You. With all of the busyness in my life, it's easy to get caught up in what I need to do. Because I focus so much on what I need to do, I sometimes give in to the temptation to be defined by my work. But You don't define me by what I do, but by what You have done. May I rejoice in that truth today! I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2: CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

To remember that we have been CREATED by God is a truth that can change how we live each day of our lives. The implications of this reality have the potential to impact how we see ourselves, how we see others, and how we see God.

But the Scriptures teach us that we weren't *just* created by God. We were also created in the IMAGE of God.

Of everything else that God created, *nothing* other than humankind was created in His image. Light. Water. Land. Sun. Moon. Stars. Birds. Fish. Even the Duck-Billed Platypus. You've gotta admit, God made some really cool stuff.

Still, after creating everything else, "God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Psalm 100:3 says,

"Know that the Lord is God.

It is He who made us, and we are His;
we are His people, the sheep of his pasture."

As you read today, consider this: What do you think it means to be an image-bearer?

READING:

PSALM 100:3

How would your daily life be different if you took time every day to dwell on the truth that you were created in the *IMAGE* of God?

What do you think it means to be an image-bearer?

Remember: Everybody else you see today (and everyday) was also created to be an image-bearer.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 3-4

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today I thank You for the wonderful reminder that not only was I created by You, but that You also created me in Your image. It's easy for me to think, "I am nothing. I'm not significant. I don't have any real purpose," but you reveal to me in Your Word that I was created in Your image, and that I have a unique purpose. I have been invited to reflect the glory of You in everything I say and do. I worship You today for providing me this amazing opportunity to be an image-bearer of who You are. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3: CREATED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

Take a minute to quickly think about every movie or tv show you've seen this week. And every song you've heard. Every news article you've read. And every other book you may have read. That's a lot of information you've taken in! Now, out of all of that information, how often did you see, hear, or read the word, 'Glory?'

If you read your Bible, you may have seen it. But if you're being honest, you probably didn't see, hear, or read the word *glory* very much at all. It's just not a common word within in our culture. But while we don't use the term often, we do hear words such as *honor*, *magnificence*, and *beauty*. We also understand what it means to *take delight* in something or someone. These words are all definitions of 'Glory'.

With this knowledge, we can now think about what it means to have been created for the *GLORY* of God. It means that all things - including you! - were created for the *honor* of God. You were created to display the *magnificence* of God. You were created to mirror the *delight* and *pleasure* of God. As you read today, consider this: How would your daily life be different if you took time every day to dwell on the truth that you were created for the *GLORY* of God?

Day 4: THE GRAND FINALE OF CREATION

Three simple yet life-changing truths:

- You have been *CREATED* by God.
- You have been created in the *IMAGE* of God.
- You have been created for the *GLORY* of God.

We share these truths with children, filling them with wonder about the unseen God and how powerful He is, but as we age we're tempted to lose the wonder. We're tempted to forget God is there at all.

While these truths all reveal the majesty of God, there's one more part of God's creation story that ought not be forgotten. After every *day* in the Creation process (Genesis 1), God looks upon what He had created and said, "It is good." God was glad with His creation. But something changed after God made humankind in His image on the sixth day. God looked upon all He had made and said, "It is *very* good!"

Nothing more was needed. God declared His creation complete. Just like the grand finale of a fireworks display, God declared that we are the Grand Finale of His creation. As you read today, consider this: How do you respond to reading that God looks upon you as the Grand Finale of His creation?

Day 5: READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:49

In what ways have you grown in being an image-bearer this week? What did you learn about the nature and character of God this week? What did you learn about yourself?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Job 1-2

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

READING:

COLOSSIANS 1:14-15

How would your daily life be different if you took time every day to dwell on the truth that you were created for the *GLORY* of God?

Think about a time when you really believe you reflected the delight and the pleasure of God. What was that like?

In your own life, what barriers get in the way of reflecting the delight and pleasure of God regularly?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 6-7

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that I don't regularly take opportunities to dwell on the truth that I have been created for Your Glory.

Today, I humbly ask that you reveal to me in subtle ways, little reminders that I was created for Your *honor*. That I was created to display the *magnificence* of who You are. That I was created to mirror the *delight and pleasure* of You to others. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

READING:

PSALM 8:1-9

How do you respond to reading that God looks upon you as the Grand Finale of His creation?

What verse in Psalm 8 sticks out the most to you? Why do you think that is?

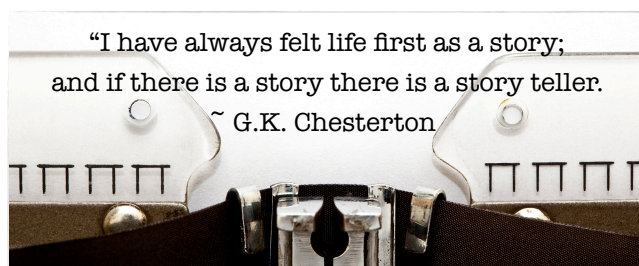
F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 8-9

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today I thank You for making me a part of the *grand finale* of Your creation! That in the same way that a fireworks display lights up the night sky, You have created me to reflect Your light, Your grace, and Your love to others. I ask today that You will continue to help me *own* the truths of who You say I am so that I may better help others know the truths of who You say they are. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.



Week #2

Created to Connect with
God and Others

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NLT)

Day 1: CONNECT WITH GOD

How do you *connect* with God? If we're all being honest, we may confess that we find it somewhat difficult to fully connect with God. The primary reason for this struggle is because we all want to have something to offer Him. Perhaps some of these quotes sound familiar:

- "I'll get closer to God one day. But I need to get my life cleaned up first."
- "A relationship with God is a really serious commitment. I'll have more time to give God later in life, but for now I'm OK just knowing He's there."
- "I don't feel like I have anything to offer God. But as soon as I feel like I do have something to offer, I'll bring it to Him."

Here's the thing: there's nothing we have that God needs. He just wants *us*. Even more specifically, He just wants *you*. He's done everything that needed to be done for the relationship to begin. And the *best* way you can relate with Him is simply to *receive* from Him.

Receive God's *forgiveness*. Receive God's *grace*. Receive God's *love*. You'll not only connect with Him, you'll be prepared to connect with others. As you read today, consider this: How difficult is it for you to *receive* from God?

READING:

EPHESIANS 2:4-10

How difficult is it for you to *receive* from God?

Which of the three statements (bullet points) in today's reading resonates with you the most?

Have you considered this may be preventing you from being able to relationally connect with God in new and amazing ways?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Job 38-39

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess it isn't always easy to *receive* from You. There are many times in which I want to be in control. Sometimes, for reasons I don't always understand, I want to take on the burden of trying to *fix* some of the difficult problems that have come up in my life. But I'm learning more and more that the best *leaders* are those who *follow* You and *receive* from You regularly. Today, my desire is to be *with* You. I humbly ask that You continue to reveal Yourself to me in unique and awesome ways. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2: CONNECTING WITH OTHERS: PART 1 OF 3

In his book titled *Connecting*, author Larry Crabb writes that in order to relationally connect with others, we need to:

- Accept who we are.
- Envision who we could be.

In other words, when we fully accept that we are God's and that He truly delights in us, and when we're able to envision who God has made us to be, it is then that we can truly be on our way to connecting with others in meaningful ways.

Another equally important truth about connecting with others is this: We can only love others as much as we love ourselves.

Think about that for just a minute. How much do you love yourself? Not in a self-esteem or self-centered way, but how much do you like and appreciate who you are? Put it on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being extreme appreciation for yourself.

Guess what? You can't love, like or fully appreciate others any more than you love, like or appreciate yourself. Not your spouse. Not your kids. Not your roommate. Not anyone.

As you read today, consider this: Is a lack of self-love preventing you from being able to love others? If so, what steps can you take to more fully accept who you are, and envision who you could be?

READING:

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

Is a lack of self-love preventing you from being able to love others? If so, what steps can you take to more fully accept who you are, and envision who you could be?

Remind yourself of the truths from Week #1. You were created by God, in the image of God, for the glory of God. How can these truths help you better connect with others?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Job 40-42

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess there are aspects of myself I don't like very much. And more often than not, I find myself noticing my own flaws more than remembering that I was created by You. Today, my desire is to remember every minute of every hour that I have been beautifully and wonderfully made. As this truth continues to rest deep within me, help me to see that others I interact with on a regular basis have also been beautifully and wonderfully made. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3: CONNECTING WITH OTHERS: PART 2 OF 3

Yesterday we looked into the first step that is helpful for us to better connect relationally with others. Continuing with thoughts from author Larry Crabb, the next step in connecting with others includes:

- Remaining calm when badness is visible.
- Keeping confident that good lies beneath.

Specifically, Crabb writes, "When we look for the bad, we must always be looking harder for the hidden good."

Here's the deal - we live in a broken world. A broken world is full of broken people. And sometimes, hurt people hurt people. But as author Bob Goff writes, "God makes people. People make issues. But people aren't issues."

If we want to better connect with others, we need to not only remain calm when we see badness come to the surface in the lives of others, we also need to be confident that there is good there, too. We need to remember that they, too, were created by God, in the image of God, and for the glory of God. We need to remember that God made them, and they may be making issues, but that they themselves are not the issues. As you read today, consider this: Which of the quotes in today's reading resonates with you most?

Day 4: CONNECTING WITH OTHERS: PART 3 OF 3

Over the past couple of days, we've looked at some steps that are helpful when it comes to relationally connecting with others. To continue quoting from the book *Connecting* by Larry Crabb, he notes that one final way we can connect with others is by "Claiming the special opportunities to reveal grace..." He goes on to note that relationships (or perhaps, people themselves) heal when they reflect the energy of Christ. Some helpful steps may include:

- "Letting people know we delight in them as Christ does.
- Eagerly looking for the goodness in someone's heart, and identifying the passions that are prompting loving, strong choices
- Remembering that it's the kindness of God that leads to repentance and healing."

Larry Crabb, by the way, is a professional counselor. But after years of counseling discovered that the best requirement to connect with others wasn't his education, but instead was by being godly. He confesses that being godly is far more difficult than getting an education, but that the ability to fully connect with God & others is worth it. As you read today, consider this: Do you find it challenging to let others know you delight in them?

Day 5: READING: 1 JOHN 4:7-8

In what ways have you grown in connecting with God and others this week?

What did you learn about the nature and character of God this week?

What did you learn about yourself?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 16-17

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

READING:

PROVERBS 18:24; LUKE 6:31

Which of the quotes in today's reading resonates with you most?

Why do you think people struggle to look for the hidden good in others?

What are some daily practices you can put in place so that you more regularly look for the hidden good in others?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 11-12

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that in the same ways I see my own flaws, I often see the flaws within others *more* than I see the good that lies beneath. Today, I pray that You would provide me with reminders that *everybody* I see and interact with almost certainly has hidden good. That they, too, have been created by You, and that You have given them a purpose I may not always see or recognize. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

READING:

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14; 1 CORINTHIANS 13

Do you find it challenging to let others know you delight in them?

Have you had any success in being able to relationally connect with others who think differently than you do? What made those relationships successful?

Think of someone in which you know you *have not* searched for the hidden good within them. Is it possible God is inviting you to think differently about them? Is it possible God is inviting you to take another step to reconcile that relationship?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 15

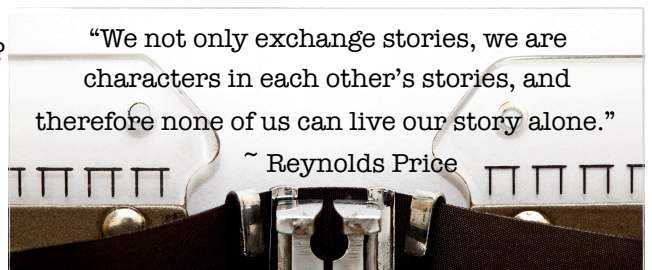
Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that seeing the hidden good in others is sometimes challenging, but letting others know that I delight in them is even more challenging! Today, my desire is to share with at least one person something I appreciate about them. May this begin a ripple effect that helps me relationally connect with everybody in new, profound ways. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

"We not only exchange stories, we are characters in each other's stories, and therefore none of us can live our story alone."

~ Reynolds Price



Week #3

Created to be a Steward
of God's Creation

The earth is the Lord's,
and everything in it.
The world and all its people
belong to him.

Psalms 24:1 (NLT)

Day 1: IT'S ALL HIS

Take just a minute to think about something you have purchased that is very special to you. Maybe it's your house? Perhaps a car? Maybe it's a painting, or some other work of art? Maybe it's a musical instrument? Whatever it is, it's something you probably spent some time researching, and maybe even spent weeks, months, or years saving your money in order to purchase. Because of this, you have a unique level of ownership to it. You value it above other things you've purchased, because you poured a lot of time, energy, and resources into it.

How difficult would it be for you to hand it over to somebody else and ask them to take care of it? Imagine you can't even leave them a detailed instruction manual. Instead, you're just going to give them a couple of quick sentences about taking care of it for you.

This is the exact situation Adam and Eve found themselves in after God created them. He basically said, "Here's the world I created. Here's everything I've ever made! Now, I'm leaving its care in your capable hands. Eat from it. Live in it. Enjoy it. Just remember that it's Mine. I just want you to take care of it for Me." As you read today, consider this: Do you struggle to consider that *everything* you have belongs to God? That it's not yours, but something He has asked you to take care of?

Day 2: TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

In the Summer of 2001, Megan and I (Pastor Justin) had the opportunity to participate in an 8-week mission trip to Burkina Faso, a small country in West Africa. While there, we were tasked with a goal to visit 7 different villages of a remote group of people known as the Marensé. Our role was simple: we were to be dropped off at a specific location, and then were to visit these 7 villages over a period of 16 days before finding our way back to the capital. We had nothing more than a translator, a GPS, some water bottles, and the clothes on our backs. Nothing more was needed.

Unfortunately, the first village was at least 30 miles away from our drop-off point. So we hopped onto our bicycles and started riding. In the West African heat, it felt like we traveled *much* farther than 30 miles. By the time we arrived the next day, we were thirsty. REALLY thirsty! The locals were very friendly and quickly brought us a large bowl of water. Unfortunately, the village chief really liked hot peppers, and put them in the water to add some 'flavor'. The outside temperatures were in the mid-90's and there was nothing to drink but hot, spicy water! We desperately needed rehydrated, so we drank it. *The lesson we learned:* Sometimes what your body *needs* most isn't what you want. But caring for your own health is necessary in order to provide for the health of others.

READING:

GENESIS 1:28-31, MATTHEW 25:14-30

Do you struggle to consider that *everything* you have and/or own belongs to God? That it's not yours, but something He has asked you to take care of?

How well do you think we, as God's people, are caring for God's creation? What's one step you can take this week to better care for His creation?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 18-19

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today I acknowledge that there are things I own that I sometimes treasure even more than my relationship with You. I'm thankful for the reminder that *everything* in this world belongs to You. I'm also thankful that you have entrusted *me* to care for everything. This week, my prayer is that I will see Your creation through new eyes. That You will lead me to not just *care* for Your creation, but that You will also lead me to *enjoy* Your creation in new, exciting ways. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

READING:

PSALM 24

Be honest: how difficult is it for you to care for your physical body? Your emotional health? Your spiritual health?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation in which what you most *needed* wasn't at all what you *wanted*? What did you learn from that experience?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 20-21

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, as I evaluate how I spend my time, I confess that there are many times when I go after things that I *want*, and that I'm not always disciplined to go after the things I most *need*. Admittedly, what I *need* more than anything is to know You. Today, I pray that You would reveal to me three things I have been pursuing that are *wants* and not *needs*. I also pray that You would reveal to me ways in which I can begin to pursue after what I most need. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3: TAKING CARE OF GOD'S EARTH

On February 14, 1990, the Voyager I spacecraft had traveled all the way from Earth to a point beyond Neptune in our Solar System. Some of those leading the project for NASA had the camera aboard the Voyager I look back and take a "family photo" of many of the planets in our solar system. The picture included Neptune, Uranus, Saturn, Jupiter, Earth, and Venus. At this distance, Earth was barely visible, and was simply recognized as a "Pale Blue Dot." If you look at the photo online, you may hesitate for a moment and wonder if you're looking at Earth, or just a small speck of dust on your computer screen.

Despite being a small "Pale Blue Dot" in this picture that was taken hundreds of millions of miles away, Earth is full of life. The creativity of God that shines in the night sky is dim compared to the life of His creation that is visible all around us. And despite God being the creator, He left *us* responsible to care for it all.

As you read today, consider this: In what ways do you see humankind not caring for or *stewarding over* God's creation?

READING:

ISAIAH 40:26

In what ways do you see humankind not caring for or *stewarding over* God's creation?

Do you think there's a healthy balance between industrialization and caring for God's creation? Where do you see your own personal life habits within that balance? Are there any steps you can take so that this balance is *healthier* than it is today?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 22

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, every day I get to see and experience that Earth is so much more than a "Pale Blue Dot". It's the world you created for me, and for billions and billions of others. And even though we can see billions of others stars and planets, we know that there is nothing else quite like the home You made for us. Today, I pray that You will reveal to me ways in which I can better care for Your creation, and that You will help me to encourage others to do the same. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 4: A NEW EARTH

There are many unique parallels between the beginning of the Bible, and the end. The Creation Story in the book of Genesis tells us about the Garden of Eden. It tells us the names of the rivers that surrounded the garden. It tells us that there were many trees in the garden, but two are specifically mentioned - the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. As the story unfolds, Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and sin entered the world. With sin came hurt, pain, tears, and ultimately, death.

From that moment on, everything changed. But as the story of the Bible comes to a close, we see that it ends just as it began.

At the end of the book of Revelation, we read about all things becoming new. There's a new Heaven and a new Earth. There is no more sin, no more tears, no more pain, and most significantly, no more death. There's also a River of Life, which waters the Tree of Life.

This, of course, doesn't absolve us of our responsibility to care for and steward over God's creation. But it does provide a picture of what's to come. As you read today, consider this: What other similarities may there be between our current world and the world to come?

READING:

2 PETER 3:13, REVELATION 21:1-8, REVELATION 22:1-5

What other similarities may there be between our current world and the world to come?

How does your answer to the above question impact the way you see our current world? Be specific.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 24

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that sometimes it's hard to see similarities between this current world, and the one which is to come. This world is so full of brokenness, hurt, and fear that it's hard to imagine a world without it.

Despite this, I know that one similarity between the two worlds is that we can know You here and now in the same way we will know You in the world to come. Help me to see You and know You while I'm working. Help me to see You and know You while I'm resting. Help me to see You and know You when I'm walking. Help me to see You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 5: READING: PROVERBS 3:9

What are three ways you can show *honor* to God today?

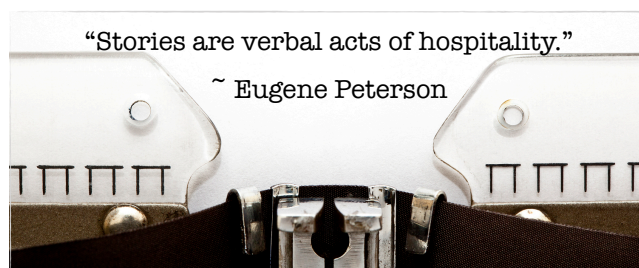
What did you learn about the nature and character of God this week?

What did you learn about yourself?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 25:19-26:35

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)



Week #4

Created to be a Worshiper of God

And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.”

Revelation 5:13 (NLT)

Day 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A WORSHIPER OF GOD?

What does it mean to be a worshiper of God? It seems like this would be a subtle, simple question. But in reality, it's a question with tremendous depth.

Did you know there's not a verse anywhere in all of the Bible that says, "Being a worshiper of God means..." It's just not there. Instead, what the Scriptures do provide is story after story of people who trust God, follow Him, submit to Him, serve Him, bow to Him, and more. In other words, God has revealed to us how *others* took steps towards worshiping Him, and leaves it up to each of us to determine what steps we can take to become worshipers of God.

So maybe a better question is this: What's the first step *you* can take to become more of a worshiper of God? For *some* of us, the first step may be to acknowledge our own self-centeredness, and stop trusting in ourselves and instead place our trust in God.

For *others*, the first step may be *serving* God in some new way. Or it may be spending *time* with God in His Word and in prayer. Or it may be acknowledging our fears and turning them over to God. As you read today, consider this: What's the first step *you* can take to become more of a worshiper of God?

READING:

ROMANS 12:1-2

What's the first step *you* can take to become more of a worshiper of God?

Finish this sentence: This week, the one thing I want to better understand about what it means to worship God is _____.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 27-28

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I *know* there is much in my life that can grow in order for me to become a better worshiper of You. And even though I see these things so clearly, I'm fearful that I'm not strong enough or courageous enough to persevere. As I enter into this new week, my desire is to remember that You have made me brave, and You have made me Yours, and that with You, all things are possible. I trust You today, and commit myself to Your will and Your ways. I'll follow You wherever You may lead me. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2: IDENTIFYING THE DISTRACTIONS

In today's world, it's becoming increasingly difficult to be a true worshiper of God. Did you know that the average person touches the screen of their cell phone over 2,600 times a day? Not only that, the average person also checks their phone over 80 times a day for new notifications. All this does is reinforce our own self-centeredness — that what's going on in our own lives, and what others are saying to us is far more important than anything else — including our relationship with God.

But our cell phones, tablets and computers are just one of the many distractions that get in the way of us becoming better worshipers of God.

Take 1-2 minutes to pause, and write down **ten** things that get in the way of you *growing* and *pursuing* being a worshiper of God?

Pause

Now think: of the ten things you wrote down, what are one or two you can eliminate, or at least lessen, today?

As you continue reading today, consider this: How difficult will it be for you to identify and remove the *majority* of the things that are distracting you from being more of a worshiper of God?

READING:

2 SAMUEL 6:22-23

What are the one or two distractions you eliminated, or at least lessened, today in order to become more of a worshiper of God?

This passage is about king David being *undignified*, as he worshiped God by dancing through the streets. What are the biggest distractions that are preventing you from feeling free enough to be an *undignified* worshiper of God?

Do you have a trusted friend or family member who can help you in your journey to overcome these barriers?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 29-30:24

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today was a reminder that I have *many* things that *try* to get in the way of me growing and pursuing a deeper relationship with you. But though these things may *try* to get in the way, I know that by the power of Your strength, they have already been overcome. May I grow and be an *undignified* worshiper of You every day. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3: REMOVING THE BARRIERS

Yesterday you took the opportunity to identify ten things that get in the way of you growing and pursuing being a worshiper of God. Admittedly, you may not be able to fully eliminate all of these barriers in one day. But there may be certain practices you can put into place to begin to overcome these barriers one at a time.

Some of the common barriers (or distractions) that can prevent us from growing in worship may include:

- Number of hours at work or school
- Entertainment (tv, movies, music, video games, etc.)
- Fears such as, "I don't have anything to offer God."
- Hurts such as, "Nobody knows what I've been through or what I'm currently going through."
- Self-loathing such as, "What that person said about me is probably true. I am worthless."
- ...and much more.

Even though these distractions get in the way, we can still choose to find ways to overcome these barriers and become worshipers of God. Better yet, we can choose to remember that God already *has* overcome all of these barriers! As you read today, consider this: How would your life be different if you focused more time/energy on eliminating these distractions than you do catering to them?

Day 4: Renting vs. Owning

There's a simple difference between *renting* a home or apartment and *owning* a home. On the one hand, you pay *somebody else* for the opportunity to live under *their* roof. On the other hand, you get to live under *your own* roof. You either invest in somebody else's future, or you invest in your future. Both may provide the same benefit for the present, but only one will provide lasting benefit for you and your family.

Unfortunately, there may be times when we do the same thing with our Christian faith. There are times when we only go to God during difficult circumstances, but when life is going well we actually worship Him *less*. Or maybe there are times when we pray about things we really *want*, but don't truly worship God by praying about our own fears, insecurities, perfectionistic tendencies, or other areas that are real *needs* in our lives. In other words, there are times when we *rent* our faith, and only focus on the present circumstances in our lives. These times when we *rent* our faith, we forget that there will be lasting benefits to *owning* it.

As you read today, consider this: In what ways are you currently *renting* your faith? How would your life (and future) be different if you decided to *own* it?

Day 5: READING: LUKE 10:38-42

How can your daily life be more like the life of Mary? Be specific.

What did you learn about the nature and character of God this week?

What did you learn about yourself?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 37

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

READING:

JOHN 4:23-24

How would your life be different if you focused more time/energy on eliminating these distractions than you do catering to them?

What does it mean to worship God in spirit and in truth?

How will you respond to God and worship Him in spirit and truth? (Share with at least one other person how you chose to worship God today.)

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 31-32

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today's reading was an excellent reminder that sometimes my own thoughts are what most get in the way of me growing in worshiping You. Today, I commit to spending more time in Your Word. I commit to being intentional about worshiping in spirit and in truth. I commit to eliminating some of the things that are getting in the way of me knowing You more. I commit to being the person You have called me to be. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

READING:

HABAKKUK 3:17-18,

In what ways are you currently *renting* your faith? How would your life (and future) be different if you decided to *own* it?

This passage in Habakkuk shows us that he was able to continue to be a worshiper of God despite having no food and his life being in shambles. Do you foresee yourself as ever being able to *own* your faith at this level? Why or why not?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 33, 35

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that I am sometimes a person who *rents* my relationship with You, instead of *owning* it. Today, I want to begin to *own* my faith in new ways. Even though I'm not exactly sure what that looks like, I know that You will lead me. Even though I'm not sure where that path will take me, I know that You will be there with me. Even though I may sometimes veer off that path, I know that You will pursue me. And that's a kind of faith I know I can truly *own*. I worship You today! In Jesus' name. Amen.

"His anxiousness about another day shrank when he thought about how far the Maker had carried him. He may be scarred and worn in places, but he believed he was better for it."

~ Andrew Peterson



Week #5

Created to be a
Child of God

For all who are led by the Spirit of God
are children of God.

Romans 8:14 (NLT)

Day 1: YOU ARE MY SON / DAUGHTER

Everybody on earth has something in common. It doesn't matter what they look like. Or how much money they make. Or what nation they live in. But the one thing that everybody has in common is that they are the *son* or *daughter* of somebody. There's just no escaping it.

But being the biological child of somebody doesn't define who we are. Instead, God tells us that we have the opportunity to be *His* child.

John 1:12-13 reads, "But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God."

The Life Application Study Bible notes that this *new birth* changes us from the inside out. It rearranges our attitudes. It impacts our desires. It transforms our motives. It helps us to feel alive.

As you read today, consider this: How has being a *son* or *daughter* of God impacted your attitudes, desires and motives? How would you explain to somebody outside of the faith what happens to your own attitudes, desires and motives, when you lose focus on the truth that you are a son or daughter of God?

READING:

JOHN 1:12-13, GALATIANS 4:4-7

How has being a *son* or *daughter* of God impacted your attitudes, desires and motives?

How would you explain to somebody outside of the faith what happens to your own attitudes, desires and motives, when you lose focus on the truth that you are a son or daughter of God?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 39-40

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you for inviting me to be a part of your family and calling me Your own. While I know I'm not perfect, You are continually rearranging my attitude, my desires, and my motives. Today, I invite You to reveal to me opportunities to relate with others in new profound ways. I invite you to remind me so that my attitude is more gracious towards others, my desires are pure and godly, and my motives come from a heart of love. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2: YOU ARE MY FRIEND

Take just a moment to think about this: What are at least three character traits that are essential for *friendship*? Some may say having similar interests or hobbies is important for friendship. Others may say that being *there* for one another during difficulties in life is necessary for a friendship to thrive. Still others may say that *grace* and *understanding* are essential for friendship.

In his book *The Meaning of Marriage*, Pastor and Author Timothy Keller writes, "There are two features of real friendship—constancy and transparency." From a Biblical perspective, God desires to be your friend. Think about it this way: God has *always* been there for you. In your doubts. In your fears. In your struggles. He has been there through it all.

Not only that, but He *always* has been and *always* will be transparent with you about who He is. He will be open. He will be vulnerable. He will be gracious. He will be there. Always.

But God has much more to say about *friendship*. He doesn't just say that He wants to be your friend. He says that *YOU* are *HIS* friend.

As you read today, consider this: What does it mean to you that God sees you as His friend?

READING:

JOHN 15:15

What are at least three character traits that are essential for friendship?

What does it mean to you that God sees you as His friend?

Does your answer to the second question change how you would answer the first question?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 41

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you for not *just* calling me Your son or daughter, but you have *also* called me Your friend. Your friendship is constantly revealing to me the intentions and purpose of true friendship. Today, I invite you to reveal to me ways in which I sometimes use some of my *friendships* for my own gain. Help me to see these relationships in new ways. Help me to see these relationships in the same way You see me. I pray in the name of Jesus, my best friend. Amen.

Day 3: YOU ARE A SAINT

The Scriptures are full of statements that have challenged all of humanity for generations. For example, the Bible reveals to us the ugliness of sin and the impact it has in our lives. Romans 3:23 reveals that "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." While sin is a reality in all of our lives, God doesn't always want us to view ourselves as 'less than,' 'ugly,' or 'insignificant.' In fact, all throughout the New Testament, the Apostle Paul reminds those who are followers of Jesus that we are exactly the opposite - we are *saints*. While some translations read "*God's Holy people*," the meaning is the same. Some examples include:

Romans 1:7 - To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.

Ephesians 1:1 - Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus.

Philippians 1:1 - Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.

1 Corinthians 1:2 - To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.

As you read today, consider this: Do you consider yourself to be a *saint*? Why or why not?

Day 4: I LIKE BEING WITH YOU

It's pretty hard to think about, but before He came to earth, *Jesus* had everything. After having created the heavens and the earth, Jesus sat in the presence of God the Father and simply enjoyed ongoing friendship and fellowship with Him. Everything in His life and everything about his environment and circumstances was *perfect*.

But the world had a problem - a *sin* problem.

Jesus could have remained right where He was. He could have remained in heaven. He could have remained in a perfect world. But he *chose* to leave that world in order to be *with* us.

Matthew 1:23 reads, "'Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

You see, Jesus left behind a perfect world because He wanted to be *with* us. To make it even more personal, Jesus chose to leave behind the comfort of heaven to be with *you*. It's almost as if Jesus was saying, "I like being with you so much, I'm going to do everything in my power to be with you!"

As you read today, consider this: Do you struggle to believe that Jesus *likes* being with you? If so, why do you think that is?

Day 5: READING: PSALM 86:5, 1 JOHN 4:7-8

How would you communicate to somebody who has never heard the gospel the meaning of 1 John 4:7-8?

What did you learn about yourself this week?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 46-47

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

READING:

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

Why do you think the Apostle Paul began so many of his letters reminding those reading them that they are *saints*?

Do you consider yourself to be a *saint*? If not, what are some steps you can take this week to remind yourself that you *are* a saint?

Is there a friend or loved one who can regularly remind you that you are a *child* of God? A *friend* of God? A *saint*? — Is it possible God is inviting you to be that voice in somebody else's life?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 42-43

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess there are many days in which I consider myself to be much more of a sinner than a saint. Much more than I care to admit, I find myself focusing on everything 'bad' or 'impure' or 'unholy' about me than I do reminding myself that You have called me Your child, Your friend, and a saint. Today I invite you to reveal to me when these unhealthy thoughts enter my mind, and remind me of Your truths. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

READING:

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8, ROMANS 8:38-39, ZEPHANIAH 3:17

Do you struggle to believe that Jesus *likes* being with you? If so, why do you think that is?

Zephaniah 3:17 reads, "He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs." Does this passage in any way impact your view of God? Your understanding of how God sees you? Explain.

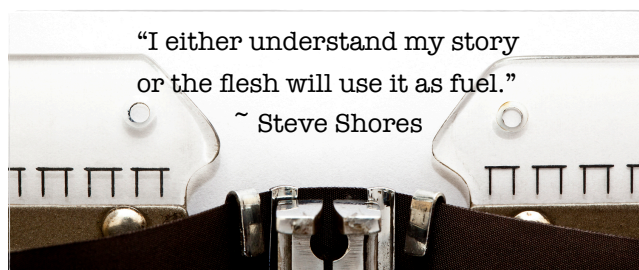
F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 44-45

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess today that the passage from Zephaniah 3:17 has revealed to me something about who You are that I don't often think about. It reveals that You truly *do* enjoy being with me. It reveals that no matter what poor decisions I may have made in the past, You are there, and You continually rejoice over me because You see me as the person You have created me to be. Continue to reveal to *me* and those around me the purpose You have for my life, and provide me the wisdom and courage to freely fulfill that purpose. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.



Week #6

Created to be a Royal Priest

...for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 1:9 (NLT)

Day 1: SET APART

In the Old Testament, the position of *Priesthood* was reserved to a small, select group of people. Their role was to represent the people to God, as well as to oversee the sacrifices the people brought to God.

While the sacrificial system used in those ancient times may seem strange to us, to them, it made sense that there would be a small group of Priests who oversaw the requirements and spoke to God on their behalf. All in all, the concept of *Priesthood* could be understood in this way: Priests were *set apart*. Their commitment was intense, their lifestyles were different, and the regulations they needed to follow were rigorous. In other words, they were a *special* group of people.

But in the New Testament, the author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus completely changed how we should view the Priesthood. It tells us that Jesus now speaks to God on our behalf. That He has taken on the role of *High Priest*. That He does not need to offer sacrifices every day for the people, because He Himself *was* the final sacrifice. Even more so, it tells us that we have been set apart by placing our faith in Him. As you read today, consider this: What is the first thought that comes to mind when you hear that you have been '*set apart*'?

Day 2: EVERYBODY A MINISTER

Daily reminding ourselves that we have been '*set apart*' is something that can have a huge impact in how we see ourselves. But there's still a bit of a mindset in our culture that *pastors*, *bishops*, *priests*, or others are the only ones who have been set apart. It is *they* who have been called to minister to others.

But the Scriptures paint a different picture. In the years after Jesus' death and resurrection, one of his disciples, Peter, wrote a letter to many Christians who were experiencing persecution under the Roman Emperor. In his letter, Peter wrote, "...for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."

Peter didn't write this to remove himself from the responsibility he had as the leader of all of the churches in his day. Instead, he wrote it as an encouragement to the people. He wrote it to remind them that they had been *set apart*. He wrote it to let them know they could see themselves as *Priests*. He wrote it so they could understand a powerful truth: they had the strength, wisdom, and courage to minister to others in the same way Peter could. As you read today, consider this: In what ways is God inviting *you* to minister to others?

READING:

HEBREWS 7:23-28, EPHESIANS 2:10

What is the first thought that comes to mind when you hear that you have been '*set apart*'?

Have you ever thought that the Christian life isn't about making sacrifices, but is simply about becoming the person God has created you to be?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 48-49

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that while it's sometimes challenging to remember that You have called me Your child, Your friend, and a saint, it can be more difficult to remember that You see me as a *royal priest*. Today, I bring to You my worries, hurts, anxieties, fears, and every other inadequacy that weighs me down. Instead of holding onto the things that only bring darkness into my life, I invite You to reveal to me *at least* one answer to the questions: *Who is God inviting me to be, and what are some healthy practices I can put into place in my journey to become that person?* I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

READING:

1 PETER 2:9, 1 PETER 4:10

Do you ever find yourself looking for ways to minister to others? Of all of the current priorities in your life (family, work, sports, etc.), how high is your priority to love, serve, and minister to others?

In what ways may God be inviting *you* to minister to others? (Are there any commitments in your life you can lessen so that you have more opportunities to serve and minister to others?)

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 50 - Exodus 1

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that there are times when I do not look for ways to minister to others. There are times when I'm not intentional about encouraging others and loving them in the same ways You love me. But I rejoice in knowing that despite some of these past mistakes, You're still constantly inviting *me* to minister to others. Reveal to me some commitments I can give up so I may better fulfill Your will. And today, provide me an opportunity to minister to somebody in an unexpected way. In Jesus' name.

Day 3: SHARING GOD'S WORD

Imagine for a moment that you have a friend, colleague, or family member who begins to ask you some questions about your faith. They may begin by saying something like, "You or your family seems a bit *different* than others I know." But then they go on to ask a few questions:

- You seem to live like everything matters. Everything is important. Every *person* is significant. Why is that?
- What exactly does it mean to *trust God*? Or to place your faith in Christ and to be a Christian? Or maybe, what exactly is *the gospel*? Can you explain it to me?
- My marriage is crumbling, and you're one of the few people I know who has a strong marriage. What does the Bible say about marriage, and can you help me to see my marriage differently?

In that moment you're left with a choice. You may respond by saying, "Wow, those are great questions for my pastor, or my priest. Let me get you their number." Or you may recognize that God has invited *you* to share His Word with them in order to help *you both* to grow. As you read today, consider this: How would you respond if somebody asked you these kinds of questions?

Day 4: REAL PURPOSE

Always being prepared to provide an answer for the hope that we have is a challenge. It requires us to dig deep, to look within ourselves to fully understand who God is, who we are, and who He has called each of us to be. Still, it can be quite overwhelming.

As an example, some may say, "I'd love to *always* be prepared to provide an answer for the hope that I have. But I don't feel like God has provided me with what I need to do that. To be honest, I'm not sure He has given me any specific *purpose* to fulfill."

If that's you, be encouraged that you're not the only one! But also be encouraged that the Scriptures confirm that as a follower of Jesus, God has provided *you* with spiritual gifts. The purpose of these gifts is to lift up and encourage others - both Christians and non-Christians alike.

Maybe the *purpose* God is inviting you to fulfill is to find simple ways to get started in the process. For example, maybe you can begin each day by praying, "God, today I ask that You provide me an opportunity to minister to somebody else, in as simple or as large a way as You lead me." As you read today, consider this: Do you regularly pray for opportunities to minister to others? Would you be willing to commit to doing so over the next week?

Day 5: READING: EPHESIANS 4:11-16, GALATIANS 2:20

In what ways do you think that using our spiritual gifts and serving others can bring *unity* to God's people?

Have you ever had somebody speak the truth to you, in love? What kind of impact did that have on you?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 6-7

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

READING:

1 PETER 3:15

How would you respond if somebody asked you the kinds of questions listed in today's devotional?

Does 1 Peter 3:15 impact how you would think about answering these kinds of questions?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 2-3

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that while my inadequacies sometimes interfere with my desire to minister to others, these same inadequacies go to a whole new level when I think about sharing about Your Word, Your grace, and Your lovingkindness with others. Today, instead of praying that You provide me with the confidence to share Your word with others, I simply pray that You will reveal to me more of who You are so that I may *know* You better. May the box I sometimes put you in be shattered so that I can see and know You for who You really are. By truly *knowing* You, may my confidence to share more about You and Your word increase beyond measure. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

READING:

ROMANS 12:3-8

Do you regularly pray for opportunities to minister to others? Would you be willing to commit to doing so over the next week?

God has provided you the opportunity to live each day with a *Real Purpose*. On your own, find at least three Scripture passages that say something about who God is inviting you to be and/or how He is inviting *you* to minister to others. Share the verses you discover with at least one other person.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 4-5

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

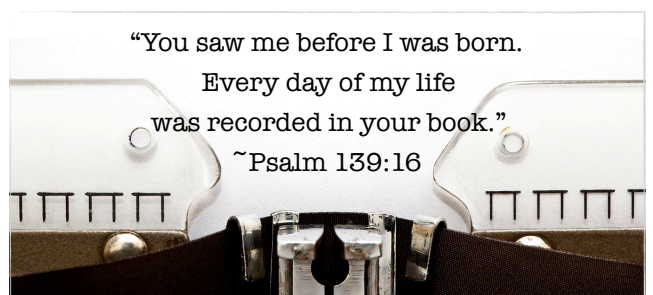
PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that sometimes when I'm challenged to find a Scripture passage on a certain topic, I'm tempted to go online in order to quickly discover the answer. Perhaps You're not looking for a quick answer, but are instead more interested in the *process* of me growing to know You. Perhaps you simply want me to *know* You instead of seeing what *Google* knows about You. Today, my desire is to read Your word, pause, and truly reflect on who You are. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

"You saw me before I was born.

Every day of my life
was recorded in your book."

~ Psalm 139:16





"You are the salt of the earth...
You are the light of the world."

Matthew 5:13-14 (NLT)

Day 1: SALT & LIGHT

Chapters 5 - 7 in the Gospel of Matthew are widely referred to as the *Sermon on the Mount*. While this 'sermon' likely contains quotes from several days of teachings, one Study Bible notes that some of the key points of Jesus' sermon are that *position, authority, and money*, are not of significant value in the Kingdom of God. Instead, God is most interested in the hearts and minds of His people trusting Him.

For those who trust God, Jesus shares a profound reality:

"You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world."

Salt and Light are significant agents of change. Salt affects not just the taste of food, but also preserves it, helping it to last longer and continue to provide sustenance to those who need it. Similarly, light affects the world around it like nothing else. Even the smallest bit of light can make the depths of a pitch-black cavern visible.

Jesus' teaching could not have been misunderstood by those who first heard it. They didn't hear Him say, "You can be agents of change in this world." Instead, they heard Him say, "You *are* agents of change in this world. In the ways that you have been changed by Me, go out and *be* that change in the lives of others!" As you read today, consider this: How has God uniquely created you to be an agent of change?

READING:

MATTHEW 5:13-16

How has God uniquely created you to be an agent of change in your family? Your job? Your school?

What is one way you will commit to *being* an agent of change throughout the week?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 8-9

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today revealed to me that You haven't *just* invited me to be an agent of change in this world. Instead, You have declared that *I am* an agent of change! Today, I humbly pray that You will reveal to me ways in which I can be an agent of change in my family. Reveal to me ways I can be an agent of change at work. Reveal to me ways I can be an agent of change in the lives of complete strangers I see at the gas station and grocery store. You have been the ultimate agent of change in my life, and have called me to be the same in the lives of others. As I see these positive changes unfold around me, may I give *You* the glory for it all. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2: MAKING LIFE TASTE BETTER

Today, there's a lot of stuff we can put in our food to make it taste better. Salt and pepper are pretty standard. But we also have *sugar*. And *fat*. And don't forget what may be the healthiest of them all...potassium benzoate! (Just kidding, of course.)

But in Ancient Israel, there were very few options. The primary go-to for food seasoning was *salt*. While salt adds quite a bit of flavor to any food, Jesus noted that if it loses its saltiness, it's of no real value. But anyone who has spent time in the kitchen will tell you that if just the right amount of salt is added, its own flavor will also bring out the best flavor from the food. For those at the feast, it's a win-win for everybody.

Maybe one of the things Jesus was trying to teach His followers about being *salt* is that He desires us to bring out the best in others. And by bringing out the best in others, maybe life itself will *taste* better, not only for us, but also for those we interact with on a regular basis.

As you read today, consider this: How will you encourage and bring out the best in others throughout the remainder of this week?

READING:

GALATIANS 6:1-3, PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

How will you encourage and bring out the best in others throughout the remainder of this week?

How can others encourage and bring out the best in *you* throughout the remainder of this week? Is it possible God is inviting you to reach out and ask somebody to help or encourage you?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 10-11

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I want to begin today by thinking of a few people who have helped to bring out the best in me. Specifically, I thank you for bringing (name of person), (name of person), and (name of person) into my life. Their encouragement has impacted me in so many ways, and I thank You for bringing them into my life. Today, I simply pray for opportunities to bring out the best in others, and that You provide me the wisdom to know how to encourage them. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3: PRESERVE WHAT'S GOOD

Today, we have a ridiculous number of food preservatives. If you want to have some fun, ask some friends to spell some of the words that are listed as ingredients on Twinkies or other Little Debbie Snack Cakes.

The idea of these added preservatives is to *preserve* what is *good*. Other regular ingredients such as flour, sugar, cheese, meat, and more will rot or mold fairly quickly without the added preservatives.

In the same way that salt helps different foods *taste* better, it also has the ability to *preserve* what is good. Salted meat will last a lot longer before beginning to spoil. Even beans, cabbage, and fish are often preserved with salt to prevent them from spoiling.

In the same way that Jesus may be encouraging us to bring out the best in others, perhaps He's also encouraging us to see and preserve the best in others. Maybe it even goes a step further. Maybe He is inviting us to always be looking for the good in others, no matter what may be visible on the surface. Counselor and author, Larry Crabb, has noted the importance of finding "delight in others, no matter what degree of ugliness we encounter." As you read today, consider this: How challenging is it for you to delight in others, no matter what degree of ugliness you may encounter?"

Day 4: A CITY ON A HILL

In the ancient world, cities were built on a hill for many reasons. It was more difficult for opposing nations to attack a city on a hill. Those on the city walls could keep watch and see farther due to their height. But other than the typical military advantages, the light from within a city on a hill would light up more land. So the peasants and workers out in the fields would still have a clear view of the city as the sun began to set.

Jesus shared that His people were both the salt of the earth, as well as the light of the world - a city on a hill. While being the light of the world can be understood in many different ways, in our culture it could mean that you choose to speak up and show compassion in situations where others do not. It could mean providing for the needs of others; not just their physical needs, but their emotional and spiritual needs as well. It could mean allowing your light to shine so others know where to go for help and encouragement when darkness is entering their own life. It could mean...(you fill in the blank.)

As you read today, consider this: Who has been a light for you when you experienced a dark season in life? How did that experience prepare you to be a light in the lives of others?

Day 5: READING: JOHN 8:12, ACTS 13:47

Based on this week's readings, how would you explain to somebody else what it means to be *salt* and *light* in this world?

What did you learn about the nature of God this week? About yourself?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 16-17

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

READING:

1 THESSALONIANS 2:7-12, PROVERBS 12:25

How challenging is it for you to delight in others, no matter what degree of ugliness you may encounter?

Who do you know who is currently anxious or worrying about something happening in their life? How can you be an encouragement to them today?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 12

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that many times when I encounter the *ugliness* within somebody else, my initial desire is to *run* the other direction as quickly as I can. While I know that sometimes it is healthy to have safe boundaries in place, there are times I run the other direction when I could be patient and diligent in looking for the hidden good within them. Today I am simply reminded that even when I see the worst in others, *You* have created them. *You* have created them in *Your* image. May I continually see others through *Your* eyes. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

READING:

ISAIAH 43:2, PSALM 121:1-2, LUKE 8:16

Who has been a light for you when you experienced a dark season in life? How did that experience prepare you to be a light in the lives of others?

Bringing it back: How has God uniquely created you to be an agent of change in your family? Your job? Your school? Has your answer to this question changed in any way throughout the week?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 13:17-14:31

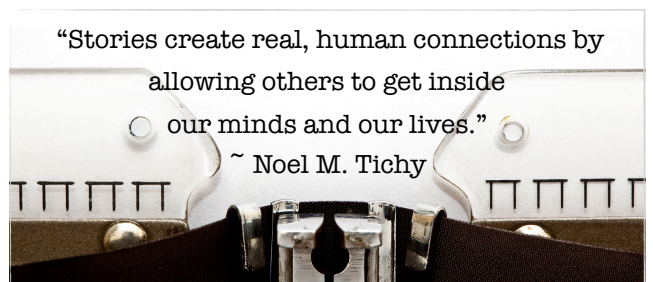
Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today I thank You that for the reminder that *I am* a city on a hill. Not only have You provided me a significant spiritual advantage against Your adversary, You have also designed me to reflect Your light so that the darkness all around will be consumed. Today, I simply pray that Your light will be reflected in my life in such a profound way that even from a distance, people will see You and come to know You better. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

"Stories create real, human connections by allowing others to get inside our minds and our lives."

~ Noel M. Tichy



Week #8

Created to be
an Ambassador

So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

1 Corinthians 5:20 (NLT)

Day 1: PERSEPHONE: PART 1 OF 2

In Greek Mythology, the goddess Persephone plays a significant role in the changing of the seasons. The ancient story inspired musician John Mark McMillan to write a song focusing on some of the life changes (seasons) he had experienced throughout his life.

He noted that when he wrote this song, he was trying to explain the different seasons we all experience in life. For example, we experience seasons of living and thriving, but we also experience seasons of death and dying. Yet another season will emerge, and we once again experience life. This new life will be different, and more refined than the previous one.

Another part of meaning in the song lyrics comes from *reminiscing* about the past. McMillan says that far too often we think about the *good old days*. But those days are gone, and it's best to accept the death of that season. He writes:

I don't want to dance anymore
With dark nostalgia
I don't want to hold hands with the dreams
Of a dead man.

As you read today, consider this: Is it possible that *reminiscing* on your past is hindering your ability to enter a new, more fruitful season in life?

READING:

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21

In what ways have your past decisions and mistakes led you to believe that God would rather have *somebody else* be His ambassador rather than you?

Is it possible that *reminiscing* on your past is hindering your ability to enter a new, more fruitful season in life?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 19-20

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that there are times when I think about the *good old days*. There are times when I reminisce about my past, believing the *lie* that if my life were more like it used to be, it would be better. Thank You for reminding me today of just how far You have brought me. Thank you for reminding me that even though I have some *great* memories from my past, You have been refining me. I pray today that I can be confident to not be enslaved by 'dark nostalgia', but can instead see the more fruitful life you have laid before me. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2: PERSEPHONE: PART 2 OF 2

Dreaming about the person you want to become and the steps you hope to take to become that person is an essential aspect of spiritual growth. But it's equally important to remember that God may refine you more through that process than you imagined.

We see this reality in the lives of numerous people throughout the Bible. David expected to be a shepherd, and God decided to make him king. Mary expected to be a normal wife, and God decided to have her bring Jesus into the world. Peter expected to be a fisherman, and God used him to help Christianity flourish.

Of course, this level of spiritual refining isn't something that only happened to those in the Bible. It happens today, too.

In the third verse of John Mark McMillan's *Persephone*, he writes:

When I was young I thought I would become
Someone different than who I find myself to be
But in my weakness I've come to believe
Who I am is greater than the man of who I once dreamed

As you read today, consider this: Do you currently see yourself as greater than the person you once dreamed you would be?

READING:

GALATIANS 2:20

Do you currently see yourself as greater than the person you once dreamed you would be? Explain your answer.

In what ways has your life story and the seasons you've experienced refined you to be a better ambassador of Christ? Be specific.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 24-25

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, it's easy to see that the person I am today is not the person I once thought I would be. I confess that there are many times when life is not at all like I expected it to be, nor am I the person I sometimes thought I would be. But today's reading has helped me to pause, reflect, and recognize that You have led me to be somebody who is *greater* than the person I once dreamed I would be. Today, I pray that You will continue to refine me so that tomorrow, and the next day, and the next, I will continue taking steps to be the greatest possible version of myself. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3: NEVER GOING BACK

We all have a past. For some of us, our past is full of poor decisions. For others, our past is full of the poor decisions and actions of others that have caused significant hurts in our lives.

Despite what may have happened in *your* past, it is important to remember that it happened *in-the-past*. There's no need to try to numb it by overworking. There's no reason to think that what others have said about you can define who you are. There's no reason to think that buying a bunch of cool stuff will lead you to forget about it. It happened, but for all who have trusted in Christ, that burden has already been removed and you can now live in freedom.

On an album by United Pursuit, they sing a lyric that is a wonderful reminder about this burden having been removed. They sing:

There's nothing that I have need of
'Cause there's nothing You haven't done
You make my soul alive
You put Your love inside

As you read today, consider this: What are some things you often do to try to feel alive? Does it work?

READING:

PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14

As you read today, consider this: What are some things you often do to try to feel alive? Does it work?

Why do you think we often do things that don't lead to feeling truly alive?

Read the first line of the song lyric in today's reading one more time. How true is this statement in your own life? What steps can you be taking so that this can be regular mindset for you?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 26-27

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that many, many times I try to define myself in my work, or by what others say about me, or by the false belief that what I own will help me forget about the past. I'm grateful for the reminder that there's really nothing - outside of You - I have need of. You have provided me with more than I could ever earn on my own. Today, I will truly *rejoice* that I am never going back! I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 4: SO WILL I

Hillsong UNITED recently released a song simply titled *So Will I*. The intent of the song cannot be misunderstood - we are to worship God just as the rest of His creation does. More importantly, we are to love others, give of ourselves, and even surrender our lives to others just as God has done for us. Some of the lyrics throughout the song include:

If the stars were made to worship...so will I
If the mountains bow in reverence...so will I
If the oceans roar Your greatness...so will I
If the wind goes where You send it...so will I
If the rocks cry out in silence...so will I
If You gladly chose surrender...so will I
If You gave Your life to love them...so will I

God has created you to be His ambassador. He has created you to proclaim the greatness of His nature. He has created you to serve others. Encourage others. Love others. Empathize with others. And to *be with* others in the same way that He left heaven to be *with* us. As you read today, consider this: What would it look like to live life in such a way that others see and know that no matter what, you are *for* them and *with* them?

READING:

PROVERBS 3:5-6, 23:26

What would it look like to live life in such a way that others see and know that no matter what, you are *for* them and *with* them?

Do you find it difficult to see others in the same way God sees them? Why do you think that is?

Take action: Who is one person you sometimes distance yourself from? What is one thing you can do today to encourage them, perhaps letting them know you are *for* them and *with* them?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 28-29

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that there are some people I have little to no desire to be *with*. Their attitude or foolish life decisions leave me frustrated and anxious, so being *with* them is a significant challenge. But today, I'm grateful for the reminder that You gladly chose to surrender *for* them. You openly gave your life to be *with* them. And because of who *You* are and all *You* have done, I commit to doing the same. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 5: READING: JOHN 15:1-7

In just one sentence, summarize the main lesson you have learned throughout this message series.

In what ways has this series helped you become more confident to share more about the story of God and the story of you?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 30-31

Reflect: What did you H.E.A.R. from God today? (See back page.)

"...telling the story hurt and helped all at once.

Already he could see ways the story had changed him and would go on changing him."

Andrew Peterson



H.E.A.R. Bible Study Method

This Bible Study method was designed to be used with the F260 Reading Plan.

READ: 10 Minutes a Day / 5 Days a Week

REFLECT: 5-10 Minutes a Day

RESPOND: All Day / Every Day

HIGHLIGHT:

After reading 1-2 Chapters of Scripture, *Highlight* the verses that speak to you by writing out the following:

- ❖ Write down the name of the book.
- ❖ Write down the Chapter and verses.
- ❖ Write down a 1-3 word title (eg. Why does this passage speak to me?)

EXPLAIN:

Engage with the text and wrestle with its meaning. Some *possible* questions to consider include:

- ❖ Who was the passage written to?
- ❖ Why was it written?
- ❖ How does it fit in with surrounding verses?
- ❖ What may God be communicating through this passage?

APPLY:

Consider how you may be able to apply the text in *Real Life*. Some *possible* questions to consider include:

- ❖ How can this passage help me?
- ❖ How can I apply this passage in my life today?
- ❖ What is God saying to me?

RESPOND:

Finally, *respond* to God. This can be done in any number of ways, but make it sincere.

- ❖ Write out a prayer (eg. Ask God to help you become more loving, or grace-filled, or content, etc.)
- ❖ Sing, write a poem, paint, sketch, take a photo, or find some other creative way to respond to God.
- ❖ Commit to a certain action.
- ❖ Who is God inviting me to be?
- ❖ What's my next step in becoming that person?

