

# ACCESSPOINT

**Accessing the gospel that  
is the power of God for  
those who believe.**



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*Accessing the gospel that  
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## Introduction and Explanation of the AccessPoint Bible Studies

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### The Heart of these Studies

The gospel is the most important news that anyone can ever hear. It's also the most important message that we continue to hear as Christians. The gospel is the central story of the Bible about God's creation, our rebellion, and Jesus' redemption--it is the great rescue that was planned from before the foundations of the world. These Bible studies are meant to guide students through the most essential components of the gospel as well as its most important implications for our lives.

### The Structure of the Studies

The studies are meant to be highly accessible, that is, they do not take a lot of studying or hours of work to prepare. They are framed around a central problem that is common to all people (also known as the fallen condition focus) and then provide the primary solution as seen in the specific passage (also known as the gospel solution). The problem and corresponding solution for each study serve as the primary focus of the study and the ultimate "big idea" that each student walks away with. The problems are not specific to non-believers or believers, they are issues that must be met by the gospel for both believers and non-believers alike. If our sin is the greatest of problems, and the cross is the most excellent of solutions, then hopefully as we hear the gospel, grace will produce the most extreme changes in our lives.

### The Layout of the Studies

Each study begins with the problem and solution that the corresponding passage communicates. This is the big picture of the overall study. They are in italics because they are meant for you, the leader, to know and understand up front, so that you can direct and facilitate discussion towards the gospel. All text written in italics is meant for the leader as helpful commentary to guide the study. The studies then provide an introductory question that will hopefully launch a time of discussion for the group. It is most effective if you have everyone answer this question. The study then transitions to the biblical text, which should be read aloud. A number of discussion questions follow, often tracing the flow of the passage or story. The final questions are intended to bring conclusion to the discussion and hopefully hit on the gospel solution at the top of the page. These questions are also more focused on individual and communal application.

### Going Deeper

The second page of each study is titled "Going Deeper". This section is meant to provide you, as leaders with additional resources for developing your study. If the front page is the body of the car, then the second page is your opportunity to customize it with leather seating and your preferred colors. That is to say, the front page is the core of the study; it's the center; and it's meant to be able to be taught as a stand alone study. However, as you as a leader seek to communicate the gospel through God's word to your students, you might want to add additional components. This might include another related Bible passage, perhaps a YouTube video of a sermon clip, or maybe a quote from your favorite author. The point of the going deeper section is to provide some of those resources you might use in order to add depth to your discussion and dive more intensely into the biblical text.

### Our Prayer

Our prayer is that your small group would be gospel-saturated and that those who have not heard will believe, while those who know Jesus would be challenged to continue to grow in their belief and application of the gospel. To God alone be the glory!

Feel free to email [kyle.keating@uscm.org](mailto:kyle.keating@uscm.org) or [chris.sarver@uscm.org](mailto:chris.sarver@uscm.org) with any questions or feedback.



## **Clarity & Confidence: Understanding the Central Message of Christianity Ephesians 2:1-10**

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### **Problem: (for leaders)**

*\*We don't believe that we are as bad off as we actually are, nor that we need God to be so graciously good toward us. So, we think that we must and can gain right standing before God on the basis of merit (good behavior, good works, doing the "right" things, etc.) rather than God's grace in Christ.*

### **Solution: (for leaders)**

*\*Though we were dead in our sin, it is God alone who makes us alive (gives us true life and eternal life) in order to live how He wants us to live. Salvation was nothing we could or did achieve - it was God's gift to us.*

### **Introduction:**

\*Have you ever tried to do something good or nice in hopes that it would make up for something bad or wrong you did to your parents or a friend or boyfriend/girlfriend? How does that approach tend to work over time? Why?

### **The Biblical Text:**

Ephesians 2:1-10

### **The Human Condition/The Need (read verses 1-3):**

- \*What's the overall tone or flavor of this section?
- \*What is the human condition? What is God's reaction to the human condition? Why?
- \*Based upon these verses, what might God's attitude be toward any effort on the part of people or a person to "be good in order to make up for being bad?" Do you think that approach will succeed? Why or why not?

### **God's Initiative/The Provision (read verses 4-7):**

- \*According to these verses, how is God shown to be loving and merciful?
- \*From what are they "saved"? How would you define "saved"?
- \*Jesus Christ is mentioned four times in this section. Why is he important to this discussion?

### **Human Response & God's Intended Outcome (read verses 8-10):**

- \*What does it mean to "believe" (verse 8)?
- \*Why can't "good works" rescue someone from their sins and God's anger? What can?

### **Summary:**

- \*What seems to be the bottom line of this passage?

### **Conclusion:**

- \*What ways do you try to be good in order to make up for the bad things you have done against God? Do you compensate for your failure by doing good things before you go meet with God? How might the truths of this passage change that approach?

# GOING DEEPER

## **Extra Discussion Questions:**

\*Agree or Disagree:

- 1) There are certain things (acts, behavior, etc.) a person must do to get into heaven.
- 2) There are certain things that can absolutely keep a person out of heaven.

\*In what areas of your spiritual life do you find yourself becoming proud or thinking of yourself better than someone else? How might the truths of this passage counter pride and such thinking?

\*Suppose you were standing before God and He asked you, “Why should I let you into heaven?” What would you say? How confident are you that He would allow you into heaven based upon your response? Does Ephesians 2:1-10 give us any clue as to the only acceptable response/basis? What level of confidence does it give a person?

## **Cross-Referencing: Faith v. Works (John 15:1-8, James 2:14-26)**

\*What is the relationship between good behavior (“good things we have done”) and salvation/being saved?

Read John 15:1-8.

\*What is the relationship between the vine and the branches? How is it that the branches bear good fruit?

*Insofar as the branches are connected to the vine (or we are connected to Jesus), then they will bear fruit. How are the branches connected to the vine? By faith alone.*

Read James 2: 14-26

\*How are works an essential part of faith? What is the relationship between works and faith?

*Works necessarily come out of, or are the fruit of a relationship with Jesus that is based in faith alone. James is responding to a misunderstanding of Paul’s preaching of grace that assumed that if works have nothing to do with it, then we can go on sinning and never live out the implications of our faith. But James argues, true faith will necessarily result in good works.*

## **How do others teach this passage?**

\*Check out what John Piper has to say on this text in his sermon called: “But God...” Linked below:

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/3/523\\_But\\_God/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/3/523_But_God/)

Or check out this two minute YouTube video of John Piper discussing Ephesians 2:4-5:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWII0oIXbE0> or just YouTube: John Piper, Ephesians 2:4-5



## Who Is Jesus?

### Jesus Claim to be “I AM”

Exodus 3:13-17; John 8:48-59; John 18:1-8

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#### **Problem:** (for leaders)

*\*Our view of/understanding of Jesus is not in accord with how the Bible presents Him and how He presents Himself. As a result, we do not take Him, His work, and His claim upon our lives seriously. Bottom line: our view of Jesus is too small at best or inaccurate at worst.*

#### **Solution:** (for leaders)

*\*Jesus is God—the Great I Am of the Old Testament. As such, His death on the cross is sufficient to atone for the sins of all his people. His divinity gives him authority over all things he created, including us. He is Lord and should be recognized as Lord of our lives. When we recognize Him as such, we’ll fall on the ground before Him (literally and figuratively) and make Him Lord of our lives.*

#### **Introduction:**

\*When you think of Jesus, what words immediately come to mind?

\*How would a typical college student answer these questions:

*Who is Jesus & is He important today? Why?*

How would you answer them?

#### **The Biblical Texts:**

Exodus 3:13-17; John 8:48-59, 18:1-8

#### **The Context: God as the great “I AM” (read Exodus 3:13-17)**

\*Why does Moses ask for God to tell him his name? Why was it important to know God’s name for himself?

\*What is significant of God’s declaration “I AM WHO I AM”? (“I AM’ in Hebrew would be pronounced something like Yahweh, the name God uses for himself throughout the Old Testament)

\*What images or characteristics of God come to mind when hearing this declaration?

#### **The Claim: Jesus Claims to the “I AM” (read John 8:48-59)**

\*How does Jesus respond to the question of who he is? What is so important about the statement “Before Abraham was, I am.”? What is Jesus saying about himself?

\*How does the response of the Jews in the passage affirm that this is what Jesus is saying?

#### **The Climax: Jesus before the Cross (read John 18:1-8)**

\*What does Jesus say about himself in this passage? (Check the footnotes, Jesus calls himself “I am” three times v. 5,6,8)

\*What is significant about Jesus declaration to be God on the eve of his crucifixion? Why is Jesus’ divinity important in relation to his death on the cross?

#### **Conclusion:**

\*How do you think Jesus’ claim of divinity affects how we respond to him? What does that mean for his claim upon our lives?

# GOING DEEPER

**Extra Discussion Questions:**

John 18:1-8

\*Note: This is an instance where the English translation cannot capture the significance of the text. In order to have the grammar work, the English translation must translate Jesus statement as “I am he”, but in the original Greek, Jesus simply said “I am”, as he did in the earlier passage.

\*How does everyone respond to Jesus initial statement “I am” in this passage? How is this similar/different from their response earlier in John? What do these responses say about the significance of the words “I am”?

**More Background: Yahweh, God’s Name for Himself**

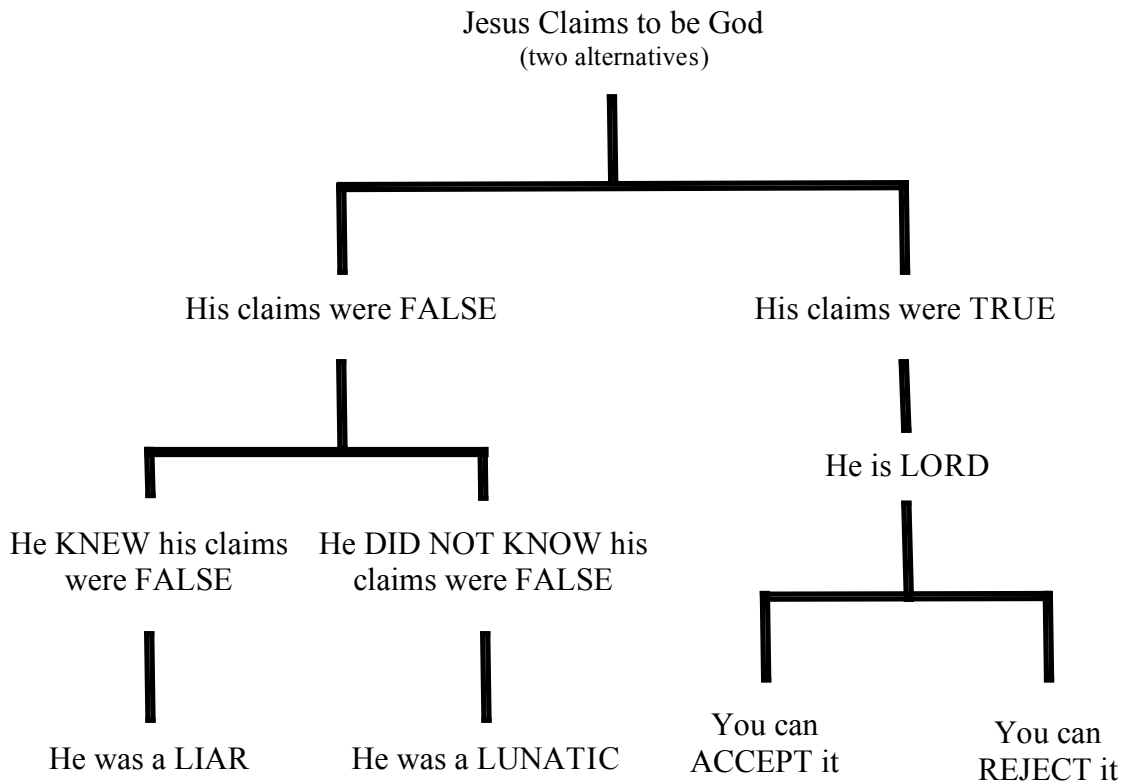
\*When God says of himself “I AM WHO I AM” he declares his name to the world. The name “I AM” captures the authority and supremacy of God over all his creation. As such, the Israelites set apart the phrase “I AM”, pronounced “Yahweh” in Hebrew as God’s name, so holy that is not even to be spoken aloud.

\*Whenever the word LORD appears in the Bible in all capitalized letters (as it does throughout much of the Old Testament), it really signifies the Hebrew word “Yahweh” or God’s name for himself. In these cases, Lord is not simply a declaration of God’s people that he has authority, but it is the actual name that God has given himself.

**C.S Lewis’ Argument: Jesus as Lord, Liar or Lunatic (from *Mere Christianity*):**

\*Too often people have tried to dismiss Jesus as either a **Lunatic** (He was crazy actually thinking he was God but was in fact not) or a **Liar** (He knew that he wasn’t God but continued to claim that he was). Why aren’t these valid options in view of the Scriptures we have examined?

The only option He leaves us is that He is **Lord** (God in the flesh).







## An Invitation for Life: Salvation and Satisfaction in Christ Isaiah 55

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### **Problem: (for leaders)**

*\*We don't believe that God is our source of life and, therefore, our source of satisfaction, so instead of coming to Him, we look to find life and satisfaction in other places (sex, entertainment, etc).*

### **Solution: (for leaders)**

*\*God is the one who gives life to our soul and satisfies us completely. The only way to know this life is in coming to Him, once for the salvation for our soul and then regularly to hear from Him and be satisfied in Him.*

### **Introduction:**

\*When you feel empty what do you do to fill up? What things do you seek to find satisfaction in? (Relationships, image, entertainment, sexual pleasure?) How is this reflected in your life?

### **Background:**

\*Isaiah is prophesying to the Israelites, the people of God, in a time of great distress. Because of their disobedience to God, Jerusalem has been destroyed, and they have gone into exile. Now, Isaiah is promising that God is about to liberate his people.

### **The Biblical Text:**

Isaiah 55

### **The Invitation (read verses 1-5)**

- \*What is the invitation that is offered here and who qualifies for it? Why does the invitation come, "no strings attached"? Does our world offer such invitations?
- \*What is the picture of satisfaction that is painted here?
- \*What must we do to be satisfied in God? What role does Jesus play in us finding satisfaction in God?

### **Responding to the invitation (verses 6-11)**

- \*What does it mean to repent? Why would a person want to turn from sin to God? How does a person do that?
- \*How does God respond to our repentance? What is different about his forgiveness compared to human forgiveness?

### **The power of the invitation: (verses 10-13)**

- \*What do verses 10 and 11 tell you about God's word? How is the Word described in this passage?
- \*If what this passage says about God's Word is true, what implications does this have for how we live in relation to the Bible? What role should the Word play in our lives? What should this look like practically?
- \*What is God's promise to us if we return to the Lord?

### **Conclusion:**

- \*Look at the invitation that Jesus offers in Matt 11:28-30. How is it similar to this invitation? What is appealing about God's invitation? What keeps you from accepting it?
- \*How do you go about finding satisfaction in God in your daily life? How do you listen to Him, seek Him, know His ways, and experience His forgiveness and compassion in your life on a regular basis?



# GOING DEEPER

## Extra Discussion Questions

\*In verse 1, we are instructed to “come, buy, and eat” even though we don’t have money, how can one buy if one doesn’t have money, what does this mean? (*grace: unmerited favor. The invitation that is offered is of such value that no one could possess what it actually takes to obtain it.*)

\*In verse 2, the question is asked, “Why do you spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?” What in your life represents “spending” and “laboring” on what doesn’t really satisfy? Be specific.

\*Why does he compare God’s word to the rain and snow and the changing seasons? How does it explain God’s power to change and transform us through His Word?

## Background: What does it mean to be satisfied in God?

\*Josh Harris’ sermon entitled “Is God enough?” provides great background for what it means to be satisfied in God. Linked below:

[http://www.covlife.org/resources/28894-Is\\_God\\_Enough](http://www.covlife.org/resources/28894-Is_God_Enough)

## Gospel Presentation from Isaiah 55: How to Receive Christ (David Linden)

*See the full article at:* <http://www.grebeweb.com/linden/receive.html>

So how do you receive Christ? Listen when God talks. The real God will point you to Christ, to Christ's works, not yours, to His obedience not yours, to His cross and His suffering for sinners, not our penance nor our measly attempts at self-improvement. In our Lord you will see the attraction of a commander who will conquer you as you pay attention to the Father. Christ will take over your life so you will be able to live free and you will be one of His grateful prisoners ever after, never wanting to be relieved of His joyful service.

*Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man His thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God for he will freely pardon.*  
Isaiah 55:6,7

### Seek

The Lord is vigorous in telling us how to respond to Him. He persuades and appeals and commands us to come. He points to our need. He points to His supply in Christ. And now He tells us to be diligent.

### Turn

We are to turn from sin. Believing in Christ is the door into a very different life, one where Christ is Lord. Coming to Him is a turning of repentance. When we receive Christ, it has this kind of "to and from" in it – from our sins, to our Savior. We come confessing that we are sinners. We cannot come to Christ to have Him and keep our sins as well. Real faith turns from sin.

### Call

But there is another element in this. We are to call. We receive Christ when we pray. We call out to Him, calling Him Lord, a very new way for a sinner to address God. We say, "Lord", which is statement of conviction by us that He is God and the Risen Savior from the dead, as well as a confession of a new allegiance we have for Him. We also make a declaration before the world because we confess Him with our mouths. This is what it means to call on the Name of the Lord that we may be saved.



## Grace Vs. Legalism: Which Will You Live By? Galatians 5:1-6

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### **Problem: (for leaders)**

*\*We don't believe that simply putting our faith in Jesus is enough to merit us right standing before God every day. We think we need to be religious, that is, do good spiritual deeds to please God.*

### **Solution: (for leaders)**

*\*Grace means Freedom! God knows that no one is able to be perfect, to fulfill all the requirements of the law. This is the reason he sent his Son. Jesus is the only human being who lived a perfect life in obedience to God. We don't deserve to be freed from having to obey all that God commands, but, when we place our faith in Christ, God says to us, as he did to his Son Jesus, "this is my Son in whom I am well pleased."*

### **Introduction:**

\*Have you ever hurt a friend, or wronged someone before? After receiving forgiveness from that person did you still feel like you needed to continually earn their forgiveness and your right standing in their eyes? How did that affect your friendship?

### **Background:**

\*A group of, self-proclaimed, religious people were leading the recent converts to Christianity in Galatia astray. These "religious people" were trying to convince the Galatians that there were certain rituals that they needed to carry out, and continue to carry out, in order to truly be have right standing before God & please Him; one of those rituals was circumcision.

### **The Biblical Text:**

Galatians 5:1-6

### **Human Condition: Slavery (read verses 1-4)**

\*To what were the Christians in Galatia formerly slaves? What is the law?

\*In our present day we don't seem to have this controversy over being circumcised. What might circumcision represent in your life? What is something that you feel you must do, or not do, in order for God to truly love you and be pleased with you?

\*Why do you think Paul says, "if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you"?

\*What do you think it means to be cut off from Christ? How does this happen when you try to make ourselves right with God by the things you do?

### **God's Response: Freedom! (read verses 5-6)**

\*What do you think defines freedom? How does the world define freedom? How does the Bible?

\*How did Christ set the Galatian Christians free? What are those who are in Christ freed from?

\*Why does living light of grace please God?

\*How do verses 5-6 explain how a person becomes righteous in God's sight?

\*What does it look like to have faith?

### **Conclusion:**

\*Describe what a life lived by grace might look like. Describe what a religious life might look like. Which description best describes your life today? Why?

\*What are some practical steps that you can take towards living by grace today?

# GOING DEEPER

## Extra Discussion Questions

- \*How does putting our faith in Christ make us right with God?
- \*For those who put their faith in Christ, what are some of the things “promised to us who are right with God” in verse 5?
- \*Look at verse 6. How can faith express itself through love?

## Read a Book:

- \*Check out Tim Keller’s *The Prodigal God* to better understand the difference between the gospel and religion.

## Cross Referencing: Galatians 3:10, Romans 6:1,2

- \*Look at Galatians 3:10. Why does Paul say, “If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, you must obey all of the regulations in the whole law of Moses”?

- \*Look at Romans 6:1-2. Does living by grace mean that we are freed from responsibility to obey God’s commands? Explain. What is the relationship between grace, faith and works?

## An Illustration of Grace Alone

- \*Consider the below illustration:

Christ + \_\_\_\_\_ = Salvation

Do you ever think this way? That it is Christ plus something else that gives you right standing before God? Perhaps not directly, but are there other things that get you more excited than Christ? Often that can be telling as to whether something has been exalted up into a position of worship in our lives.

- \*Or how about this equation:

Christ + \_\_\_\_\_ = Joy

Is your joy conditioned by things other than the gospel? Are you only joyful if a certain person is around? If you are doing well in school? If you are considered well-known or well-liked among a group of people? So often we don’t think in terms of things being added to Christ to save us, but we do think we need to add things to Christ to have joy. While things other than Christ can provide joy, the reality is that joy that substitutes for Christ is idolatry. When our joy becomes conditioned upon things other than the gospel, we are missing the depth of the joy that the gospel gives us.

## Cross Referencing: Philippians 3:2-11

- \*Look at the above passage. In this passage, Paul describes all the works that could be attributed to him that could give him cause to boast in himself. He criticizes those who would include such works in the above equation of salvation, because they subtract from the work of Christ.

- \*How does this passage echo Galatians 5?
- \*How does Paul describe the nature of grace in this passage? Where does our morality fit into Paul’s equation?
- \*Why does Paul use such radical language to talk about the worthlessness of these works?
- \*How do you boast in your own resume, like the one Paul lists for himself in this passage?



**Sweeter Than Honey:  
The Word of God  
Selection from Psalm 119**

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**Problem:** (for leaders)

\*We don't believe that God's Words (His Law) are the source of joy, true life, and the freedom for which we long; rather, we think them to be boring, irrelevant, and restrictive. So, we turn to a variety of things (relationships, sports, video games, Christian books, achievement, ministry, etc.) to quench the thirst of our hearts.

**Solution:** (for leaders)

\*True joy is found only when one follows the true Words of God for true living.

**Introduction:**

\*What brings you joy? Have you ever found these things to let you down? When they did how did you respond?

**The Biblical Text:**

Psalm 119: 1-8; 9-16; & 97-104.

**Read Verses 1-8:**

- \*How would you describe the author's heartfelt experience? Why does he seem to feel this way?
- \*What does it mean to be *blessed*? (*full of joy, happy*)
- \*In what ways is God's Word described or referred? (*law of the LORD, precepts, statutes, commandments, righteous rules*)
- \*How is it that rules, commandments, laws, and statutes can evoke such heartfelt delight and happiness? Does this seem to run counter to the rules, policies, and directives in your everyday experience? Why is that?
- \*What in your life do you delight or find happiness? How does that compare to your experience of God's Word? What might account for the difference?

**Read Verses 9-16:**

- \*In this section the writer states his heartfelt purpose and intention? What are they?
- \*How does he describe the result or benefit of pursuing and focusing on God's Word?
- \*How might someone go about pursuing and focusing upon God's Word today? Be specific.

**Read Verses 97-104:**

- \*List the benefits of God's Word in a person's life?
- \*What does it mean to have *understanding*? What is it about God's Word that gives understanding?
- \*What does it mean to *love God's law*? Why does the author love God's Word?
- \*How can you grow to love God's Word?
- \*Based upon this section, what might be different about your life if you grew in your love for God's Word? Be specific!!

**Conclusion:**

- \*Read John 1:1-5 & 14. What is said of the *Word*? Who is the *Word*?
- As the Word of God, how does Jesus bring the joy, true life, and the freedom for which we long?

# GOING DEEPER

## **Extra Discussion Questions:**

\*From verses 9-11, how can someone stay pure? Even though the Psalmist seeks God with his whole heart, he still needs God's help to prevent him from wandering from the commandments. Why is this? How can we love restrictions/laws? (*love the giver of the laws*) Why is it important that the Psalmist stores up God's Words in his heart (v. 11) and not just his head?

\*What prevents you from spending time in the Word? Thomas Jefferson created his own Bible by cutting out sections of the Bible that he liked and disregarding the rest. What parts of the Word are you cutting out? What parts of the Word are not putting into practice?

## **Helpful Resources:**

\*Josh Harris' sermon about how to appropriately respond to God's Word.

<http://sgm.edgeboss.net/download/sgm/na/2008/na08-session1.mp3>

\*Al Mohler answering some tough questions about the Bible.

[http://www.newattitude.org/liveblog/al\\_mohler\\_qa\\_videos](http://www.newattitude.org/liveblog/al_mohler_qa_videos)

\*John Piper's transcript of a sermon on Psalm 119:9-16 (go to [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org) and search by scripture)

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/sermons/byscripture/1/983\\_Thy\\_Word\\_I\\_Have\\_Treasured\\_in\\_My\\_Heart/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/sermons/byscripture/1/983_Thy_Word_I_Have_Treasured_in_My_Heart/)

## **Background:**

\*Psalm 119 is a 7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. Hebrew acrostic poem (built upon each letter of the Hebrew alphabet) extolling the virtues of God's Word (The Torah/the 1<sup>st</sup> five books of the Bible and by extension all of Scripture).

## **Cross Referencing:**

\*Read 2 Tim. 3:16-17. From where do the Scriptures come (what's their origin?) What are the benefits of the Scriptures (God's Word)? How does the Bible train us for good works?

## **Memorizing Scripture:**

\* "I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture" - Chuck Swindoll

\*6 reasons for memorizing Scripture

1. Conformity to Christ
2. Daily Triumph over Sin
3. Daily Triumph over Satan
4. Comfort and Counsel for People You Love
5. Communicating the Gospel to Unbelievers
6. Communion with God in the Enjoyment of His Person and Ways



## All or Nothing: Understanding Lordship Romans 12:1-2

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### **Problem: (for leaders)**

*\*We don't believe that our sin is that bad; therefore, we don't believe that God's mercy is all that great. Because our sin is not that bad and God's mercy all that great, we don't feel it is necessary to give him our whole lives.*

### **Big Idea: (for leaders)**

*\*Because of the great mercy that God has shown us by sending Jesus to suffer and die in our place, He deserves our whole life--not just part of it.*

### **Introduction: (if you have the movie clip, feel free to show it)**

\*In the movie "The Count of Monte Cristo," pirates take the main character, Edmund Dantes, captive. He is forced to fight to the death against another man, Yacupo, who has been pronounced guilty of stealing from the pirates. Dantes defeats Yacupo, but just as he is about to kill him, he stops and demands his freedom. Yacupo's freedom is granted. Yacupo passionately whispers in Dantes' ear, "I am your man, forever."

What would it take for you to tell someone, I am your man (or women), forever?

### **The Biblical Text:**

Romans 12:1-2

### **Verse 1:**

\*What does God expect from us who have received his mercy? What does this look like?

\*How can we know how great God's mercy is? *(The greatness of his mercy is directly correlated to how we view our sin; if we believe that our sin is awful, then his mercy is great, but if we believe that our sin isn't really that bad, then his mercy is nothing special.)*

\*How does the gospel demonstrate God's mercy?

\*What are the things in your life that you hold onto instead of offering everything to God? What might help you give up those things and offering yourself to God a living sacrifice?

### **Verse 2:**

\*What do you think Paul means by "don't conform any longer to the pattern of this world"?

\*What is one aspect of the "pattern of this world" that is currently tempting you to conform to it? Have you conformed to it? Why or why not?

\*What is Paul's answer to those who have conformed to the pattern of the world?

\*How does what we believe (our mind) correlate with how we live and what we live for? *(Our beliefs, or convictions, drive our behavior)*

### **Conclusion:**

\*How would you respond to the claim: "I'm a Christian, but I'm not super-spiritual like the missionary types..."

\*What is the first step you personally need to take towards offering your body as a living sacrifice to God?

# GOING DEEPER

## **Summary:**

\*How Christians live their lives is a response to God's mercy. We often don't give our whole lives to God because we just don't believe that our sin is that bad. God hates sin. Our sin grieves the Holy Spirit. God didn't send his one and only Son to suffer and die for people who were just sort of bad. Because we don't believe our sin is that bad we don't believe God's mercy is that great, and therefore, we don't feel like we need to give him our whole life as a sacrifice of worship and thanks. When we come to grips with how bad our sin really is, then we will realize what an incredibly merciful God and savior we have and we will be compelled to give him our whole lives.

## **The Magnitude of Sin and Mercy:**

\*What is sin? What is the consequence of sin?

- Romans 3:9-18
- Romans 1:29-32
- Romans 6:23a

*If you have seen "The Passion of the Christ" then you will have seen a pictorial representation of the consequence of sin. It was gruesome, horrible, and nearly impossible to watch.*

\*How aware are you of your sin? Take a piece of paper and write down all the sins you have committed in the last couple of days.

\*Think about how great God's mercy is in light of what the Bible says about sin.

Read 1 John 1:9. Discuss your reaction to these truths.

\*With a proper view of your sin, and in view of God's great mercy, what percentage of yourself do you want to give to him today?

## **YouTube It!**

\*For an intense look at lordship, YouTube the video called "The Paul Washer Project"... a brief selection of clips from one of Paul's sermon's on lordship.





## Identity Redefined: God's Grace in our New Identity in Christ Galatians 3:23-4:9

*Accessing the gospel that  
is the power of God  
for those who believe.*

### **Problem: (for leaders)**

*Because we believe our value is in what we do, and we do not believe that God's grace, which he lavished on us through his Son, is sufficient to make us acceptable to God; we try to earn His acceptance/favor by doing things to try to please Him.*

### **Solution: (for leaders)**

*Christ's death on the cross freed us from the Law and placed us under grace; his death is sufficient to not only make us right with God (redeem us), but also to change our whole identity---to make us his sons, where his favor is continually on us.*

### **Background:**

The Apostle Paul writes to a community of believers who have heard the truth of the Gospel and accepted Christ through faith. Yet many now are still living as though they are under obligation of the Law. So, Paul is addressing his readers, calling them out and reminding them of their new identity in Christ.

### **Introduction:**

When you picture God looking down at you, what expression is usually on his face (what is his disposition towards you)? Why do you picture his expression toward you that way? What do you find yourself doing to try to earn God's acceptance or to make him smile?

### **The Biblical Text:**

**Galatians 3:23 – 4:9**

### **Pointing to Christ (Read Galatians 3:23-29):**

\*What was our condition before faith came into the picture? (v.23)

\*What is true of those who have put their faith in Christ? (v.26-29)

\*Are you confident that you are a son of God? Why/why not? If you are confident this is your identity, what keeps you from believing you are a son/living as though you are his son?

### **Redemption & Adoption (Read Galatians 4:1-9):**

*\*Verses 1-3 describe our condition before Christ came into the world, and Paul uses the analogy of us being children to show that we were not then able to enjoy the rights of being an heir. So why, then, did God the Father send Christ into the world? (v.4-5)*

\*What is the definition of "redeem"? What were you redeemed from? What are the implications of being redeemed in this way?

\*Paul says that since believers are sons, they are also heirs. (v.7) What are you an heir of? How does this make you feel?

### **Returning to the Old Ways (Read Galatians 4:8-9):**

\*What is it that Paul reprimands his readers for doing? Why is this wrong?

\*(Revisiting the Introduction) When you picture God looking down at you, what expression is usually on his face (what is his disposition towards you)? What do you find yourself doing to try to earn God's acceptance or to make him smile? How might God feel about you doing this?

### **Conclusion**

\*What is the greatest area in which you fail to believe your identity in Christ? How do you see this in your life?

# GOING DEEPER

## **Extra Discussion Questions:**

\*How would understanding your true identity in Christ affect the way you view God? Affect the way you live?

\*What would your life look like if you did not fully believe you were:

1. Redeemed by Christ's blood – (you would live in guilt because of your sins...you would still feel the weight of them and feel enslaved to them, not understanding the power you have to no longer sin.)
2. Adopted as His son – (you might live as one forgiven, but you will not experience intimacy with God, as you do not understand how close of a relationship He has now placed you in. You will not accept his grace because you will not be able to see how His favor is now toward you.)
3. An heir with Christ – (you will not live for eternity, but have only a 'here & now' mindset, which will keep you from the full scope of seeing & understanding His grace.)

\*\*\*Note to leaders: unbelief in these areas can have HUGE impact in every area of a Christian's life. Try to draw depth and examples from their lives out of those in your study as you discuss this. Be willing to give a few examples of how they might affect someone & even share how unbelief in one area or all affect your life to get them thinking and to start sharing.

## **How do others teach this passage?**

\*Find out what John Piper has to say on this text in his sermons called: "*Don't Go Back from Sonship to Slavery*" and "*The Law Does Not Annul the Promise*" linked below: (you can also go to [desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org) and search by scripture)

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1983/392\\_Dont\\_Go\\_Back\\_from\\_Sonship\\_to\\_Slavery/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1983/392_Dont_Go_Back_from_Sonship_to_Slavery/)

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1983/388\\_The\\_Law\\_Does\\_Not\\_Annul\\_the\\_Promise/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1983/388_The_Law_Does_Not_Annul_the_Promise/)



## Under a New Authority: Sin's Broken Power Romans 6:1-14

*Accessing the gospel that  
is the power of God  
for those who believe.*

### **Problem: (for leaders)**

*\*We don't believe that we will ever see change in our lives because we do not really understand or believe that our "union" with Christ has broken sin's power/control over us. Bottom line: We still live as if we are under the power of sin.*

### **Solution: (for leaders)**

*\*Since we have been united with Christ, sin no longer holds power/control over us!*

### **Introduction:**

\*Have you ever felt controlled by something or in bondage to a certain behavior? (Discuss examples.) How did you feel? (ex. "...there was no hope for change")

\*What sorts of things did you do to try and change your behavior? Did they work?

### **The Biblical Text:**

Romans 6:1-14

### **Dead to Sin/Able to Live for God (read verses 1-10):**

\*In verses 1-10, what is sin, and what is Paul's argument for why we should not go on sinning?

\*What do you think Paul means when he says Christians have been *united* with Christ?

\*Looking at verses 3-10, since we have been united with Christ in his death, what things are now true about us in relation to sin?"

*(Sin lost it's power in our lives, v. 6; We are no longer slaves to sin, v. 6; We were set free from the power of sin, v. 7; Sin was defeated v. 10)*

\*This section also says that we are united to Christ in his resurrection. What is now true about those who are united to Christ in his resurrection? (v. 4, 8, 10, 11)

*(We also may live new lives. (v. 4) We share in his new life. (v. 8)*

### **Consider Yourselves Dead to Sin (read verses 11-14):**

\*In verse 11, Paul says we should *consider* ourselves 1. dead to sin and 2. alive to God (able to live for God)

What does it mean to *consider* something? (Explain that other translations use stronger words like "count", "render", and "reckon" "believe that you are")

\*What connection does Paul make in verses 11-12? (Read verses 11 and 12 in the NIV version. The connection is easier to see.) Why is it important to consider oneself dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God? (v. 11-12)

### **Conclusion:**

\*What seems to be the bottom line of this passage?

\*Practically, how do you "consider yourself dead to sin and/or able to live for God?"

\*From the intro we asked, "Have you ever felt controlled by something or in bondage to a certain behavior?" How does *Paul's approach* (in order to see growth and change) compare with your original approach? Are there specific sins that you are letting control you?

# GOING DEEPER

## Possible answer for question 1 of Conclusion.

*Christians have been united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore sin no longer has the power to control us! But our ability to see actual change and growth in our lives is **absolutely contingent** on whether or not we **consider** ourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God. If we **consider** ourselves dead to sin and able to live godly lives we will see growth and change, but if we fail to believe this, we will continue to live like we are in bondage to sin and won't see any change.*

## 2 POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

1. What will be the result if I consider myself dead to sin and able to live for God's glory? (*I will see change and growth in my life!!*)
2. What will be the consequence if I fail to consider myself dead to sin and able to live for God's glory? (*I will continue to live like I am in bondage to sin! I won't see any change!*)

## Illustration to explain "united with Christ":

\*Draw a picture of a person hanging on a cross. Next to the person, write various sins on the diagram. (For example, "full of pride" "always selfish", "never loving", "sexually immoral", etc.) Tell them that this represents the life of someone before they are united Christ. Explain that this person is completely controlled/enslaved by sin.

\*"United with Christ in his death" Then cross out these sins. Explain that this represents what is true about a person the moment they accept Christ. They have been united with Christ in his death. So they have died with him. Explain that these sins no longer have the ability to control them. Sin's power has been broken!

\*"United with Christ in his resurrection" Then write new things in place of the old ones. (For example, write "always humble", "completely others-centered", "loves perfectly", "always pure".) Explain how this represents their union with Christ in his resurrection. They have been raised with him. Explain that they are now **able** to live lives that please God! (If you want, you can have them draw their own diagrams as well.)

## Quotable:

"There is all the difference in the world between being in a given position and realizing you are in that position... Take the case of those poor slaves in the United States of America about a hundred years ago. There they were in a condition of slavery. Then the Civil War came, and as the result of that war, slavery was abolished in the United States. But what had actually happened? All slaves, young and old, were given their freedom, but many of the older ones who had endured long years of servitude found it very difficult to understand their new status. They heard the announcement that slavery was abolished and that they were free: but hundreds, not to say thousands, of times in their after-lives and experiences many of them did not realize it, and when they saw their old master coming near them they began to quake and tremble, and to wonder whether they were going to be sold... You can still be a slave experientially, even when you are no longer a slave legally... **Whatever you may feel, whatever your experience may be, God tells us here, through his Word, that if we are in Christ we are no longer in Adam, we are no longer under the reign and rule of sin... And if I fall into sin, as I do, it is simply because I do not realize who I am... Realize it! Reckon it!"**

-D.M. Lloyd-Jones



## **The Reality of Hell: What happens to people who don't know Christ? Luke 16:19-31**

*Accessing the gospel that  
is the power of God  
for those who believe.*

### **Problem: (for leaders)**

\* *We don't believe there is a real and awful place called Hell where a just God will punish those who reject Christ. Because of our unbelief, we don't consider the gospel message to be truly life-saving. Therefore, we lack urgency to share it with others.*

### **Solution: (for leaders)**

\* *We must view evangelism as truly life-saving, because people who don't know Christ are in urgent need of avoiding a real and awful place called Hell.*

### **Introduction:**

\* Think about taking one test to determine your college, major and ultimately your occupation? What kind of attention would you give this test? Has there ever been a situation similar in your life? Or think of this question: what we do in this life affects the afterlife?

### **The Biblical Text:**

Luke 16:19-31

### **The Human Condition/The Need (read 16:19-22):**

\*Knowing the context of the story, what is Jesus communicating to his audience, the Pharisees, in verses 19-22? Look at the two men, how they are different or similar? (*Outward appearance and social status mean nothing in the eyes of God...salvation is a matter of the heart*)

\*How does Jesus challenge our own opinions of success and security? What in our culture is deemed successful or gives security? What might Jesus say about those things?

### **God's Initiative/The Provision (read 16:23-26):**

\*Where is Hell in relationship to Heaven? What is the rich man's experience there?

\*What do the words and descriptions of this story tell us about the reality of eternal physical suffering in Hell?

\*How is God's grace and mercy visible in this passage?

### **Human Response & God's Intended Outcome (read 16:27-31):**

\*Is the rich man conscious of the poor choices he made during his lifetime?

\*What drives his concern for his five brothers? What might this say about the relationship between our knowledge of Hell and our concern for people?

\*What is Jesus cleverly implying in Abraham's final response in verse 31? (*He is referring to his own death and resurrection*)

### **Conclusion:**

\*Take a moment to think of 3 people who you know that would experience Hell if they died today. How does this make you feel? What are some barriers for you in telling people about the gospel of Jesus that saves? How might the truths of this passage effect those barriers?

\*How can you trust God this week to bring a life-saving message through you to those in your life who desperately need to hear it?

# GOING DEEPER

## **Extra Discussion Questions:**

\*Agree or Disagree:

- 1) God is righteous in there being a hell.
- 2) The work of Christ is the *necessary* means provided by God for eternal salvation.

\*Why is Abraham mentioned as present in Heaven and speaking from Heaven?

*(The Bible is clear that Abraham found favor with God and was saved on the basis of his faith...See also Romans 4 & Hebrews Chapter 11)*

\*What kind of imagery comes to mind when thinking about v. 26 and the great chasm that is described?

## **Cross-Referencing: Heaven & Hell (Revelation 19:1-3, Revelation 19:6-10)**

\*What are the similarities and differences seen in the two passages?

Read Revelation 19:1-3.

\*What do we see concerning the judgments of God? Is this a display of “reactive anger” or justice?

*If God is good then judgment is necessary. How could man live in a world where all the rape, all the murder, all the sin committed here on earth, all the sin committed against its Creator, go unpunished? This is a beautiful passage that contains words like salvation, glory, true and just. Meditate on God’s mercy in judgment and passing over sins.*

Read Revelation 19:6-10

\*Why are the great multitude driven towards worship? What is the most valuable entity in this equation?

*As with all of human history, God is the focus. Having fellowship with God, having relationship with him redeemed and reconciled is on center stage. Imagine a time of complete peace, complete joy and complete fulfillment. Here we see a feast like no other, one in which Christ is at the head of the table and we are his guest!*

## **How do others teach this passage?**

\*Check out what J.I. Packer has to say about Hell and the recent incorrect teaching of annihilationism:

[http://www.the-highway.com/annihilationism\\_Packer.html](http://www.the-highway.com/annihilationism_Packer.html)

\*A couple of videos about Hell. The first by Pastor Tom Nelson on “What is Hell?” The second is What is the importance of believing in Hell? Is it essential to the Christian?: (you can also go to [www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org) and search the videos under the subject heading of hell)

<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/resources/video/What-is-Hell>

<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/resources/video/What-is-the-importance-of-believing-in-hell-Is-it-essential-to-the-Christian>





## God and Sex: What He Says About Sexuality and Our Sex Lives 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

*Accessing the gospel that  
is the power of God  
for those who believe.*

### **Problem: (for leaders)**

*\*Most people don't understand that because God is holy, He expects that His people be holy in every area of their lives. No where is this more apparent and important than our sexuality. Unfortunately, the culture around us, rather than God's Word, too often informs and influences our thinking and attitudes about sex. As a result, we are complacent about sexual sin. We think it's "not a big deal," or that "it doesn't really matter." So, we choose sexual immorality much more than we chose sexual purity.*

### **Solution: (for leaders)**

*\*As we better understand His holiness, the destructive severity of sexual sin, and the joy and benefits of sexual holiness; we will increasingly honor God sexually and grow closer to Him.*

### **Introduction:**

- \*Think about your favorite (or a popular) TV show. How is sex portrayed? Talked about? Why? **OR**
- \*How often and in what ways is sex talked about or alluded to in conversations with your classmates or on your dorm floor? Why do you think that is?
- \*How would you summarize our culture's attitude toward sex and sexuality?
- \*What sort of connotations do words like "abstinence" and "virginity" have among students? In your mind?

### **The Biblical Text:**

1 Thessalonians 4: 1-8

### **A Call To Holy Living (read verses 1-6a)**

- \*What specifically is Paul's instruction and on what authority does he give it? What is God's will for them? What is sanctification? (vs.1-3)
- \*Paul instructs believers to abstain from sexual immorality. What is sexual immorality? *The Bible defines sexual immorality as "Any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage."* Then in verse 4 and 5, he explains further using words like "holy", "honorable", and "passionate lust". What do you think these terms mean?
- \*Why does God care so much that His followers would live one way (abstaining from sexual immorality) and not another (in passionate lust like the Gentiles). *Again and again the Bible makes a connection between God's moral purity (His holiness) and how we live. He wants people to live in light of who He is and His plan for life and sex.*
- \*Specifically, what sort of things/behaviors are prohibited by the commands in this passage?
- \*Do you think it realistic or unrealistic to live this way? Why?

### **The Consequences of Impurity & Purity (verses 6b-8)**

- \*In what ways does Paul try to underscore the severity and seriousness of his commands in vs. 6-8? *Jesus talks in a similar way in other places in the Bible, like Matt 5: 27-30.*
- \*What does this say about how God views our sin in this area? *It's serious! When we engage in sexual sin, we are associating ourselves with something God punishes! We're rejecting God and letting sexual sin severely inhibit our relationship with him!!*
- \*In what ways do your attitudes about sex reflect the culture's? What Paul is saying here?
- \*How does one realistically and practically begin to live out what's being said here?



# GOING DEEPER

## **Further Questions & Ideas:**

\*QUESTIONS: In what ways do you find it difficult to abide by these commands? What makes it difficult?

\*In what ways have you experienced God's grace, forgiveness, or help in the sexual area of your life? Specifically, what has helped you live a life of sexual purity and holiness?

\*What difference does it make in pursuing purity to know that there is forgiveness? Is God's forgiveness an excuse to "mess up" or does it make it easier to pursue purity? Why? How?

\*IDEA: Have them take out pen and paper and confidentially and quietly list out their sexual sins or areas they are experiencing shame and guilt. Once they are done, read a passage like Colossians 2:13-15 or 1 John 1:9-2:2. Tell them that if they have confessed their sins to Him, sincerely turn from them and trust Christ, then they are forgiven. Their sins are taken away. Shame and guilt are gone. Have them tear up their papers and place in the trash can. Read Romans 8:1.

\*You might be vulnerable and share where you have failed sexually and then talk about how God's grace and forgiveness in Christ is healing and changing you. Be specific.

## **How do others teach this passage?**

\*John Piper's sermon on the text:

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/42/108\\_This\\_is\\_the\\_Will\\_of\\_God\\_for\\_You\\_That\\_You\\_Abstain\\_from\\_Sexual\\_Immorality/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/42/108_This_is_the_Will_of_God_for_You_That_You_Abstain_from_Sexual_Immorality/)

## **Other Resources:**

\*Also, you might check out this online book: [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/OnlineBooks/ByTitle/2398\\_Sex\\_and\\_the\\_Supremacy\\_of\\_Christ/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/OnlineBooks/ByTitle/2398_Sex_and_the_Supremacy_of_Christ/)

Here's some teaching about Sex and Single Person:

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1981/280\\_Sex\\_and\\_the\\_Single\\_Person/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1981/280_Sex_and_the_Single_Person/)

Some terrific teaching about Sexual Failure and God's Grace (Highly Recommended!):

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/ConferenceMessages/ByDate/1927\\_How\\_to\\_Deal\\_with\\_the\\_Guilt\\_of\\_Sexual\\_Failure\\_for\\_the\\_Glory\\_of\\_Christ\\_and\\_His\\_Global\\_Cause/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/ConferenceMessages/ByDate/1927_How_to_Deal_with_the_Guilt_of_Sexual_Failure_for_the_Glory_of_Christ_and_His_Global_Cause/)

## **Read a Book:**

Check out the book *Sex Isn't the Problem, Lust Is* by Joshua Harris for an excellent look at a biblical understanding of sex and lust.

# GOING DEEPER: APPENDIX

## **Human Sexuality and the Bible (from ESV Study Bible pp. 2544-2545)**

The Bible views sexual intimacy in marriage as a blessing from God. God said to Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28), which implies that God created them so that they would have sexual intercourse together and thereby bear children (cf. Gen. 1:31). Sex is seen within the context of [heterosexual] marriage (“his wife,” Gen. 2:24) from the very beginning of creation. After the fall, sexual intimacy in marriage is still viewed positively (see Prov. 5:15–19; Song of Solomon; 1 Cor. 7:2–5).

Why is adultery wrong? (1) Because God says it is wrong: “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14). (2) Adultery pictures unfaithfulness in the relationship between Christ and the church, giving a picture of Christ being unfaithful to his people and abandoning them, and not keeping his covenant with them, or else picturing the church as worshiping other gods and being unfaithful to Christ (cf. Mal. 2:14; Eph. 5:31–32). (3) Adultery intrudes another person into the “one flesh” relationship of marriage (cf. Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31). (4) Adultery destroys trust within a marriage because it is the most serious kind of violation of a marriage vow. (5) Adultery often leads to children being born without two parents to raise them or else leads to abortion to end an unwanted pregnancy, both of which consequences contradict God's ideal. (6) Adultery is thus frequently and understandably pictured in Scripture as destroying a person's life: “He does not know that it will cost him his life” (Prov. 7:23; cf. 5:3–14; 6:27–29, 32–33; 7:21–23).

Sexual intercourse between unmarried persons is also consistently viewed as morally wrong throughout Scripture, from the laws of Moses (Ex. 22:16–17; Deut. 22:13–21) to the teachings of Jesus, who implicitly rebuked the woman at the well for living with someone to whom she was not married (John 4:16–18; cf. also Gen. 38:24; Matt. 15:19 [*porneia* or “sexual immorality” is distinguished from adultery, and the 1st-century understanding of the word would certainly include any sexual intercourse outside of marriage]; John 8:41; Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2, 9; 1 Thess. 4:3; note the imagery in 2 Cor. 11:2).

God requires not only right conduct but also purity of heart: “You shall not covet . . . your neighbor's wife” (Ex. 20:17; cf. Prov. 6:25; Matt. 5:27). The opposite of desiring to commit adultery is having a deep love for one's wife or husband and a strong desire for a positive sexual relationship within one's own marriage, as well as a sense of revulsion at the thought of embracing anyone else in the same way. This purity of heart, like other inward virtues, needs prayerful cultivation if it is to be sustained.

Looking at pornography is a direct violation of Jesus' command against gazing at a woman “with lustful intent” (Matt. 5:28; cf. Job 31:1–2). Pornography attracts a man's affections and desires away from his marriage and away from his wife. It inevitably brings moral uncleanness in the heart, long-lasting harmful memories, and destructive consequences to one's marriage relationship (the same is true for the future marriage of those who are single). It ultimately leads in many cases to other sins, such as prostitution, rape, and other kinds of violence against women, because it dehumanizes them and fails to recognize and respect them as persons made in God's image and valuable in his sight.



**Prayer:**  
**The Widow and the Judge**  
**Luke 18:1-8**

*Accessing the gospel that  
 is the power of God  
 for those who believe.*

**Problem: (for leaders):**

*\*Sometimes we think there is a no great need for God in our daily lives. We quit acknowledging him, start depending on our own self-will, and try to cultivate anything less than supernatural strength to get us through this roller coaster of life. We think we are better off than what we really are and our relationship with him is severed.*

**Solution: (for leaders)**

*\*Because God is good and he desires to meet with His people, we need to be in constant communication with Him. Without this communication, we miss out on knowing the true heart of God and experiencing the joy of his presence. God is the ultimate provider who desires to give us what we simply ask of him. By communicating by faith, we have the direct link to the ruler of all things, and the opportunity to see his glory revealed through his gracious provisions for us! God is merciful and just, caring and kind, and He wants for us to come to Him continually with our lives so that He can reveal more of Himself to us and so we will look more like Him.*

**Introduction:**

\*What do you think of when you hear the word “prayer”? Why do we pray? Why don’t we pray? When do you pray and what do you find yourself praying for?

**The Biblical Text:**

Luke 18:1-8

**Comparison or Contrast?**

\*Go through verses 1-5 and compare God to the judge and us to the widow. Answer the questions, and then do the same contrasting these characters.

*Compare:* we are like the widow and God is like the judge

\*If this were true, what does it tell us about our standing and worth?

\*If this were true, what does it tell us about God?

\*If this were true, why does God answer our prayers?

*Contrast:* we are not like the widow and God is not like the judge

\*Since this is true, what does it tell us about our standing and worth?

\*Since this is true, what does it tell us about God?

\*Since this is true, why does God answer our prayers?

**The Message of the Parable**

\*How does Jesus set this parable up so that we know it is a contrast, not a comparison?

*In this passage, Jesus describes God and His desire for us to come to Him. He does this in a unique way, by showing us what He is not (an uncaring judge). He also shows that we are not like the widow (bothersome and unwanted).*

**Conclusion**

\*What about God’s character is revealed here?

\*What is God’s desire for us in prayer? Why?

\*Knowing that God wants you to come to Him all the time and wants to bless you, how does that make you feel?

\*What specifically keeps you from praying?

\*What truth or truths in this parable might motivate you to pray? Why?

# GOING DEEPER

## **Praying With One Another**

- \*What are some things about God that you should give Him praise for?
- \*What are some things in your life that you should thank God for?
- \*What are some needs in your life that God would like for you to come to Him with?

## **A Modern Parable:**

\*Go to the website [www.modernparables.com](http://www.modernparables.com) and check out the film “The Widow and the Judge”, there’s a cost to download the ipod version, but the film is excellent and worth the cost. There’s also a teaching on the film as well.

## **Extra Discussion Question**

\*How does having a persistent prayer life bring us closer to the Lord?

## **Cross Referencing: Matthew 6:5-14**

\*In this passage, Jesus explains how we should pray. Why does he say in verse 7, “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words,”?

\*How does it make you feel to know that “your father knows what you need before you ask him,”?

## **Cross Referencing: Matthew 19:26, Mark 10:27, Luke 1:37, Luke 18:27**

\*Taken the common message in these four verses, why is it important to know that nothing is impossible with God? What does this show us about who God is?

\*Thinking about your own life, what are some areas in which you doubt the possibility of God intervening in the way you would like it to look?

\*Are there certain prayer requests that you hesitate to bring before the Lord because of not believing that they could be answered? What are they?

## **How Others Teach on Prayer:**

\*Check out this John Piper sermon on prayer (you can also go to [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org) and search under the topic “prayer”):

*[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2004/195\\_Be\\_Constant\\_in\\_Prayer\\_for\\_the\\_Joy\\_of\\_Hope/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2004/195_Be_Constant_in_Prayer_for_the_Joy_of_Hope/)*



**Community:**  
**United With One Another**  
**Ephesians 4:1-16**

*Accessing the gospel that  
 is the power of God  
 for those who believe.*

**Problem: (for leaders)**

*We tend to move away from other people or convince ourselves we're doing fine with God on our own. We tend to think we can mature as believers independent of others. We're not convinced we truly need others, or we think they aren't worth it. The result in our culture is hyper individualism and disunity in among Christians.*

**Solution: (for leaders)**

*It is absolutely essential that your relationship with God be in the context of the community of believers, the body of Christ. If you are to live a life worthy of the gospel and attaining fullness of Christ, it's to be in community--united with others.*

**Introduction:**

Have you ever done or attempted to do a difficult project (or chore) by yourself when you really should have asked others for help? Take a moment to describe the emotions or feelings you had.

OR

Agree/Disagree: Your walk with God is dependent upon others.

**The Biblical Text:**

Ephesians 4:1-16

**Standard for Christian community (verses 1-6):**

\*In verse 1, Paul issues the exhortation for them to live "worthy of the calling." In verses 2-5, how is this to be lived out?

\*Why are the traits in verse 2 essential in being lived out in community?

\*Following the charge for them to live worthy of the gospel call, the *very first* thing Paul mentions is our relation to others. Does this absolute necessity of united relationship surprise you? Why or why not?

\*Put into your own words how these verses require us to be united with one another?

\*What are the things that keep you isolated from others? What in your life keeps you from experiencing unity with others?

**Benefits of Christian community (verses 7-16):**

\*Verse 8 quotes Psalm 68:18. According to verses 7-13, these "gifts" are given by whom? To whom? For whom?

\*What are the benefits of having a diverse community of believers with different gifts?

\*In verses 13 and 15, Paul emphasizes the "fullness of Christ" and that we are to "grow into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." What is Paul getting at? Why is this emphasis significant?

\*How do these verses challenge you or motivate you to move toward the fullness of Christ?

\*Since people are honestly imperfect, messy, and difficult, how do we practically overcome these barriers to pursue growth together in Christ?

**Concluding Questions:**

\*Can we experience the benefits of community (verses 7-16) if we're not united with one another in community (verses 1-6)? Why or why not? Why do we need to be united with one another to attain His fullness?

\*What steps can our Bible study make to be united with one another in the midst of our diversity? How could this affect our area of campus as a whole?

# GOING DEEPER

## **Possible Answers for Discussion Questions**

- \*Why are the traits in verse 2 essential in being lived out in community? *(Note: These words indicate that living this way in community isn't easy; there will be challenges. Again, why then are these essential? We tend to be harsh, be impatient, avoid conflict, flee tough situations, be proud, be isolated.)*
- \*Following the charge for them to live worthy of the gospel call, the *very first* thing Paul mentions is our relation to others. Does this absolute necessity of united relationship surprise you? Why or why not? *(Note: Being in close relation with other believers is not optional. Being united with others is the means to a life worthy of Christ.)*
- \*Put into your own words how these verses require us to be united with one another? *(Ideas: putting others before yourself, choosing to unconditionally love, understanding that we're all at different points in life and our walks with God, dealing with conflict, emphasizing our common ground instead of differences.)*
- \*Verse 8 quotes Psalm 68:18. According to verses 7-13, these "gifts" are given by whom? To whom? For whom? *(Christ, v.7,8. God's people, each one of us, v.7,12. The body of Christ, the community of believers, v.12,13.)*
- \*In verses 13 and 15, Paul emphasizes the "fullness of Christ" and that we are to "grow into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." What is Paul getting at? Why is this emphasis significant? *(Jesus Christ is to be put on the pedestal, be the focal point, be supreme as we're united with one another. Jesus is the only reason we can be united and attain His fullness. We are to take on the character, faith and love of Christ.)*

## **Extra Discussion Question:**

- \*Is there a difference between these three phrases: United with one another, agreeing with one another, and tolerating one another? *(Having unity isn't just agreeing with, getting along with, or putting up with others.)*

## **How Others Teach the Text:**

Check out this sermon from Isaac Hydoski from Covenant Life Church in Maryland. Isaac teaches how the body works together in community to build up the maturity of believers: *(you can go to [www.covlife.org](http://www.covlife.org) and check out the resource library and search by scripture)*

[www.covlife.org/resources/364055-Growing\\_Up\\_Into\\_Christ](http://www.covlife.org/resources/364055-Growing_Up_Into_Christ)

## **Surfing the Blogosphere:**

Check out the following series of blog posts from Jonathan Dodson on [theresurgence.com](http://theresurgence.com) on the nature of gospel-centered community:

Go to [theresurgence.com](http://theresurgence.com) and search "community" in the box in the upper right. These three blog posts are particularly helpful:

- The Church: A Gospel-Centered Community, Part 1
- The Church: A Gospel-Centered Community, Part 2
- Too Mature for Community?