

LIFE

with God

“IS GOD DISTANT? IS GOD INVOLVED IN THE WORLD TODAY? DOES GOD CARE ABOUT ME? HOW WOULD MY LIFE CHANGE IF I FOLLOWED GOD?”

All of these are common questions about the practicality and reality of God in our lives today, ultimately asking the question, “What does a life with God look like?”

Chances are you have or had this same question about God’s presence in your life. We encourage you not to run from these questions, but instead to run to them and find out more.

Understand what scripture says about God’s character. Reevaluate how you see God in your own life. Experience God in a new way.

We hope to provide you with the resources to ultimately see what life with God really looks like. In the Life with God study, we will unravel how God interacts with the world today and what that means for you over the next 9 weeks.

WONDERING WHAT A LIFE WITH GOD MIGHT LOOK LIKE?

This resource is for you.

CONSIDERING TRUSTING IN GOD, BUT WONDERING HOW THAT CHANGES YOUR LIFE?

This study will speak to you.

FOLLOWING GOD FOR YEARS BUT NEED TO BE REAWAKENED TO THE EXCITEMENT OF A LIFE WITH GOD?

This guide will help you look at life with God with fresh eyes.

Our prayer is that this 9-week guide will not only reveal God’s presence and activity in today’s world, but will also ignite your passion about living life with Christ. We are excited to embark on this new journey with you.

Andrew & Jared

u hast made the land to
semble; thou hast rent it:
I the breaches thereof;
r it shaketh.
u hast showed thy people
rd things:
u hast made us to drink the
ine of staggering.
u hast given a banner to
em that fear thee,
t it may be displayed be-
use of the truth. [Sē'lāh
t thy beloved may be de-
ered,
e with thy right hand, and
swer 'us.
hath spoken in his holi-
ss: I will exult;
ill divide Shē'chem, and
ete out the valley of Sūc-
th.

Lead me to the rock that is
higher than I.
3 For thou hast been a refuge
for me,
A strong tower from the enemy.
4 I will dwell in thy 'tabernacle
for ever:
I will take refuge in the covert
of thy wings. [Sē'lāh
5 For thou, O God, hast heard
my vows:
Thou hast ¹⁰given me the heri-
tage of those that fear thy
name.
6 Thou wilt prolong the king's life;
His years shall be as many
generations.
7 He shall abide before God for
ever:
Oh prepare lovingkindness and
truth, that they may preserve

WEEK 1: LIFE WITH GOD

Many people have different ideas about what Christianity means and looks like. Some people think it is mostly about a Sunday morning service where they can try to be closer to God. Others believe it is a way to please their spouses or carry on family tradition. Are they wrong? Not exactly.

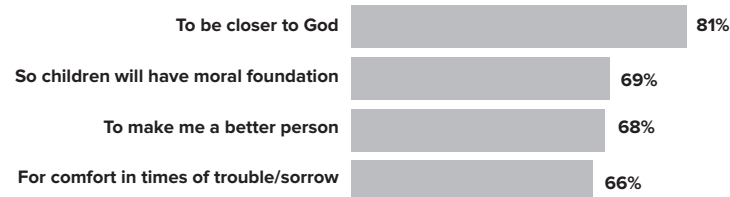
According to a Pew Research Center study published in 2018, some of the top reasons why Americans go to church are:

- ◆ to be closer to God
- ◆ to provide children with a moral foundation
- ◆ to be a better person
- ◆ to have comfort
- ◆ to continue the family's religious tradition
- ◆ to please family or a spouse/partner

For these Americans, Christianity is about going to church on a Sunday in order to fulfill a duty to themselves or a loved one rather than have a particular religion to live by. In fact, the study goes on to say that more Americans are growing less religious—fewer people associate themselves with a particular religion and fewer people attend religious

TOP REASONS U.S. ADULTS GIVE FOR CHOOSING TO ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Among U.S. adults who attend religious services at least once or twice a month, % who say _____ is a "very important" reason they ATTEND religious services



Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults. "Why Americans Go (and Don't Go) to Religious Services"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

gatherings.

But are these ideas of Christianity truly Christianity? Just because the world views it this way, does it mean we should? Having this snapshot of the American religious today allows us to see why we may view Christianity the way we do. However, for this study, we ask that you put aside these thoughts and look at Christianity from a new perspective. Why do we go to church and listen to a man talk when we can experience God elsewhere? What truly is Christianity all about?

The top reasons Americans do not attend any sort of religious gatherings are:

- ◆ they can practice faith in other ways
- ◆ they do not believe in a certain religion
- ◆ they cannot connect with the sermons

TOP REASONS U.S. ADULTS GIVE FOR CHOOSING NOT TO ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Among U.S. adults who attend religious services at least once or twice a month, % who say _____ is a "very important" reason they DO NOT attend more often



Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults. "Why Americans Go (and Don't Go) to Religious Services"

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- ◆ they have not found a place where they like to worship

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE CHRISTIANITY?

WEEK 1: LIFE WITH GOD

WHAT ARE SOME REASONS THAT YOU ATTEND CHURCH OR ANY SORT OF RELIGIOUS GATHERING?

BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is less about a Sunday morning service than we usually think. (Although, we do highly value our Sunday mornings!) It is less about trying to become the best version of ourselves that we can muster up through church clothes, Jesus memes, and clean movies. It is also less about an ethic to live out or a set of “Thou shall’s...” and “Thou shall not’s...” All of that is not the core of Christianity.

To help explain, the Bible tell us directly what is the most important element. In the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians, God tells us what is **“of first importance.”**

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-7

When something is **“of first importance,”** it means that it is the central element, the number one thing, the object that cannot be overlooked. Like receiving oxygen is of first importance to the human life, so the gospel is of first importance to Christianity. If you remove oxygen, you have no more life. Similarly, if you remove the gospel, you have no more Christianity.

As, we are told in this passage, the gospel is: Jesus Christ died for our sins, rose again to defeat death, and is alive today. This is the core of Christianity. The Christian faith is exactly that: faith. It is about confidence that we have screwed up and done wrong things. We have not lived according to what God has called us to do. Because of that, there is punishment for our sins or wrong-doings. Yet, the gospel is the message that if we put our faith—our confidence, our trust—in Jesus dying for our sins on the cross, rising to defeat death, and living and reigning today in heaven, then we can be saved.

We must never confuse our obedience to a set of moral duties as of first importance to Christianity. The gospel is about a person saving people. It is not about people chasing perfection. It is about Jesus Christ who came to the world to save sinners like you and me. It is not you and me trying to make our way to God through good, moral behavior.

HAVE YOU EVER VIEWED CHRISTIANITY AS A MORAL RULEBOOK?

WHAT MAKES YOU STRUGGLE TO BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL AS EXPLAINED IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15?

LIFE WITH GOD

The only response to hearing the gospel message of Jesus that God wants is a response of faith. He does not want a response where we clean up our lives and then come to believe in Jesus. Instead, it is a simple response of believing that Jesus Christ can forgive us and bring us to God.

If you have responded to the gospel in faith, then you have entered into your life with God. Remember, Christianity is not a religion of duty and dictatorship. It is a life of faith in the God who created you, who forgave you, and who is now present with you. If in your mind you simply view Christianity as a set of rules or an ideology to believe in, please consider Jesus's words in John 14.

READ JOHN 14:6-7

Jesus tells his followers, and us today, that Christianity is not about us creating a path to God, it is about Jesus. If you have faith in Jesus, you can be with God. Your life IS with God. That life does not start later, it has already started! The Christian is constantly living a life with God because the Holy Spirit is living in his or her heart. Jesus continues in the next couple chapters of John to teach about the Holy Spirit, the one who guides us, teaches us, and is with us.

Christianity isn't about our perfection, it is about the presence of God. He is with you as soon as you place your faith in his Son. God promises to lead you, guide you, and protect you.

Let's end by considering the implications of living a life continually with God.

WHY IS RECOGNIZING THE PRESENCE OF GOD IMPORTANT FOR US TODAY?

DO YOU EVER SENSE GOD PROMPTING YOU TO BELIEVE OR ACT IN CERTAIN WAYS?

HOW MIGHT YOUR LIFE LOOK DIFFERENT IF YOU CONSCIOUSLY AND CONTINUALLY RECOGNIZED THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN YOUR LIFE?

WEEK 1: LIFE WITH GOD

READING PLAN

(READ BEFORE HUDDLE)

As you SOAP through the Bible passages for week 1, consider the deeply relational approach that God takes with his people. Take time to read and study these passages over this week.

Psalm 23

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Acts 16

HUDDLE MEETING

- **Read & Discuss (20 min)**

Share one of your SOAP entries from your individual study. What did you hear from God and how you have been challenged to obey?

- **Repent & Encourage (25 min)**

How have you been tempted to ignore God's presence in your life this week?

What does that reveal about where you place your trust?

- **Pray (15 min)**

Share opportunities you have to share the gospel this week. Consider the person/people you have been called to pursue. How could you integrate them into your life this week?

Pray that God would save the people he has called you to pursue.

WEEK 2: ALIVE IN GOD

Maybe you've noticed the growing trend in our culture of such things. It seems as if most places you turn these days you will run into someone raving about (or smelling like) their new oil that has turned their life around. Photos smeared across your social media feed of your friends throwing around tires and running til they throw up. Or at the very least, we've all seen the recipes and dishes that bring us back to a simpler age when we ate only from the land.

WHAT IS SO COMPELLING TO US ABOUT THESE THINGS?

One of the clear motivators for doing crazy things — like climbing a rope for fun in your 30s or eating tree bark because of the nutritional value — is that we all desire to live a healthier life and a fuller life. Yet, dig a little deeper for a moment. What is it exactly that drives us to these things?

In some sense there is a very real positive desire to feel and experience life in a healthy way (which is a good thing!). But, at the same time we attempt to move towards health, we are acknowledging the reality that we are on a crash course with illness, lack of health, and ultimately, death.

The ever-pervasive reality haunts us all — we are finite and one day, even as healthy as you might be for a few decades, death is coming to all of us. And this is a reality that often scares us to the point of not thinking about it or driving us to Chris Traeger-like health habits so we can believe we will live until we are 120.

WHY DO YOU THINK DEATH SCARES US SO MUCH? IS IT RIGHT TO FEAR DEATH?

The Bible says that these fears are universal. In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us that we are not only headed towards death, but are spiritually dead right now. Read Ephesians 2:1-3 and see how Paul describes the reality of death.

READ EPHESIANS 2:1-3

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DEAD IN SINS?

WHY IS IT A SIGN OF OUR DEATH THAT WE CARRY OUT THE DESIRES OF THE BODY AND PASSIONS OF OUR FLESH (VERSE 3)?

If the Bible is true, then what is the hope that we can cling to? Can oils, kale, and a few more push-ups ultimately heal the problem that sin has caused? Of course not! So what is our answer? Look at how Paul answers in Ephesians 2:4-10.

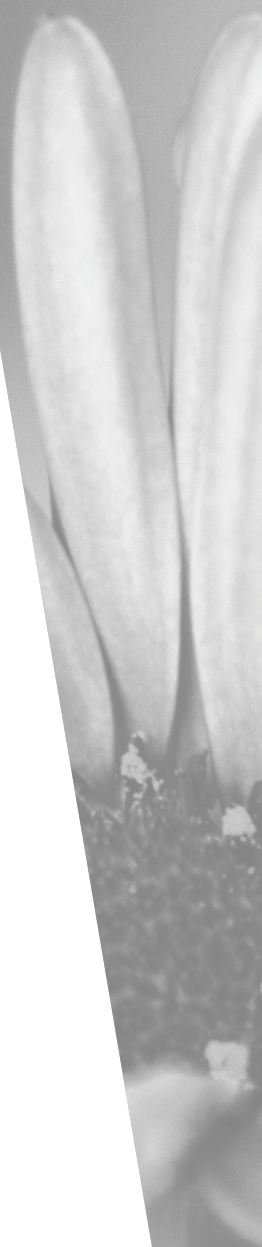
READ EPHESIANS 2:4-10

HOW DOES THE BIBLE SAY GOD CURES DEATH?

The desire we have to stave off death can really only be cured by finding a life that lasts forever. This is the life that God offers to us in Jesus Christ. If we have placed our faith in him alone, not in our good works or healthy living, then Jesus will save us solely by grace. And he doesn't just remove your sins; he makes you truly alive.

Life with God is the only true form of life because it is eternal life. A life that doesn't end. While we may physically die on this earth, our souls have been made alive in Jesus to live in the presence of God forever.

IF WE HAVE BEEN RAISED TO LIFE FROM DEATH, HOW SHOULD THAT CHANGE HOW WE LIVE TODAY?



WEEK 2: ALIVE IN GOD

READING PLAN

(READ BEFORE HUDDLE)

As you SOAP through the passages for week 2, consider the radical transformation that happens when the gospel intersects with an individual's heart. It produces much more than a religious person who tries to be more moral—it takes someone from death to life!

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Galatians 2:15-21

John 11:1-27

HUDDLE MEETING

- **Read & Discuss (20 min)**

Share one of your SOAP entries from your individual study. What did you hear from God and how you have been challenged to obey?

- **Repent & Encourage (25 min)**

In the past week, how have you been seeking to find happiness or contentment in worldly things that lead to death?

- **Pray (15 min)**

Share opportunities you have to share the gospel this week. Consider the person/people you have been called to pursue. How could you integrate them into your life this week?

Pray that God would save the people he has called you to pursue.

WEEK 3: LOVE FROM GOD

Can you name a more repeated theme in novels, songs and movies than that of love? No good country song is without the loss of it. No good rom-com is without the pursuit of it. And no good novel is complete without the understory of it. Love pervades our cultures, our hearts, and our minds.

WHY IS THERE SUCH AN EMPHASIS ON LOVE IN OUR CULTURE?

Love is everywhere around us, and yet, at the same time it can frequently feel elusive. Not only do people often struggle to capture the emotion, many would struggle to define the concept of love as a whole. What is love? What does it look like? What does it encompass? What does it feel like? What does it not look like?

Although we may not have all the answers to these questions, it is undeniable that all have an insatiable desire to be loved. As children, we crave the love of our parents. As we mature, we desire the love and approval of friends. Many often attempt to experience love through people of the opposite sex. And so forth. Most of our lives are driven by obtaining love. Many of our day-to-day decisions, at the core, are our attempts to experience love.

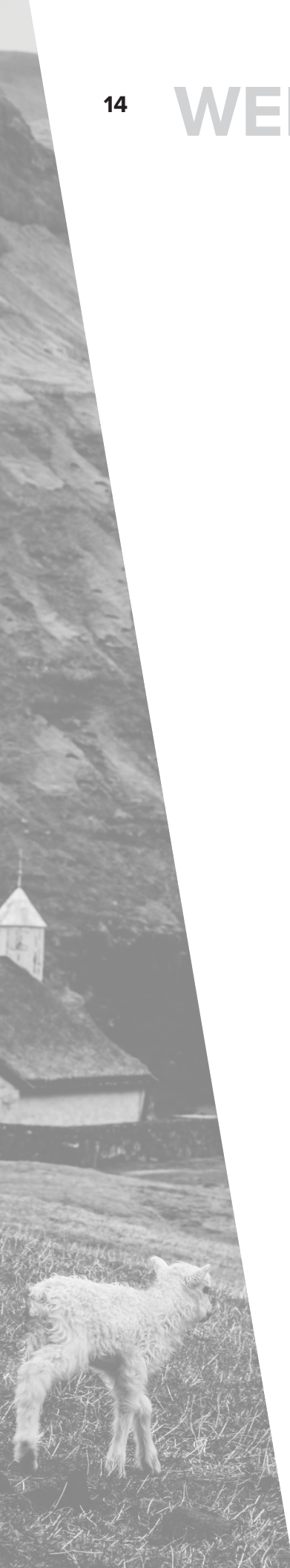
WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF STRIVING AFTER THE LOVE OR APPROVAL OF OTHERS RECENTLY?

But not only are we driven by a desire to be loved, we also were made to give love. Most, if not all, have people in their life that they genuinely love. Most have hobbies that they give time and money to engage in. Many have sports teams that rule our schedules and break our hearts.

In fact, if someone were apathetic towards everything in life, showing no real passion or love for anything, we would consider that person deeply depressed. The lack of love or desire for anything is not normal in humanity, so we see it as a fracture of the normal rhythm of human life.

WHERE DO WE GET THIS DESIRE TO BE LOVED AND TO LOVE?

If this is all true, then where can we find the greatest fulfillment of experiencing love and the greatest outlet to place our love? The Bible reveals that these two great desires are not against the will of God, but were given to us by God. Furthermore, they both can find their ultimate answer in God himself.



If you want to know the truest form of love, turn to 1 John 4:7-10. Examine how we can experience love in its purest, most soul-satisfying way.

READ 1 JOHN 4:7-10

How can we truly know we are loved? We can know this because God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world so that you could live through him. You do not have to do anything to earn God's love, and you do not even have to love him first in order to receive love back (what type of human relationship offers that type of unconditional love?!). No, God simply chose to love you first by sending his Son to prove he loves you.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD TRULY LOVES YOU? WHY OR WHY NOT?

John tells us that we experience God's love so that we might live through him (verse 10). In order to truly live life with God is to first and foremost realize that you have been completely loved by God. But John goes on to tell us then that your second great desire, to love other things, also is incorporated.

READ 1 JOHN 4:11-12

James K.A. Smith says this about a person who has been changed and transformed by the love of Jesus: "Jesus is a teacher who doesn't just inform our intellect but forms our very loves. He isn't content to simply deposit new ideas into your mind; he is after nothing less than your wants, your loves, your longings."

Smith is saying that if you are living life with God, Jesus will change not just your mind or your religious status. No, Jesus changes your heart and your loves. You now begin to love the things that God loves. You begin to love other people the way God loves other people. You begin to no longer love the old things that took you further away from God.

Jesus reveals God's love to us and Jesus also reorients love from us. A life with God is a life experiencing full, satisfying love from God. But a life with God is also a life of fully loving God and others in a way that satisfies our soul.

IF YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN, IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU SEEN THE THINGS YOU LOVE CHANGE?

WEEK 3: LOVE FROM GOD

READING PLAN

(READ BEFORE HUDDLE)

As you SOAP through the passages for week 3, consider the radical nature of His love toward you and his desire for love produced in you.

Psalm 136

1 Corinthians 13

1 John 4:7-12

HUDDLE MEETING

- **Read & Discuss (20 min)**

Share one of your SOAP entries from your individual study. What did you hear from God and how you have been challenged to obey?

- **Repent & Encourage (25 min)**

How have you resisted the call to sacrificially love your community this week?

- **Pray (15 min)**

Share opportunities you have to share the gospel this week. Consider the person/people you have been called to pursue. How could you integrate them into your life this week?

Pray that God would save the people he has called you to pursue.

WEEK 4: ADOPTED BY GOD

In 2010, I spent a couple months in China working with multiple ministries and missionaries. One of the elements of our time there was to spend a few hours every day at a local orphanage. Almost all of the children in the orphanage were abandoned by their parents. These children were growing up without any security or assurance that their basic needs would be provided.

As we spent time with the children, we began to notice a few trends in their behavior. One such trend was that if they were given anything — whether it was food, toys, or craft supplies — most of the children would grab as much as they could and attempt to hoard or hide it. Although I thought it was strange early on, a light bulb finally switched on. They were storing up what was given to them, because they had learned at an early age that provision was not guaranteed. Many of them were learning that to survive they had to craftily hoard what they could get their hands on.

Many of us today operate in a similar manner with things in our lives. Some are driven so desperately to never feel a lack of security that we store up whatever we can so we are never at a place of complete need. Others live lifestyles of being in constant need, never knowing where the next meal will come from or if their income and expenses will balance out at the end of the month. Whichever side you fall on, it can easily produce an ‘orphan mentality’ of anxiety, worry and fear.

HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANXIETY OR FEAR BECAUSE OF A LACK OF SECURITY?

Jesus addresses this desire and fear in Matthew 6, peering into our hearts and calling out our fears of questioning how we will be provided for. Will enough money come in? Is my job too unstable? Is my relationship falling apart? Is my reputation ruined? Am I wasting my life?

Jesus calls out these worries and reminds us that if God cares for the birds of the air and the grass in your lawn and makes sure they are taken care of, will he not provide for you?

The desire to have to provide for ourselves is an orphan mentality of believing that there is no one else that cares for you and provides for you. When you are an orphan, you have to survive on your own. However, when you are a child with a loving parent, you rely on them to make sure your needs are met. The former mindset says I have to provide for myself, the latter mindset trusts I will be provided for by another.

HOW DO YOU DISPLAY AN “ORPHAN MENTALITY” IN YOUR LIFE?

Later in the Bible, the Apostle Paul explains that those who have trusted in Jesus are not orphans, but sons of God. Read Romans 8:14-17 to see how he explains what it means to be a son of God.

READ ROMANS 8:14-17

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ADOPTED BY GOD? WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE SAY ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING ADOPTED AS SONS OF GOD?

Paul says that if we are no longer orphans, but have been adopted by God, then we are heirs with Christ. This means that we are not simply adopted so that we can know that we are loved (although that is a beautiful reality!), but we are adopted in order to be given an inheritance. Adoption does not simply mean you have a family, but you now have a right to everything that the Father owns.

Don't miss what this means — to be a child of God means you will inherit the earth with Jesus one day! 2 Timothy 2:12 says that if we endure in this life with Jesus, we will one day reign with Jesus. Therefore, an important aspect of our life with God is knowing who our new Dad really is and what that means for us.

HOW DOES KNOWING GOD AS YOUR FATHER CHANGE HOW WE SHOULD VIEW LIFE TODAY?

A life with God as our Father changes our mentality from having to provide for ourselves and storing up the things of this world, to trusting that we have a loving Father who is giving us everything in the next world. We can be freed from storing up material treasures like big houses, a few extra dollar bills, and validation or approval from peers, because we have ultimate provision from God.

Going back to Jesus's teaching, he pleads with those living a life with God: ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all the things will be added to you.”*** (Matthew 6:33) Jesus says that if we trust in God and seek after him, we will have all the things we need in this life.

A life as a son or daughter of God is a life free from storing up treasures on this earth, because we know that we have provision for now and an inheritance to come. A life with God lives for that.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SEEK THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS?

IF YOU BELIEVED THAT YOU HAD A GREAT INHERITANCE COMING, HOW WOULD THAT CHANGE HOW YOU LIVE TODAY?

WEEK 4: ADOPTED BY GOD

READING PLAN

(READ BEFORE HUDDLE)

As you SOAP through the passages for week 4, consider how you often live from a paradigm of what you DO NOT have. Contrast that with the overwhelming blessings given to us in Christ when we are adopted into God's family.

Luke 15:11-32

Romans 8:12-17

Ephesians 1:1-14

HUDDLE MEETING

- **Read & Discuss (20 min)**

Share one of your SOAP entries from your individual study. What did you hear from God and how you have been challenged to obey?

- **Repent & Encourage (25 min)**

How have you experienced worry, fear, anxiety over what you DO NOT have?

What does that reveal about your heart in light of God's provision?

- **Pray (15 min)**

Share opportunities you have to share the gospel this week. Consider the person/people you have been called to pursue. How could you integrate them into your life this week?

Pray that God would save the people he has called you to pursue.

WEEK 5: CHANGED IN GOD

In 2008, a young politician took to the campaign trail hoping to win the presidential election by offering the American people one thing. Barack Obama's vision for America may have included complex policies and strategies, but the vision was so simple, clear, and concise that it could be summarized in one word: CHANGE. And that simple concept struck a chord in the hearts of many Americans. So much so that he was elected the 44th president of the United States.

Whether on a national level or on an individual level, the idea of change strikes a chord in all of us. We all have an inherent dissatisfaction that reflects a core belief inside all of us: things could be better. Our country could be better. Our economy could be better. My physique could be better. My parenting could be better. My leadership could be better. My job performance could be better.

The hope offered from New Year's Day resolutions and personal growth plans perk us up as we begin to believe, "I can change." More often than not, our results of change fall completely short of our lofty goals. But still, at every chance and every crossroads, we keep coming back to this compelling and hope-filled idea: CHANGE.

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE WE ALL SHARE THIS DESIRE TO EXPERIENCE CHANGE?

While our desire to change is strong and our attempts are many, perhaps the most frustrating part of change is our lack of results. How many times have we attempted to change our work habits? How many times have we attempted to change our diet? How many times have we vowed to become a better spouse or better parent? It's almost as if we experience a magnetic pull toward our old self that keeps us from experiencing lasting change. This frustrating pattern requires that we look inside ourselves and have an honest conversation about why we seemingly cannot accomplish what we so earnestly desire.

WHY DO WE SO OFTEN FAIL WHEN WE ATTEMPT TO CHANGE OURSELVES?

When we live life with God, he promises to lead a process in us called "sanctification". Pastor and author John Piper describes sanctification very simply: progressively becoming like Jesus. In other words, through God, change is possible. Change is not only possible for us, but we should expect it. Perhaps the most relieving and encouraging part of sanctification is that the engine that fuels the change in us is not actually ourselves, our goals, or our willpower, but it's God himself.

READ ROMANS 6:4-11**HOW DO THESE VERSES SPEAK ABOUT THE PROCESS OF CHANGE?****VERSE 5 TALKS ABOUT BEING UNITED WITH HIM (JESUS). HOW SHOULD WE EXPECT JESUS INSIDE US TO SANCTIFY US?**

Some of us have experienced this change by God. Some of us have experienced many life changes through discipline. However, there seems to be an insatiable desire for change. You can climb the corporate ladder with your work ethic, but still want more. You can reach your goal weight and have the perfect six pack, but there's still another muscle group that needs a little work. You can overcome addictions and sin patterns, but still desire more change.

This desire we have for perfection is hardwired in us by God and ultimately, in Jesus, it will become reality.

1 Corinthians 15:51-57 says: Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is your victory?"

O death, where is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has promised to change us in this life, but deliver ultimate change in the next life if we are in Christ. He promises that the sins, the struggles, and the pains of this world will be done away with. Change, true change, is possible and promised in Jesus!

WE DESIRE CHANGE NOW. WE WILL BE COMPLETELY CHANGED ONE DAY. IN THE MEANTIME, GOD IS SANCTIFYING US. AS WE STRIVE TO BE CHANGED BY GOD, COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE: IN ORDER TO BEGIN TO BE CHANGED BY GOD, I NEED TO

WEEK 5: CHANGED IN GOD

READING PLAN

(READ BEFORE HUDDLE)

As you SOAP through the passages for week 5, consider how God's presence in an individual's life will produce lasting change over the course of a lifetime.

Romans 6

Colossians 3:1-17

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

HUDDLE MEETING

- **Read & Discuss (20 min)**

Share one of your SOAP entries from your individual study. What did you hear from God and how you have been challenged to obey?

- **Repent & Encourage (25 min)**

How have you battled sexual temptation in the past week?

How have you battled other addictions in your life this past week?

- **Pray (15 min)**

Share opportunities you have to share the gospel this week. Consider the person/people you have been called to pursue. How could you integrate them into your life this week?

Pray that God would save the people he has called you to pursue.

WEEK 6: FREEDOM IN GOD

Imagine for a moment walking into a brand new restaurant, looking at a robust new menu, with pages of varieties of foods. Page after page you flip through the menu. Endless amounts of options — from eggs benedict, to tapas, to pad Thai, to a 12oz filet mignon — with anything else you could imagine in between.

If you're not already overwhelmed or anxious, consider for a moment: is that the picture of ultimate freedom? Endless options, anything is possible, no boundaries to what you might indulge in. Just complete, unadulterated, unfiltered, freedom.

IS THIS YOUR IMMEDIATE VIEW OF FREEDOM? EXPLAIN WHY OR WHY NOT.

Many of us consider this to be the freedom we truly desire: no boundaries, no restrictions, no hindrances. We have bought into the notion that unless all things are available and optional, then it is not truly freedom. And as Americans specifically, freedom has been a bedrock that we are socialized in from our first days.

We are taught that we can be anything we want, do anything we want, experience anything we want - and that we have the right to it all. As a child we sense the desire to be freed from restrictive curfews and parental rules. As an employee we long for the day that we are our own boss so we can usher in endless vacation days and working from our beds. We believe in freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom from about anything else that might restrict our desires.

We all get a bit tingly and the heart starts pumping a few beats faster as we watch William Wallace cry out "They may take away our lives, but they'll never take our freedom!" Is there anything more American?

WHY DO WE HAVE SUCH A STRONG DESIRE TO FEEL FREED FROM RULES AND BOUNDARIES?

Yet, what if this is a false conception of true freedom? What if true freedom is not endless options and complete autonomy? What if no boundaries at all, no restrictions at all, no off-limit options at all is not real freedom, but actually slavery? What if we then become enslaved to the very guttural desires that we think we want to let run our lives?

Tim Keller points out in his book, *The Reason for God*, that true freedom cannot be unhindered, endless options: "In many areas of life, freedom is not so much the absence of restrictions as finding the right ones, the liberating restrictions. Those that fit with the reality of our nature and the world produce greater power and scope for our abilities and a deeper joy and fulfillment."

He argues that freedom is not endless options, rather it is binding yourself to the liberating options. The option to drink a case of beer every night is not true freedom, for in doing so you will be enslaved to the substance. The option to post on social media every day just to then open the app every five minutes to see who commented most recently is not true freedom, for in doing so you will be enslaved to the 'likes' and the validation of others. The option to follow every instinct or hunch that you come up with is not true freedom, for in doing so you will be enslaved to your every whim.

True freedom cannot be the absence of boundaries and the allowance of endless options; it must be finding the liberating boundaries and following those options.

The Bible says that the way to freedom is by dying to your carnal desires towards options that end up enslaving you, and actually becoming a slave to God. Read Romans 6:15-23 and see how God wants us to view slavery and freedom.

READ ROMANS 6:15-23

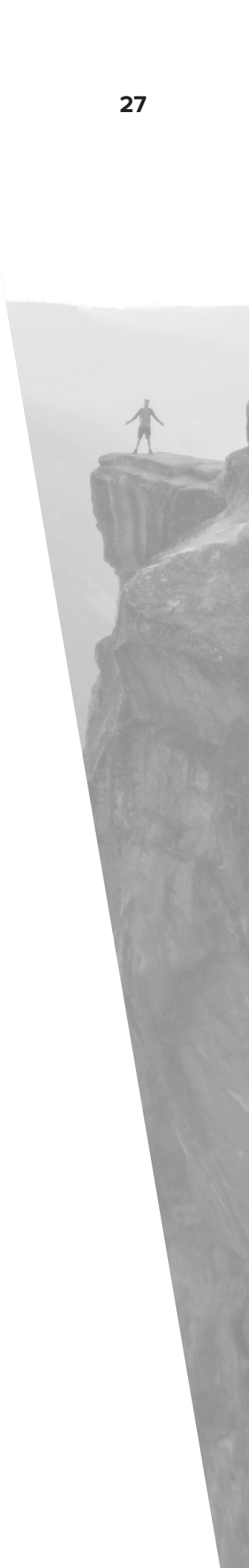
FROM THIS PASSAGE, IS TRUE FREEDOM DOING WHATEVER YOU WANT? EXPLAIN BY USING AN ARGUMENT FROM THE PASSAGE.

HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED BEING A 'SLAVE TO SIN'?

Paul says in this passage that Jesus alone has the power to set us free from being enslaved by sin and the things of this world. It is only when we trust in him to be our help and freedom that we can be free from sin and the wage of sin — death. It is at this point that we receive the gift of the gospel ***“eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”*** (Romans 6:23). Life with God is freedom from that which used to enslave you.

But we are now not free to do whatever we want, we ***“have become slaves of righteousness”*** (Romans 6:18). Paul on numerous occasions identifies himself as a slave of Christ. True freedom in our life with God is the freedom to do what is right and good. We now have the freedom to walk with God and obey God. And this restriction to choosing righteousness allows us to find greater joy and life than being enslaved to anything else.

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN GOD FREE YOU FROM BEING ENSLAVED TO SIN AND ALLOW YOU TO WALK IN FREEDOM IN CHRIST? IF YOU HAVEN'T EXPERIENCED THIS, WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE FREED FROM?



WEEK 6: FREEDOM IN GOD

READING PLAN

(READ BEFORE HUDDLE)

As you SOAP through the passages for week 6, consider how God's plan of redemption has been put on display throughout history through moving his people from slavery to freedom.

Exodus 11-14

1 Peter 2:13-25

Isaiah 61:1-3, Luke 4:16-21

HUDDLE MEETING

- **Read & Discuss (20 min)**

Share one of your SOAP entries from your individual study. What did you hear from God and how you have been challenged to obey?

- **Repent & Encourage (25 min)**

How have you battled sexual temptation in the past week?

How have you battled other addictions in your life this past week?

- **Pray (15 min)**

Share opportunities you have to share the gospel this week. Consider the person/people you have been called to pursue. How could you integrate them into your life this week?

Pray that God would save the people he has called you to pursue.

WEEK 7: GIFTED BY GOD

Since middle school, number 2 pencils and multiple choice circles on a paper have led us to determine our strengths, our personality type, our ideal job, and our ability to work well with others. Whether it's by our own inclination or the requirement of a teacher or boss, we are on a path of self-discovery through standardized tests. We've taken the Myers-Briggs, Strengthsfinder, the DISC assessment, the Enneagram, and so many more. We've supposedly discovered our talents (or lack thereof!) as the results have come back. What's next?

One thing is for sure, we live in a world made up of 7 billion unique people. We are far more complex than 4 letters can describe. At the same time, there is something intriguing about discovering how to be "uniquely you." While some meet these tests with more skepticism than others, there is something exciting and hopeful when we discover new insights about ourselves.

"My top strength is empathy? No wonder I love to listen and ask questions."

"I'm an extreme introvert? No wonder I feel so refreshed when I can escape from crowds and be alone."

"I'm a 6 on the enneagram? THAT explains why I consistently imagine worst-case scenarios and generally proceed with caution."

WHAT IS ONE HELPFUL INSIGHT YOU'VE LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF FROM A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT TEST?

There is a layer that lies below this self-discovery. As we learn about ourselves and learn about how we flourish the question we all wrestle with is, "Do I matter?" We want significance. We want to know that being "uniquely me" is actually good enough. We want to discover a purpose. It's easy to look around and see the rich, the good-looking, the popular, and the leaders in our society and understand that they matter. But do we matter? Is there any rhyme or reason to the fact that I am a completely unique individual from the other 7 billion people on the earth, and I live right here right now? This is a legitimate question.

WHAT WOULD YOU DESCRIBE AS YOUR UNIQUE PURPOSE? HOW DO YOU KNOW?

The Bible gives an answer to these questions. While there are many facets to the biblical answer, one of the clearest answers comes in the explanation of spiritual gifts. The bible teaches that upon believing in Jesus and trusting him as your Savior, the Spirit of God comes to live inside you. One of the benefits of the Spirit in you is that you are empowered with spiritual gifts.

FIRST, READ ROMANS 12:6-8. THEN, 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11.

ACCORDING TO THESE 2 PASSAGES, WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS? HOW SHOULD SPIRITUAL GIFTS BE USED?

As Paul, the author of 1 Corinthians, continues writing, he picks up on some interesting themes in relation to spiritual gifts. He begins to explain the purpose and function of gifts through the metaphor of the body. He is giving Christians this image of the body to show them that they all function as individual parts of a body, yet all the parts make up one fully functioning cohesive body. He then goes on to say that a hand is not better than a foot and an eye is not better than an ear. In other words, the beauty of a Christian community is that God has uniquely equipped each person with spiritual gifts that work together with those around you in perfect harmony. And even though one person is a winsome teacher and vision caster, and another person is a behind-the-scenes detail person, EVERYONE IS ESSENTIAL to function.

If we come back to questions like, “Do I matter? Do I have a purpose? Is who I am good enough?” The Bible would meet those questions with a resounding “YES” and follow up by saying: YOU ARE INDISPENSABLE. Whether you are a big toe or a brain or an elbow, you are needed in the church and God has uniquely wired you and gifted you to serve and lead in the capacity which he has equipped you.

DO YOU KNOW WHICH SPIRITUAL GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN TO YOU?

While personal assessment tests can be helpful, many times we approach these tests to figure out how we can succeed or how we can be fulfilled as an individual. The beauty of spiritual gifts is that God has given them for the “common good.” We are gifted so that we can love others. We are gifted so that we can love God and show God’s love to others. This is the nature of the gospel of Jesus — self-sacrifice for the good of others and the glory of God. Jesus used his gifts and his power to teach others, heal others, and love others. Ultimately, he laid down his life for our good, so that our sins could be forgiven. Now, Jesus has given us a purpose. He has called us into a mission of sharing the Gospel by using our gifts in a self-sacrificing, others-centered way. When the church functions like a body, the church is encouraged, those around us are loved, and God is glorified.

HOW HAS GOD CALLED YOU TO USE YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

WEEK 7: GIFTED BY GOD

READING PLAN

(READ BEFORE HUDDLE)

As you SOAP through the passages for week 7, consider that each believer has been given a purpose to play a part in and to pursue God's mission.

1 Corinthians 12-14

Judges 6-7

Acts 1-2

HUDDLE MEETING

- **Read & Discuss (20 min)**

Share one of your SOAP entries from your individual study. What did you hear from God and how you have been challenged to obey?

- **Repent & Encourage (25 min)**

How have you avoided God's calling to graciously use your gifts to love and encourage your community this past week?

- **Pray (15 min)**

Share opportunities you have to share the gospel this week. Consider the person/people you have been called to pursue. How could you integrate them into your life this week?

Pray that God would save the people he has called you to pursue.

WEEK 8: HOPE IN GOD

In 1871, Chicago lawyer Horatio Spafford had created a comfortable life for himself. He had married a wonderful woman named Anna, they had 4 beautiful girls, and he had a successful work life. Suddenly, in the same year, their reality changed. Chicago was struck with a great fire that killed 300 people and left another 100,000 people homeless. The fire also destroyed much of the Spaffords' investment.

In the 2 years that followed, Horatio and Anna devoted much of their time to care for the victims of the fire. They were devout followers of Jesus who wanted to love the vulnerable like Jesus had. Their selfless work was fulfilling, but it took a toll. In 1873, the Spaffords decided to take a much needed vacation to refuel after a trying season. In November of 1873, they were headed to join friends in Europe, but right before their departure, Horatio got held back on business and decided to send his wife and four daughters ahead, while he would join later.

Anna and the four girls boarded the steamship *Ville du Havre* and set off across the Atlantic. Tragically, their steamship collided with another ship mid-ocean. Anna was one of only 27 people who survived the tragedy by clinging to debris in the ocean. The four Spafford daughters did not survive.

Back in Chicago, Horatio received a telegram from his wife: "saved alone". Horatio set off to cross the Atlantic to bring Anna home. Through his experience and heartbreaking loss, he penned the words to the famous Christian hymn "It is Well with my Soul".

When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot
Thou hast taught me to say:
It is well, it is well, with my soul

Horatio Spafford had a hope that transcended circumstances. He saw a purpose in the pain. Since then, his hymn has provided countless Christians with words to sing when suffering.

Whether we like it or not, suffering is our norm. Functionally, many of us convince ourselves that we can control life's circumstances enough to make our lives better and better as we mature. This is simply not true. We may not experience the level of tragedy of Horatio Spafford, but pain and trials fill our weeks and months much more than we would like. The question we must ask ourselves is, "What do we do with this pain?" How do we react in our suffering?

Suffering can be life-altering — like the loss of a job, a devastating diagnosis, a battle with mental illness, or the loss of a loved one. Or, suffering can be something lighter like a bad grade on a test, an

annoying co-worker, a car repair, or a bad Husker football season! Either way, suffering is all too common.

AS YOU WATCH THOSE AROUND YOU, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST COMMON REACTIONS TO SUFFERING?

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE SUFFERING EXISTS?

All of us wish for a life free from suffering. We have a sense that things are not OK the way they are. While there are plenty of evil things “out there” in the world that affect our suffering, the Bible states that the problem with suffering doesn’t start “out there”, but rather starts inside our hearts. It starts from the inside of every human heart then makes its way out into the world. In Romans 5:12 it says, “therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”.

Because of sin and death, suffering has spread throughout the world. Now, our challenge is to handle suffering in a more profound way than white-knuckling it or escaping to alcohol or Netflix. Later in Romans, there is a more profound answer.

READ ROMANS 8:18, 22-30.

WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE TELL US ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN’S HOPE AMIDST SUFFERING?

We experience landmarks in life where hard work and suffering come into focus — when we cross the finish line after running a marathon, when we finally walk across the stage to graduate, when we finally see our baby after 9 months of grueling pregnancy, when we finally get the last items moved in and arranged in our new house — these are moments when you realize that the suffering was worth it.

Paul, the author of Romans, is trying to tell us that one of these types of moments is coming. When we see Jesus face-to-face, all of the suffering due to sin and death will come into focus with this new victory of being glorified with him. He will change us. He will wipe away every tear, he will welcome us in to live with him forever. This will be a landmark “finish line” experience like we’ve never known. This hope of future glory is only possible through trusting in Jesus.

WHEN WE EXPERIENCE SUFFERING NOW, HOW CAN OUR FUTURE GLORY BE A REAL, TANGIBLE HOPE IN THE PRESENT?

HOW CAN WE, AS A COMMUNITY, PREPARE OURSELVES NOW FOR THE SUFFERING TO COME?

WEEK 8: HOPE IN GOD

READING PLAN

(READ BEFORE HUDDLE)

As you SOAP through the passages for week 8, consider how Jesus can provide hope amidst every trial and hardship.

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 14:25-31, John 16:25-33

Psalm 42

HUDDLE MEETING

- **Read & Discuss (20 min)**

Share one of your SOAP entries from your individual study. What did you hear from God and how you have been challenged to obey?

- **Repent & Encourage (25 min)**

How have you been tempted toward hopelessness this week?

How you caught yourself grumbling or complaining?

- **Pray (15 min)**

Share opportunities you have to share the gospel this week. Consider the person/people you have been called to pursue. How could you integrate them into your life this week?

Pray that God would save the people he has called you to pursue.

IMAGINE WHAT HEAVEN AND HELL MIGHT LOOK LIKE, WHAT DO YOU PICTURE? THIS CAN BE FROM ANYTHING FROM YOUR IMAGINATION, THE BIBLE, MOVIES, ETC.

In 1321 Dante Alighieri finished his epic poem, *Divine Comedy*. The famous narrative has become one of the most iconic descriptions of the afterlife, including gruesome and vivid details of hell. Dante's *Inferno* would depict the imagery of sinners being cast into the horrid afterlife with beasts and agony at every turn. For most of us, this and other similar caricatures of the afterlife would become staples in our imagination.

For instance, if you were to consider what heaven and hell might look like it's probable the pictures would include some of the following. Hell would probably consist of fire and screaming; most likely with a horned, fiery-red Satan standing with a sinister smile, holding his trademark pitchfork.

If you were to glance up and imagine heaven, you most likely see cupid-like angels floating around with harps on puffy white clouds. Maybe even the pearly white gates and a caucasian Jesus with silky brown, Fabio-like hair.

However, let us not focus our attention on Dante's poem or Hollywood's depiction. Instead, let's examine what the Bible says about heaven and hell.

Immediately the questions can come streaming in: can hell possibly be real? How would a loving God allow the existence of such a treacherous place? Does God enjoy throwing his created beings into a place to suffer?

DO YOU EVER STRUGGLE WITH THE CONCEPT OF HELL? IF SO, WHAT DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH MOST?

It is important to note first that the Bible speaks clearly and often about life after death (Matthew 25:31-36, Mark 9:42-50, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Revelation 20-22). God says that after a person dies they will face judgment (Hebrews 9:27), and from that point they will spend an eternity in the new heaven and earth or in hell.

In many depictions of hell we see fire, torment, and agony; and these are probably only earthly ideas grasping at what are most likely shadows of the true horror that it will be. And while it is difficult to imagine how a loving God could stand to allow such a place, we must consider two things.

First, hell exists because human sin exists. The question of how could a good God send people to hell really misses the scope of God's

character. For if God did not punish sin with ferocity, he would be an unjust and evil God. Imagine a murderer steps into a courtroom for a ruling and the judge let's all the crimes go without punishment in the name of love. Would we not cry for justice? Would this not be an outrage? If God allows sinful men and women to go unpunished he would not be loving, he would be wicked. Therefore, hell exists because human sin must be punished.

Secondly, hell is so horrible because sinning against a holy God is so horrible. The direct correlation to the treachery of hell is the glory of God. The punishment must fit the crime to some extent in any fair judgment. If God's glory was minuscule, the punishment would not need to be great. However, because of the magnitude to which God's glory is perfect, holy, and awesome; the punishment for abusing and neglecting that glory by sinning must be equal.

HOW SHOULD THE EXISTENCE OF HELL CHANGE HOW YOU VIEW GOD AND OTHER PEOPLE?

However, as bad as hell is, eternal life with God is the exact, glorious antithesis. Read Revelation 21 to see an image of the world God will create for his people for eternity.

WHAT ARE THE MOST NOTEWORTHY CHARACTERISTICS TO YOU FROM THIS PASSAGE AND WHY?

If hell is real because humans sin, then the new heavens are real because the Lamb was slain. Through the sin of mankind all of the creation has been tainted and wrecked; but through Jesus offering himself as a sacrifice all of creation will be recreated. This recreation includes anyone who trusts in Jesus as their sacrifice and savior.

The only way that life with God is possible is by having someone remove our guilt and take the punishment of God's wrath for us. This is exactly what Jesus has done. He has paid our debt, removed our shame, and gave us life. And not just a better life for tomorrow, an eternal life with the presence of God.

R.A. Finlayson once said, "Hell is eternity in the presence of God. Heaven is eternity in the presence of God with a mediator." Apart from having Jesus stand in the gap for us, we will face an eternal punishment of God's righteous wrath. But with Jesus as our perfect mediator before God, we no longer await God's wrath but instead enjoy God's presence.

HOW SHOULD OUR ETERNAL DESTINY SHAPE HOW WE LIVE TODAY? HOW SHOULD IT CHANGE HOW WE VIEW OTHERS WHO DO NOT YET HAVE JESUS AS THEIR MEDIATOR?

WEEK 9: ETERNITY WITH GOD

READING PLAN

(READ BEFORE HUDDLE)

As you SOAP through the passages for week 9, consider how scripture speaks of the afterlife in a completely God-centered manner — it is through him, with him, and centered on him.

1 Corinthians 15

Revelation 4-5

Luke 16:19-31

HUDDLE MEETING

- **Read & Discuss (20 min)**

Share one of your SOAP entries from your individual study. What did you hear from God and how you have been challenged to obey?

- **Repent & Encourage (25 min)**

How have you tried to escape this week by wasting time or distracting yourself?

- **Pray (15 min)**

Share opportunities you have to share the gospel this week. Consider the person/people you have been called to pursue. How could you integrate them into your life this week?

Pray that God would save the people he has called you to pursue.

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