



# United

FOUNDATIONS IN GENESIS

life  
group

## Introduction

Genesis 1-4, while containing the story the of the first humans, also contains major biblical principles as to all human relationships. So, it does not matter if you are married, single, widowed, etc., these truths can apply to the relationships in your life. Marriage, of course, will be discussed because the text deals with marriage, but even then, it has great importance for the life of the unmarried. There is much debate among the particulars of the chapters that we will be covering—many from liberal theologians who have departed the faith, but even among conservatives there are differences. *This curriculum will not seek to address those issues and neither should the discussion be centered on those issues.* The goal of this curriculum is to strengthen people's relationships with God and with each other. Extended discussion on those other issues in this setting would distract, not contribute, to that goal. I hope this curriculum is used by God in a powerful way in your life and the lives of the people in your Life Group. As always, if you need anything, please reach out to me. I am so encouraged by your ministry and your obedience to teach and expound God's Word. My prayer for you is that you would rely on the Spirit for wisdom, strength and encouragement, and that He would anoint your ministry with his power.

To Christ be the glory, both now and forever!

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## Life Group – Genesis 1:24-31 – May 6, 2018

### *Defining Our Identity and Roles*

#### **CONNECT**

Take the time to take a group picture. What are some of the more embarrassing pictures that have been taken of you?

#### **GROW: Highlight and Explain the Text**

##### **Read Main Passage: Genesis 1:24-31**

(Additional Passages: 1 Pet. 2:13-3:7, Eph. 4:17-24; 5:17-6:9, Rom. 12-13, Rev. 4:11; Hab. 2:14)

- What do we learn about who God is and what he does in this passage?
- What do we learn about ourselves in this passage?
- How does this text connect to the rest of scripture?
- How do these truths about God and ourselves impact our lives and relationships?

#### **SERVE: Apply the Text**

What are the specific action steps you need to take this week?

How does this text move me to better serve and love others who are created in the image of God?

Where are the areas in this community where the concept of being created in the image of God needs to be lived out and displayed?

Summer is fast approaching. What is your Life Group's plan for continued ministry and fellowship during the summer months where schedules and time spent in town is typically more sporadic?

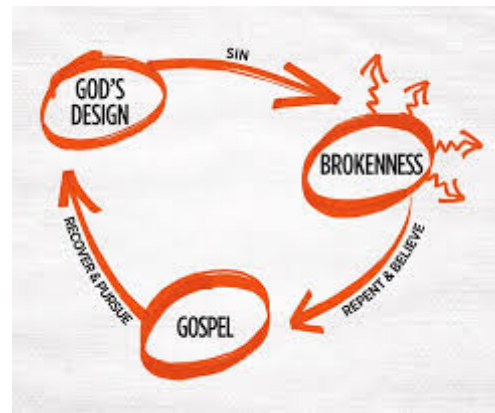
#### **PRAY: Respond to the Text**

How have you strayed from your God-defined role? Spend some time in prayerful repentance. Has your life been characterized as one who views others as being created in the image of God? If not, confess those specific sins to God and repent.

Many are attempting to live their lives outside of their God-given purpose and identity. As a result, brokenness abounds. Pray for those who are lost and searching for their identity and purpose. Pray that God would give you opportunities to share the gospel with them

#### **MULTIPLY: Share the Text with Others**

Practice sharing the 3 Circles and share it with someone this week.



**For the Family:** Read Genesis 1:26-27 with your family, and talk about what it means to be made in the image of God and how that affects the way we treat other people.

#### **MEMORIZE: Meditate on the Text**

*So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27 ESV)*

## Life Group – Genesis 1:24-31 – May 6, 2018

### *Defining Our Identity and Roles*

Genesis Chapter One is a foundational chapter to the Christian faith. While there are many disagreements as to the timeline (which this lesson should not attempt to address), the author of Hebrews makes it clear that understanding “that the universe was created by the word of God” is something that we do by faith. The account introduces us for the first time to the person the entire revelation of Scripture means to introduce us to – God. In this passage, we learn that God is the Creator King. He spoke mankind into existence and the sum of his creation was very good. We learn that God is the definer. He defines the roles and responsibilities of his creation. Lastly, we learn that God is the provider. He provided food in the garden for his creation. We are also introduced to the “crown of God’s handiwork... human life”<sup>1</sup>. Man is described as being created in the image of God. God blesses them, which “is to bestow not only a gift but a function”<sup>2</sup>. In his command to man for him to be fruitful and multiply, God sets himself up as King over all of mankind.

How do these truths apply to human relationships? First, God created man in his image, male and female. This truth bestows a great value upon human life that is not bestowed onto any other form of life. This value demands respect, which is why James condemns his audience for cursing others with their tongue because people are made in the image of God (James 3:9). Therefore, the way we treat others reveals the way we view God. But not only does it bestow value onto the human being, it gives them a great responsibility. “We are God’s representatives in this world” meaning that we are to reflect his character and glory to the rest of creation.<sup>3</sup> Take a moment and think about all the characteristics of God – love, faithfulness, justice, mercy, etc. These are what should characterize our relationships as image bearers.

Second, it is important to note that since God defined man’s role and provided for man in Genesis 1, we needed God *before sin entered the world*. We have always needed God<sup>4</sup>. Sin only intensified that need. We are unable to figure out our role and identity in this world apart from God. Any attempts are futile and result in brokenness. 1 Peter 2:13-3:7, Ephesians 5:17-6:9, and Romans 12-13 provide great examples of how God has defined the various relationships that occur in this life. Take some time with your group to discuss the impact this has on the primary relationships represented in your group.

Lastly, God continues to provide for us as we live out our God-given roles through his word. For “man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3). If someone is afraid to live out their role as God defined it, they need not be afraid! They need to run to the word of God and let him provide for them as they pursue God’s design for their life.

**Listen to this 6.5 minute podcast by John Piper on what it means to be created in the image of God?**

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-does-it-mean-to-be-made-in-god-s-image>

### **Front Page Questions:**

God is Creator of good things God is Provider and definer God is King God exists in Triune Form (First hint)	Men and women are both created in the image of God and were meant to reflect His image. We needed God to define their role and provide for them from the beginning We were created as sexual beings. (Be fruitful and multiply.)
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<sup>1</sup> Matthews, 160.

<sup>2</sup> Kidner, 56.

<sup>3</sup> Greidanus, 59.

<sup>4</sup> Tripp, 40.

## Life Group – Genesis 2:4-25 – May 13, 2018

### *The Chief Relationships of Man*

#### **CONNECT**

Take a few moments and talk about things that you used to think were so important, but realized later on were not as important. And vice-versa.

#### **GROW: Highlight and Explain the Text**

##### **Read Main Passage: Genesis 2:4-25**

(Additional Passages: Exo. 34:6-7, Eph. 5:31-32; 2:1-10; Phil. 2:1-11; Deut. 6:1-15, Jn. 13:31-35)

- What do we learn about who God is and what he does in this passage?
- What do we learn about ourselves in this passage?
- How does this text connect to the rest of scripture?
- How do these truths about God and ourselves impact our lives and relationships?

#### **SERVE: Apply the Text**

What are the specific action steps you need to take this week?

How does this text move me to better serve and love others who are created in the image of God?

What are some specific ways your group can help build up others' relationship with God in this church? How can your group help serve the marriages of this church?

#### **PRAY: Respond to the Text**

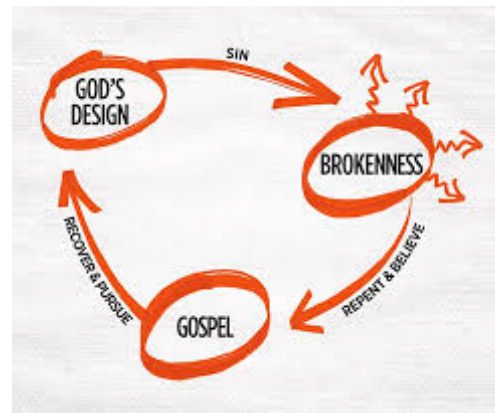
Does the gospel empower and define your relationships? If not, then confess your sin to God and repent.

Pray that our church would be growing as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. Pray for the marriages of the leaders in this church that God would protect them from the temptations of the evil one.

Pray for the broken marriages in our church. Pray that the power of the gospel would transform and renew them.

#### **MULTIPLY: Share the Text with Others**

Practice sharing the 3 Circles and share it with someone this week.



**For the Family:** Read Genesis 2:4-9 with your family, and talk about who God is and how he gives life. Exodus 34:6-7 can be helpful in explaining who God is and Eph. 2:1-10 is helpful in explaining how he gives life.

#### **MEMORIZE: Meditate on the Text**

*So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27 ESV)*

## Life Group – Genesis 2:4-25 – May 13, 2018

### *The Chief Relationships of Man*

Moses revisits the account of how God created the world in Chapter 2, yet from a different perspective where he “fills in the details of man’s creation which were not included in 1:1-2:3”<sup>5</sup>. The two chapters do not contradict one another. In chapter 1, Moses used the word *Elohim* to describe God which was more general in nature. In chapter 2 he makes a shocking revelation to his fellow Israelites—he reveals that the God who created the world and all that is in it is *YAHWEH*. He is the one who was in the beginning. He is the true God of power, but also of relationship. “The use of “YAHWEH” throughout this passage underlines the personal and relational nature of God”<sup>6</sup>. It is the people’s relationship with YAHWEH that is supposed to have pride of place in their hearts. God is revealing Himself as their covenant God who is meant to be their chief relationship. Also, we see again in this chapter that God is the source and giver of life. We see again that he is the Creator King who defines our purpose and identity in this world. And out of his goodness and desire for the best for man, he instituted the next chief relationship of mankind—marriage. We learn that it was not good for man to be alone, so God created woman and God himself gave her to Adam in marriage. Adam was overjoyed with his new wife, and God provided some new guidelines for the marriage relationship: “Man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” And, we see that before sin entered into the world, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed with one another, picturing the type of openness and intimacy that God intended.

How do these truths impact our relationships, specifically marriage? While there are many practical steps that one could take from just this passage, the fullness of the application comes many, many years later when Paul explains the true meaning of this text as to referring to Christ and his church. Timothy Keller states that this truth is the great secret to marriage, that “the gospel of Jesus and marriage explain one another” and that if we start by “doing for our spouse what God did for us in Jesus”<sup>7</sup> everything else will fall into place. The way God interacts with his covenant people is to be the model for how we interact with our spouses, and the way we interact with our spouses *should* be an earthly picture of how we relate to God.

So how does God relate with us? Moses introduces YAHWEH here in the text, so I believe it to be helpful to see how God introduces himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7, which says:

*“The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’”*

Another passage is Philippians 2:1-11. The below chart gives *some* practical applications to marriages from these passages.

You show mercy and grace to your spouse.	You forgive your spouse when they sin against you.	You accept your role in the marriage.
You are slow to become angry with your spouse.	You let the punishment for your spouse’s sin fall on Christ.	You have your spouse’s good in mind.
You are steadfast in your love.	You treat your spouse fairly.	You serve your spouse.
You are faithful and keep the covenant you made.	You show humility in your actions toward your spouse.	You view your spouse as more significant than yourself.

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<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, 12.

<sup>6</sup> ESV Study Bible, 52.

<sup>7</sup> Keller, 43.

“The gospel can fill our hearts with God’s love so that you can handle it when your spouse fails to love you as he or she should. That frees us to see our spouse’s sins and flaws to the bottom—and speak of them—and yet still love and accept our spouse fully... This is the great secret! Through the gospel, we get both the *power* and *pattern* for marriage.”<sup>8</sup> And the gospel must provide both! To attempt to live out the pattern of the gospel while not relying on the power of Christ who breathed life into you by grace through faith (see Eph. 2:1-10), then you *will* burn out. But also, one cannot experience the power of the gospel and not apply it. The gospel moves us to obedience. Always.

If that is how the gospel and who God is helps explain marriage, how does marriage explain how we should relate to God? Well from Genesis 2:23-25, Five Principles emerge:

1. Just like how a husband and wife need to communicate, we need to communicate with God. How has God designed that to take place? Through the reading of his word and prayer. (See Deut. 6:1-15)
2. As a man leaves his father and mother and holds fast to his wife, we leave our old way of living and hold fast to Christ and his ways.
3. As a husband and wife become one flesh, we are in the process of becoming one with the image of God through the process of the Spirit sanctifying us.
4. As a husband and wife are intimate with one another, we are intimate in our relationship with God, letting him speak to and speaking to him about the deepest parts of who we are.
5. As a husband and wife (before the fall) were unashamed with each other, because of what Christ did for us on the cross, we can be unashamed before God, confident in Christ’s finished sacrifice. (See Hebrews 4:14-16).

What if you or the people in your group are not married? Well since Jesus told his disciples in John 13 to love another as he had loved them, the gospel serves as the basis of all human relationships. And even if someone is not married, the picture of marriage still helps them see a practical example of how we relate to God, which can be hard to wrap the mind around. So, whether your group is 6<sup>th</sup> grade girls or a group of only married people, the truths revealed about who God is and who man is in Genesis 2 have a great impact on our lives and relationships.

### Front Page Questions

<p>God is Yahweh. (See Exodus 34:6-7 for fullness of this truth)</p> <p>God is the source and giver of life. (Ephesians 2:1-10 describes a way as to how that applies to our lives)</p> <p>God is the Creator King. He defines our purposes and gives commands that are meant to be obeyed.</p> <p>God instituted and defined marriage.</p>	<p>Man is meant to obey God and live out the role he was given by God. We can only do this if we know his word.</p> <p>The most important relationship we have is with God. The second is with our spouse.</p> <p>Marriage is God’s gift to man.</p> <p>The gospel gives the pattern and power to marriage. (Ephesians 5:31-32)</p>
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“Women were created from the rib of man to be beside him, not from his head to top him, nor from his feet to be trampled by him, but from under his arm to be protected by him, near to his heart to be loved by him.” – Matthew Henry

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<sup>8</sup> Keller, 45.



## Life Group – Genesis 3:1-24 – May 20, 2018

### *The Problem and The Solution*

#### **CONNECT**

Name a time in your life where a major problem arose. How was it resolved? What ended up being the solution?

#### **GROW: Highlight and Explain the Text**

##### **Read Main Passage: Genesis 3:1-24**

(Additional Passages: Heb. 9:22-28, 12:3-11; Rom. 3:1-31; Luke 23:1-24:12; Josh. 7:20-21)

- What do we learn about who God is and what he does in this passage?
- What do we learn about ourselves in this passage?
- How does this text connect to the rest of scripture?
- How do these truths about God and ourselves impact our lives and relationships?

#### **SERVE: Apply the Text**

What are the specific action steps you need to take this week?

How does this text move me to better serve and love others who are created in the image of God?

How can we protect one another from the process of sin? How can we help one another to guard against and remove any of the lies of our enemy?

What are ways that we can be quick to recognize the sin we are committing in our relationships with others and let the grace of God transform our relationships?

#### **PRAY: Respond to the Text**

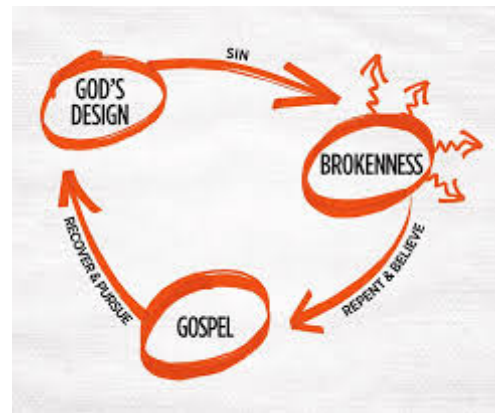
Are you currently caught up in the process of sin? Where are you in it? Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to obey. Ask for forgiveness and repent where needed.

Pray that our church would recognize the enemy's deceptive ways and that our faith in God would move us to obedience.

Pray for those still lost and under the full curse of sin. Pray that they would repent of their sins and turn to Jesus who will clothe them in his righteousness.

#### **MULTIPLY: Share the Text with Others**

Practice sharing the 3 Circles and share it with someone this week.



**For the Family:** Read Genesis 3:1-9 with your family, and talk about the process of sin and what results from that sin. Two options from here: 1) Explain how God dealt with sin through Jesus Christ, Or, 2) go on to explain how those who have believed in the gospel have the Holy Spirit who helps us to interrupt the process of sin and choose obedience.

#### **MEMORIZE: Meditate on the Text**

*So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27 ESV)*



## Life Group – Genesis 3:1-24 – May 20, 2018

### *The Problem and The Solution*

Everything was good. Man was in perfect relationship with God. The created order was very good. Husband and wife lived together perfectly in that they were naked and unashamed. It was truly paradise. Genesis 3 is one of the most tragic chapters in Scripture. At the same time, it is also one of the most hope-filled, as we are first introduced to God's plan to solve man's biggest problem, sin. Verse 1 introduces a new character to our story—the serpent. He is described as being “more crafty than any other beasts”. The father of lies approached Eve and began to work his deceptive ways. In a spiritually fatal move, she bought the lie, took the fruit and gave to Adam who also ate. Through Adam's willful and deliberate disobedience, sin entered into the world. Their sin resulted in their loss of innocence and fear<sup>9</sup>. They were guilty, ashamed, and afraid of seeing God, with whom they used to enjoy great fellowship. But God sought them out! “The covenant God does not give up on his distrustful and disobedient creatures”<sup>10</sup>. But when God pressed them on their sin issue, neither Adam nor Eve took responsibility for their sin and resulted to blaming—Adam blamed his own wife who once was the “bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh” for his sin. He even went so far to blame God for his sin. This sin had killed the harmony of Man's chief relationships.

Relationships would be easy if it wasn't for people! Because people are sinful, and sin is why we struggle in our relationships. Not only is divorce sin, but everything that leads up to a divorce is a result of sin. We experience strife and conflict because of sin. We rebel against our God-given roles because of sin. Sin destroys everything in its path. It is a ravenous beast that seeks to tear and shred anything it can lay hold of. God has not left us helpless in our battle against sin, however. Namely, those in Christ have been given His Spirit and are empowered by Him to walk in obedience. There is a clear pathway from obedience to sin revealed in this text, as well as various tendencies of man, that if we are attuned to, we can be better informed as to how sin deceives us and moves us to disobey God, thus better equipping us to choose righteousness. Here is how sin works:

Eve saw the fruit → Eve coveted the false promise of sin → Eve took the fruit → Eve hid in shame.

Another example of this destructive process of sin is seen in the life of Achan in Joshua 7, who disobeyed God by taking gold from the fallen city of Jericho. *And Achan answered Joshua, "Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I **saw** among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I **coveted** them and **took** them. And see, they are **hidden** in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath."* (Jos 7:20-21 ESV, emphasis mine)

This is the process sin works its destruction in a relationship. We see an opportunity in an argument to crush our spouse, friend, etc. We covet the feeling of victory and moral superiority, so we take the opportunity. Then shame and guilt wells within us, and we attempt to backtrack after the emotions are gone and cover up what we had said that had hurt the other person. We see the opportunity to seek sexual gratification outside of God's design. We covet the feeling of significance or control the sin promises, so we take part in the sin. Then after the fleeting pleasure of sin fades, we are left feeling empty, ashamed and guilty, so we lie to cover up our sin. I could go on and on. This is the process of sin, and each of us have fallen victim to it. Why?

- Because like Eve, we are easily deceived by lies that target our heart.
- Like Eve, we have a tendency to get God's Word wrong.
- Like Eve, we have a desire to be the god of our own life.
- Like Adam, we have not stood for righteousness when we should have.
- Like Adam, we have experienced the guilt and shame of sin and have tried to hide from God.
- Like Adam, we fail to take responsibility for our own sin, blaming God and others for our mistakes.

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<sup>9</sup> Greidanus, 79.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 79.

Humans have a massive sin problem, one that goes much deeper than any external practice and one that we cannot fix on our own. Any attempts to are even more futile than Adam and Eve's attempt to cover their nakedness with fig leaves. Therefore, it is *our own sin* will be our downfall in our relationships, unless we learn and apply the solution to our sin.

Genesis 3 lays the framework for how God deals with our sin. First, He seeks us out while we are still hiding in our shame (3:9). Second, He draws our attention to the seed of the woman (Jesus) who would one day be victorious over the enemy, even though it would cost him (3:15). Third, the forgiveness of sins is made. Verse 21 introduces how this divine atonement comes about:

- God required a blood sacrifice, which was accomplished through the crucifixion. (Hebrews 9:22)
- God provides the sacrifice. The sacrifice for sin could only be accomplished by God himself, so God became a man and dwelt among us, in order that he might die for us. (Hebrews 9:23-24)
- God's work lasts (contrast between clothing made from animal skin and from fig leaves). Those who repent and believe in Jesus and the work of the cross and resurrection are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and given the Holy Spirit so that they may persevere until the end.<sup>11</sup> (Hebrews 9:25-28)

Lastly, we see that God disciplines us for our good (Hebrews 12:3-11). Adam's sin resulted in being cast out from the garden, which though it must have been painful, it was for Adam's good. To eat from the tree of life and live forever in a broken state would be a horrible fate. Eternal life is only good if it means we are restored back to God. God cast man out of the garden so that he could bring them to a better Eden through his son Jesus.

Jesus alone is the solution to our sins and the brokenness we experience in our relationships as a result. Jesus is the redeemer. Scripture was given to us to introduce us to him. If the people in your group are struggling in their relationships, what they need is not a list of steps to follow, but a person to be introduced to and his name is Jesus<sup>12</sup>. He alone can deal with the problem of sin. He alone can restore brokenness. He does this by re-establishing his place as the prize of our hearts. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they committed spiritual adultery. Jesus has sought after us and made himself known to us so that we might repent of our sins and experience the forgiveness he offers. Then he gives us His Spirit and uses his Word to reshape our desires, to where the cycle of sin can be broken. As a result, we now can grow in knowledge of the truth and become harder to deceive. We now can give God his rightful place as God, as we step down from the throne of our hearts. We now can resist the enemy and stand and walk in righteousness. We now no longer have to deal with guilt, shame or fear because Christ has paid our penalty. We now recognize our sin and confess it to God and others. Everything about us is transformed because of Jesus. He is our solution. Any man-made efforts to fix our relationships are fig leaves. Jesus alone provides a lasting solution.

#### Front Page Questions:

God seeks us out. God is victorious over the enemy. God requires a sacrifice for sin which he provides. God clothes us. (Implications of lasting effects and that we are clothed in his righteousness and forgiven) God (Jesus) is the solution to the sin problem in our lives.	We have a tendency to get God's word wrong. We have a desire to supplant God as God. We are easily deceived. We have a tendency to shift blame. We have a tendency to try and hide from God. We have to deal with the lasting effects of sin in our life.
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<sup>11</sup> Rydelnik, 49.

<sup>12</sup> Ideas based on Tripp's thesis in *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*

## Life Group – Genesis 4:1-16, 24-25 – May 27, 2018

### *Bad Worship*

#### **CONNECT**

What are your favorite worship songs and why? Pick one to play before the class and after and worship God as a group.

#### **GROW: Highlight and Explain the Text**

##### **Read Main Passage: Genesis 4:1-16,24-25**

(Additional Passages: Jude 11, 1 John 3:12; Heb. 11:4; Amos 5:21-24; John 4; Matt. 22:34-40)

- What do we learn about who God is and what he does in this passage?
- What do we learn about ourselves in this passage?
- How does this text connect to the rest of scripture?
- How do these truths about God and ourselves impact our lives and relationships?

#### **SERVE: Apply the Text**

What are the specific action steps you need to take this week?

How does this text move me to better serve and love others who are created in the image of God?

How can we worship God together as a group?  
How can we move one another to worship God?

What are ways that we can be quick to recognize the bad worship practices which harm our relationships with others and let the grace of God transform our worship?

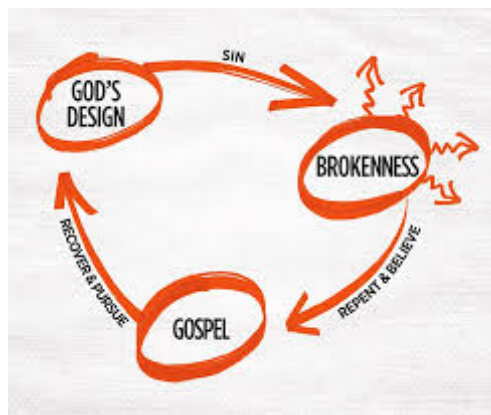
#### **PRAY: Respond to the Text**

Take time to sentence pray as a group, worshipping God. Sentence praying is praying just a short sentence aloud in a group. It is an easy way to pray collectively as a group. So, speak sentences of worship in group prayer. Pray that our church would be people who are worshippers.

Pray for those still lost and under the full curse of sin. Pray that they would repent of their sins and turn to Jesus in worship. Pray that God would turn them into one who worships God in spirit and in truth.

#### **MULTIPLY: Share the Text with Others**

Practice sharing the 3 Circles and share it with someone this week.



**For the Family:** Read Genesis 4:1-5 with your family, and talk about what it means to worship God properly. Worshipping God properly exalts Christ, expresses devotion and love, and is done in faith. Close by singing a simple worship song together.

#### **MEMORIZE: Meditate on the Text**

*So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27 ESV)*

## Life Group – Genesis 4:1-16, 24-25 – May 27, 2018

### *Bad Worship*

Bad worship leads to bad practices in relationships. One of the most infamous stories in all of Scripture—Cain murdering Abel—was a result of bad worship. In this story, Cain and Abel both offer a sacrifice to God. God rejects Cain's act of worship and receives Abel's. Cain becomes jealous and the enemy begins to speak his deceptive lies to his heart. In an act of grace and parental guidance, God warns Cain, providing a way out from the temptation to sin. Cain, out of the evilness of his heart, refuses to heed God's warning and carries out his plan to murder his brother, resulting in judgement from God. Yet, God did not forget his promise he made in Genesis 3:15, and he provides a new offspring to Adam and Eve. His name is Seth, and from his line, God raises up worshippers who "call upon the name of the Lord."

This story is very important in our discussion about human relationships because it further reveals the driving force behind the sin and conflict in our relationships—bad worship. We see this modeled time and time again throughout Scripture. The Ten Commandments are structured in a way that first moves the people to worship God properly and then deals with the practices that they are to follow. We see this happen in the books of Samuel and Kings. When a king of Israel worships God as he should, he leads the people of God well. If he practices improper worship, then he leads the people in to sin and exile. Jesus spoke towards this when he described the great commandment. When asked what the greatest commandment was he replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Matt. 22) He doesn't leave it there because he cannot, because proper worship of God leads to proper love for other people. So, he says, "And the second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'". Lastly, the apostle Paul structures his letters in this fashion to where he spends the beginning of the books dealing with how the people relate to God and the second half with the moral exhortations on how to live with others. All throughout Scripture we see clearly that worship drives our practices, either good or bad, and if our vertical relationship with God is not in order, then there is no way that our horizontal relationships with others could be in order.

So, why did God reject Cain's sacrifice? What made it bad? There are three NT texts that help us interpret this passage and learn from Cain's mistake: Jude 11, 1 John 3:12, and Hebrews 11:4.

*"Woe to them! For they [the false teachers who were leading people astray] walked in the way of Cain..."*  
(Jude 1:11 ESV, parenthesis added for context)

The false teachers were leading people into false forms of worship. The resulting worship no longer exalted Christ, but rather they exalted worldly things and practices. Worship has always been about exalting Christ. That is why God instituted the sacrificial system (the beginnings of such is seen in Genesis 2:21). It pointed towards the sacrifice Christ would ultimately make for the sins of the people. So, the first reason God rejected Cain's worship is because ***Cain's worship did not exalt Christ.***

*We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.* (1 John 3:12 ESV)

Cain's heart clearly was far from God, and as a result his worship was bad. How is this revealed in the text? We see Abel's sacrifice coming from the firstborn of his flock, but any reference to Cain's offerings being from his firstfruits is noticeably absent. His evil heart led him to offer to God nothing more than a selection of what he had. Rather than expressing a love for and devotion towards God, his worship really communicated a hatred for God. That is what is communicated when we do not worship God with our best. So, the second reason God rejected Cain's worship is because ***Cain's worship did not demonstrate devotion and love towards God.***

*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.* (Hebrews 11:4 ESV)

Faith was the motivator behind Abel's sacrifice, and was apparently absent in Cain's. I believe the prophets give insight here as to another reason why God rejected Cain's sacrifice. "Several times, especially in prophetic literature, we are informed that God's reason for rejecting a sacrifice or an offering was that religious ritual had become a substitute for obedience and holy living"<sup>13</sup> (See Amos 5:21-24, Isaiah 1:11, 29:13, 59:6-11, The Pharisees). If you take faith out of worship, that is what it becomes—a useless ritual. God desires our worship to come from faith not from obligation. This point really encompasses the other two, because when worship is done apart from faith it does not exalt Christ and it does not express love or devotion. Therefore, the last reason God rejected Cain's worship is because ***Cain's worship was not done in faith.***

As a result of Cain's poor worship, his earthly relationships suffered. So, when we are experiencing sin and conflict in our relationships, the question really should be geared to uncovering the status of our worship. If we are not exalting God in worship, not giving him our best worship, and not worshipping him in faith, our relationships will suffer. Therefore, the first thing that needs to be dealt with is not any perceived problem in behavior, but our problem with worship. If it is the other person's worship (as it was the case with Abel), the solution is not to fix their behavior. Our goal should be to introduce them to Jesus and let him capture their heart, so that they might worship him properly.

Three things about God encourage the believer. The first is the birth of Cain. Eve proclaimed that it was with the help of God she bore Cain. God helped Eve and provided for her during her experience of the curse of sin. Because of the sin curse, we are born not knowing how to worship God properly. It is good to know that God helps us overcome the curse of sin through Christ. Secondly, God did not let Cain stray without warning him. God does the same with us today, providing a way out for temptation. Lastly, it is the birth of Seth and the return to the worship of God. God's sovereign plan cannot be thwarted by sinful man and God's plan is to raise up people who worship him from every nation and tribe. So, if you struggle with worshipping, we can be certain that asking God to help us grow in worship is praying according to his will and that he will indeed help us grow in our worship.

#### **Good questions to ask:**

- Do you believe that your life and daily worship practices exalt Christ?
- Does your worship express devotion and love to God? Or are you just giving him your second best?
- Does worship flow from a heart of faith or is it just something you are doing out of obligation?

The main thrust of this lesson is to reveal that the issues that people experience in their relationships are most likely a result of bad worship. So, the movement needs to be creating people who are faithfully worshipping God in spirit and in truth. There may be a need for you to unpack these truths more than normal.

#### **Front Page Questions**

God helps his people bear the sin curse. God defines how he is to be worshipped. God provides his people with a way out when they are being tempted. God judges sin. God's plan cannot be stopped. God will raise up people who worship him.	Man's actions are a result of man's worship. Both God and sin desire to rule over our hearts. One leads to life the other leads to destruction. Our relationships are affected by our worship.
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<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, 59.