KINGDOM ESSENTIALS · SECOND EDITION

Complete Course Content

All 29 sessions, in full — teaching, word studies, experience, and six-day practice.

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HIS STORY

Kingdom Essentials: The Mission

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Telling His Story

03 The Kingdom Announcement

04 The Kingdom Initiation

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The Question

You have almost certainly heard the Bible summarized before. Perhaps you were told it is a book about how to be saved, or a manual for holy living, or a love letter from God. None of those are false. But all of them are too small, and a summary that is too small does real damage: it lets you read the whole book and still miss what it is about.

Here is the difficulty. The Bible has sixty-six books, more words than *War and Peace*, and a thread running through all of it that is rarely taught — not because it is hidden, but because it is not found in a single verse or chapter or book. It runs underneath the whole Bible. And a person who has never been shown the thread might spend a lifetime collecting true statements about God without ever seeing what He is doing.

So the question is: what is God actually doing, and what does it have to do with you?

Not what the Bible says about a hundred topics. What the story is *about*. Everything in the sessions that follow hangs on the answer, and if you get this one wrong you will file everything else in the wrong place.

One more thing worth naming before the story starts. This curriculum treats Scripture as reliable testimony — accurately transmitted, rightly gathered, worth trusting — on every page that follows. That claim deserves its own case, and making it properly takes more room than any one session has. The full argument — how the Bible was actually written, preserved, and assembled into the book you're holding — has its own course, *Kingdom Guide*. This session, and all that follow, build on that foundation rather than re-arguing it each time.

CONSIDER THIS

Before you read another line, answer the question in your own words, in writing. Not the right answer — *your* answer. What is the Bible about?

Keep it. You will look at it again on Day 6.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I have opinions about You, and some of them I did not get from You. As I read, show me where I have been looking at a small piece and calling it the whole thing. I am willing to be surprised. Holy Spirit, teach me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Telling His Story

The story does not begin with us, and it does not begin with a problem. It begins with a God who wanted to live with people.

> *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*
>
> **GENESIS 1:1**

Almost everyone in the Western world can quote that sentence. Far fewer have noticed what it establishes. It is not primarily a claim about mechanism or timing. It is a claim about ownership and intent — that everything which exists was made on purpose, by someone, for something.

> *"'In the beginning' reminds us that the Bible as a whole is a story, or rather the story — the true story of the universe."*
>
> Christopher J. H. Wright · Old Testament scholar and missiologist · *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*, 2019

What God made, He made good, and into it He placed image bearers and breathed His own life into them.

> *God saw all that he had made — and it was **very good**! There was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.*
>
> **GENESIS 1:31**

> *The Lord God formed the man from the soil of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the **breath of life**, and the man became a living being.*
>
> **GENESIS 2:7**

Scripture does not tell us how long intimacy lasted. A day, a season, years — we are not told. What we are told is what it *was*: God living with His image bearers, in a place He had made for them, with nothing between them. That is the opening scene, and it is worth fixing in your mind, because every scene afterward is measured against it.

Then the serpent.

> *When the woman saw that the tree produced fruit that was good for food, was attractive to the eye, and was desirable for making one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. Then **the eyes of both of them opened, and they knew they were naked**; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*
>
> **GENESIS 3:6–7**

Notice what is reported as the first consequence. Not a lightning bolt. Not an argument. Not a rebuke. They immediately knew something was missing, and that loss registered in their minds before anyone said a word about it. Whatever changed in that instant, the effect is not in doubt: the intimacy of Eden — God with them, nothing between — was gone.

Whatever else the Fall did, it put a barrier between God and the people He had made to live with.

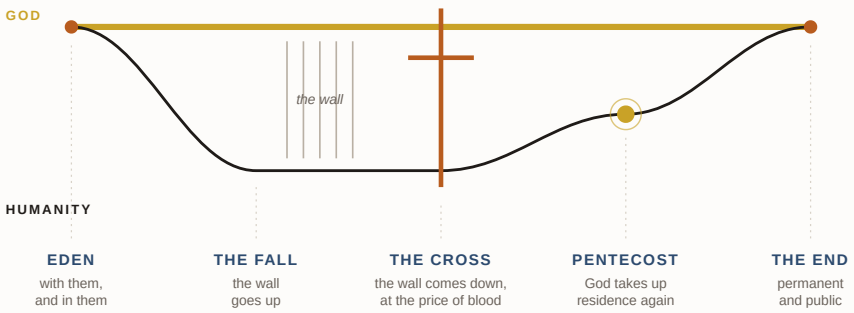
The rest of Scripture is about God removing that barrier and restoring the lost intimacy.

> *For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who **destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility**,*
>
> **EPHESIANS 2:14**

That is the story-line. Not “God rescues souls from a doomed planet,” though souls are rescued. Not “God gives us rules,” though He gives us plenty of commands. **God is removing what stands between Himself and His image bearers, and He is doing it at His own cost.**

Trace it and you can see the shape:

- **Eden** — God with them, and in them.
- **The Fall** — God separates, and the wall goes up.
- **The Cross** — the wall comes down, at the price of blood.
- **Pentecost** — God takes up residence in people again.
- **The End** — the residence becomes permanent and public.

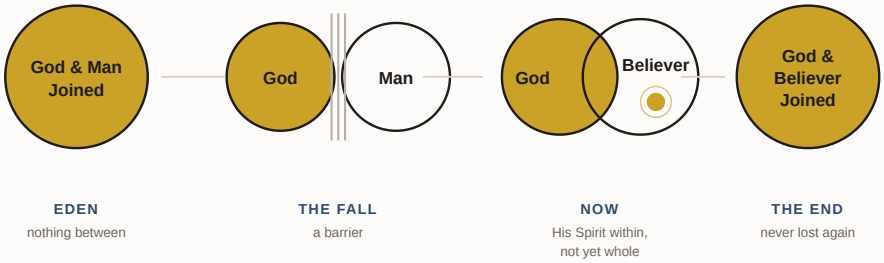


The arc of His Story. The gold line never wavers; it is the lower line that moves. What opens at the Fall is closed at the Cross — and note where the cost falls.

> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has **come upon you**, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.*
>
> **ACTS 1:8**

> *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: "Look! **The residence of God is among human beings.** He will live among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them.*
>
> **REVELATION 21:3**

Read those two verses against Genesis 2 and the shape is unmistakable. The story ends where it began, but larger, and this time it cannot be lost. **God with people**. That is what He is doing.



Four states of His presence. The third panel is the one you are living in — His Spirit genuinely within you, and the union not yet whole. Most of the Christian life is lived in that third circle.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> There is a reason this thread is hard to see, and it is not spiritual. It is quite normal.
>
> Think back to the last car you bought. The day after you drove it home, you began seeing the same make and model everywhere — as though half the city had bought one that week. They were always there. But you were not looking for them, so they blended into traffic.
>
> Psychologists call it confirmation bias. We notice what we are already carrying a category for, and we read past what we are not. It is how the mind copes with a complicated world, and it works exactly the same way on a page of Scripture. You will see the verses you were taught to see. The others blend into traffic.

So the work of this session is less about adding information than about backing far enough away to see the shape of what you already have — the shape God has always seen, since He is outside of time and is not improvising.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Which part of that arc — Eden, the Fall, the Cross, Pentecost, the End — were you taught most? Which were you taught least?
2. What difference would it make if the point of the story were God living *with you* rather than God sending you to either heaven or hell?

The Kingdom Announcement

If the Bible's overarching story is God restoring His presence among His image bearers, then there is a word for the state of affairs He is restoring, and it is the word Jesus used more than any other.

A kingdom is where a king rules. It is where the king's will sets the culture — what is normal, what is expected, what is unthinkable. Ask what a place is like and you are really asking who is in charge of it.

WORD STUDY

βασιλεία *basileia* G932

> **"kingdom"** · Matthew 4:17 · Luke 4:43

Range. Kingship, royal rule, sovereignty; and derivatively the realm over which that rule is exercised.

The sense here. In the Gospels' announcement texts, the primary sense is the **reign**, not the territory. *Basileia* is the abstract noun formed from *basileus*, "king" — it names the *exercise of kingship* first, and the domain second.

Why it carries the argument. Most English readers hear "kingdom of God" as a place, and usually as a place elsewhere. That reading quietly relocates the whole message to the afterlife. If the primary sense is God's *reign*, then the announcement "the kingdom of heaven is near" is not a statement about geography or timing after death. It is a statement that God has begun to exercise His rule here, and that you may live under it now.

Source. BDAG, s.v. βασιλεία.

John the Baptist announced the imminence of the Kingdom first (Matthew 3:1–2); when Jesus began His own ministry, He preached the identical message.

> *From that time Jesus began to preach this message: "Repent, for the* ***kingdom*** (βασιλεία) *of heaven* ***is near*** (ἐγγίζω)*!"*
>
> **MATTHEW 4:17**

And Jesus said plainly that announcing it was the reason He had come.

> *But Jesus said to them, "****I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God*** (βασιλεία) *to the other towns too,* ***for that is what I was sent to do****."*
>
> **LUKE 4:43**

That sentence should reorganize a good deal of what you assume about His ministry. Ask most believers why Jesus came and they will say, "to die for my sins" — which is true, and which Jesus Himself here describes differently. He says He was sent to *announce the kingdom*. The cross is how the kingdom is won.

The Gospels bear this out by sheer volume. The kingdom is named well over a hundred times across the four Gospels; Jesus is the one saying it in the large majority of those. It is not a sub-theme.

WORD STUDY

ἐγγίζω *engizō* G1448

> **"is near"** · Matthew 4:17

Range. To come near, to approach, to draw close.

The sense here. Matthew 4:17 has the **perfect** tense — *ēngiken*. Greek's perfect describes a completed action

whose *result stands*. Not “is approaching.” Something has drawn near and **remains** near.

Why it carries the argument. The tense is the whole announcement. If the verb were future, the kingdom would be a thing to wait for. In the perfect, it has arrived and stayed — which is why the required response is *repent*, a change of mind about who is in charge, rather than *wait*.

Source. BDAG, s.v. ἐγγίζω.

Even the enemy treated the kingdom as the center of the contest. In the wilderness, the offer he made was not about food or spectacle but about jurisdiction.

> *Then the devil led him up to a high place and showed him in a flash* ***all the kingdoms of the world****. And he said to him, “To you I will grant this whole realm — and the glory that goes along with it, for* ***it has been relinquished to me****, and I can give it to anyone I wish. So then, if you will worship me, all this will be yours.”*
>
> **LUKE 4:5–7**

Notice what Jesus does not do. He does not dispute the claim. He refuses the terms.

That silence raises a fair question — in what sense did the kingdoms of the world belong to the enemy at all, and how much authority does Scripture actually grant him? It deserves more room than this session can give it, and that is taken up in **Session 13, Kingdom Authority**. For now, note only this: what the enemy offered Jesus was the kingdoms *without the cross*. The temptation was never “have something you cannot have.” It was “have what you came for, cheaply” — which is the shape of most of the temptations you will meet.

The Kingdom Initiation

Something happened at the Ascension that most Christians pass over on the way to Pentecost.

> *This power he exercised in Christ when he raised him from the dead and **seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms** far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And God **put all things under Christ's feet**, and gave him to the church as head over all things.*
>
> **EPHESIANS 1:20–22**

ILLUSTRATION

When a Roman general won a decisive victory, the Senate could grant him a *triumph*. He rode into the city in a chariot at the head of a procession — his army behind him, the spoils of the campaign carried in view of the crowds, and the defeated walking in chains where everyone could see them. The route ended at the temple on the Capitoline hill. The point of the spectacle was not the fighting. The fighting was over. The point was the public display of a victory already won.

Paul reaches for exactly that image:

*Disarming the rulers and authorities, he has made a public disgrace of them, **triumphing over them by the cross*** (Colossians 2:15).



The south panel inside the Arch of Titus, carved in Rome around AD 81 by people who had watched triumphal processions — this is what Paul's readers pictured when he wrote of Christ *triumphing over them by the cross*, except that in his image the powers are the ones walking in chains.

Arch of Titus, south panel, Rome, c. AD 81. Photograph by בית השלום (Beit HaShalom), via Wikimedia Commons, licensed CC BY 3.0.

The Ascension is the procession. Jesus does not arrive in heaven hoping. He arrives seated, and what He is seated over is named: every rule, authority, power, and dominion. The war was decided at a hill outside Jerusalem. What follows is the announcement of it.

Then, ten days later, power — the Spirit poured out on ordinary people, so that the reign just established could be carried into every corner of the world by the people He had made to live with Him.

Which is precisely what Jesus had taught them to pray for.

> *So pray this way: "Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored,* ***may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven****."*
>
> **MATTHEW 6:9–10**

That is not a formula to recite. It is a request with a direction, and the direction is *down* — His reign, His way of doing things, arriving here, arriving now.

WHAT ABOUT …

The world being obviously broken?

If the kingdom has come, why does the evidence look like this?

You do not need a theologian to raise this. Anyone who has buried a child, or watched a country tear itself apart, or simply read the news, has raised it. And a curriculum that announces a present kingdom without answering it is asking you to disbelieve your own eyes.

The New Testament's answer is not that the brokenness is imaginary. It is that the kingdom has been **inaugurated and not yet consummated** — a state of affairs the writers describe without apparent embarrassment.

> *"You put all things under his control." For when he put all things under his control, he left nothing outside of his control.* ***At present we do not yet see all things under his control****,*
>
> HEBREWS 2:8

Read that slowly. In a single sentence the writer asserts total dominion and concedes that we do not see it. He is not confused. He is describing a decided war that is still being fought across the territory.

> *For he* ***must reign until*** *he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be eliminated is death.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:25–26

Must reign until. The reign is present tense. The completion is future. Theologians call this the **already / not yet** paradox, and it is not a dodge invented to explain away disappointment — it is the structure the New Testament itself uses. Paul can

say in the same letter that Christ reigns now and that the last enemy has not yet been dealt with.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture is clear *that* the kingdom is both here and coming. It does not explain *why* God chose to work this way — why an inaugurated reign with a long delay rather than a single decisive appearing. We are told the shape. We are not given the reason.

The Kingdom Mandate

There is a rule of thumb worth knowing: when Scripture introduces something for the first time, that first appearance is usually the clearest and most important. So look at the first thing God ever said to human beings.

> *God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth** and **subdue** (כָּבַשׁ) it! **Rule** (רָדָה) over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground."*
>
> **GENESIS 1:27–28**

I call that the Garden Mandate, and it comes *before* the command about the tree. It is the first assignment given to the human race, and it has never been withdrawn. It is repeated to Noah after the flood. It stands behind the scattering at Babel. And it appears again, in different words and a different order, on a mountain in Galilee.

WORD STUDY

רָדָה *radah* H7287 · and כָּבַשׁ *kabash* H3533

“Rule” · Genesis 1:28 · **“subdue”** · Genesis 1:28

Range. *radah* — to rule, to have dominion, to govern. *kabash* — to subdue, to bring into subjection; a strong verb, used elsewhere of subduing land or enemies.

The sense here. Both are royal words, and both are addressed to image bearers. The context is decisive: God has just said what these creatures *are* before He says what they are to *do*. The rule is exercised as His image, which means it is defined by His character, not by the raw force the verbs could carry elsewhere.

Why it carries the argument. The mandate is not a license to exploit and it is not merely a job. It is delegated kingship, and it is delegated to creatures whose defining description is that they *look like the King*. Strip the image-bearing and the verbs turn into conquest. Keep it, and they describe a steward governing on behalf of someone whose character is on display in how the governing is done.

Source. HALOT, s.vv. רדה, כבש.

ILLUSTRATION

There is a piece of ancient furniture behind Genesis 1 that most readers walk past.

When a king in the ancient Near East ruled territory he could not personally occupy, he would have an image of himself erected in it — a statue at a border, a relief on a rock face. The image was not decoration and it was not vanity. It was a legal marker. It said *this place is under the authority of the one this looks like*, and it stood in for the king where the king was not standing.

Genesis 1 picks up that furniture and does something startling with it. God fills His world with images of Himself too — but they are not carved. They breathe. They are plural, they are male and female, and they are handed a mandate in the same sentence that names what they are - image bearers.

Which means the assignment and the identity arrive together. You are not told to rule and then, separately, informed that you resemble God. You are told to

rule *because* you do.

On this background see G. K. Beale, The Temple and the Church's Mission *(2004).*

A more common expression of the mandate is one you have heard many times, probably without hearing it as a restatement.

> *Then Jesus came up and said to them, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.** Therefore go and **make disciples** (μαθητεύω) of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*
>
> **MATTHEW 28:18–20**

Set them side by side:

GARDEN MANDATE	GREAT COMMISSION
Be fruitful	Make disciples
Multiply	Baptizing them
Fill the earth	Go … all nations
Subdue it / rule	Teaching them to obey everything

Different words. Different order. The same assignment — and now issued by the One who has just announced that all authority has been handed to Him. The mandate was never cancelled. It was reissued, with the authority problem solved.

WORD STUDY

μαθητεύω *mathēteuō* G3100

“make disciples” · Matthew 28:19

Range. To make a disciple of; to cause someone to become a learner and follower.

The sense here. In Matthew 28:19–20, *mathēteusate* — “make disciples” — is **the only imperative in the sentence.** “Go,” “baptizing,” and “teaching” are all participles hanging off it.

Why it carries the argument. The grammar assigns the weight. The command is not *go*; the command is *make disciples*, and going, baptizing, and teaching describe how it is done. A church that measures its obedience by how far it travels has read the sentence backward. And note what a disciple is by definition here — someone taught **to obey**, not merely to agree. The mandate is not about producing people who hold correct opinions about the King.

Source. BDAG, s.v. μαθητεύω.

WHAT ABOUT …

“Bringing heaven to earth” — isn’t that a political program?

This is the objection a thoughtful reader should raise, and it has history behind it. Christians who talk about dominion, subduing the earth, and bringing heaven down have sometimes meant seizing institutions, and occasionally worse. If that is what you are hearing, you are right to resist it.

It is not what the texts support, and the strongest correction comes from Jesus.

> *Jesus replied, “**My kingdom is not from this world.** If my kingdom were from this world, my servants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”*

> **JOHN 18:36**

Read the reason He gives. The proof that His kingdom is not *from* this world is that His people are *not fighting*. The kingdom's origin governs its method. A reign that arrives by force is, by that fact, an ungodly reign.

And notice how the mandate is actually carried out in Matthew 28: by making disciples, baptizing, and teaching obedience. Persuasion, initiation, and instruction. Not one coercive verb in the sentence.

I AM NOT SAYING

- That the church's assignment is to take control of governments or institutions.
- That the kingdom advances by pressure, legislation, or force.
- That Christians build the kingdom, or that its arrival depends on our success.

I AM SAYING

- That God's reign is meant to reach every corner of ordinary life — work, money, family, neighborhood, schools, government — and not be quarantined into an hour on Sunday.
- That the method Jesus gave is disciple-making: persuasion, service, and teaching people to obey.
- That the kingdom comes because the King is seated, and we are invited into the work, not responsible for the outcome.

CONSIDER THIS

The mandate is not abstract. Somewhere in your life there is a room, a team, a household, or a street where you have real influence and have never once thought about it as territory God's reign is meant to reach.

Name it. One place. That is where this begins.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. If “make disciples” is the command and “go” describes how, what would change about how you measure a life well spent?
2. Where have you been treating the kingdom as somewhere you go when you die, rather than a reign you live under now?

The Turn

You now have the shape of the story: God with people, then the wall, then the cross, then the Spirit, then the end where He lives among us permanently. And you have the assignment that runs from the garden to the mountain without interruption.

Here is what remains. **You are not the audience.** The Bible is not a play you watch from a seat; the cast is still being filled, and the invitation in front of you is to **take your part** in your own generation.

> *“We are not mere spectators, an audience in the theater of the Bible. No, we get to be part of the story; we become actors on stage. Indeed, we are called and commissioned to join the cast of God’s drama and play our part in our own generation.”*
>
> Christopher J. H. Wright · *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*, 2019

Which means the first work is not to learn more. It is to begin paying attention.

The Experience · Journaling

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> For years my pastor encouraged our congregation to journal, and for years I waved it off — that was for middle-school girls with diaries, not a grown man. I did not budge until I felt stuck in my walk with God and, out of better options, finally tried what I had been dismissing. That was more than fifteen years ago. I have not missed more than a handful of days since, and no other single discipline has done as much to enrich my time with the Lord.

God had already given the instruction, long before any pastor of mine did.

> *The Lord responded: "**Write down this message!** Record it legibly on tablets, so the one who announces it may read it easily."*
>
> **HABAKKUK 2:2**

Habakkuk was told to write because a message worth receiving is a message worth keeping — legible, returnable, not left to memory. That is the whole case for what follows.

This one is the practice everything else in this course will be built on, and it is the simplest: **write down what God says to you.**

Not a diary. Not a record of your feelings. A record of what you notice Him saying — through Scripture, through a thought that arrives and will not leave, through a person, through circumstance.

How to start. Get something to write in that you are willing to be honest. Each day this week, read the assigned passage below, then write two things: *what I noticed*, and *what I think He is saying*. Three sentences is enough. Date every entry.

Why it matters more than it looks like it does. God speaks more often than we recall. The gap is memory, not silence. A written record turns "I think God said something once" into evidence you can return to — and in six months, the pattern

in your own handwriting will teach you more about how He speaks to you than any book on hearing God can.

If nothing comes, write that. “I read this, and nothing came.” That is an honest entry and it belongs in the record.

BIG IDEAS

1. The Bible is one story, and the story is God removing what stands between Himself and His image bearers.
2. It ends where it began — God living with people — but permanently and without fear of loss.
3. The kingdom is first God’s **reign**, not a place; and Jesus said announcing it was what He was sent to do.
4. The reign has begun and is not yet complete. Both halves are the New Testament’s own position, not a concession to disappointment.
5. The mandate given in the garden was reissued on the mountain, and its main verb is *make disciples*.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God is not recruiting an audience for His story. He is filling a cast, and He wrote a part for you before you were born.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I have been reading Your book for what I could get out of it. Show me what You are doing.

> *Where I have made the story small, make it whole. Where I have been sitting in the audience, show me my place in the cast — and give me the nerve to take my part. In Jesus' name, amen.*

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (1959).
Short, plain, and the book that put "already / not yet" into ordinary Christian vocabulary. If one section of this session raised more questions than it answered, it was probably that one, and this is the place to go.

SUBSTANTIAL

Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (IVP Academic, 2006).
The full-length version of what this session compressed into three sections — the whole canon read as a single mission. Long, and worth it.

ACADEMIC

G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (IVP Academic, 2004).
The argument behind the word study on radah — Eden as sanctuary, the image as royal marker, and the mandate as temple-expansion. Changes how Genesis 1–2 reads.

George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Eerdmans, 1974).
The scholarly treatment of the inaugurated kingdom. Read this if the "already / not yet" section felt convenient rather than earned.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Genesis 1:26–31 and 2:7–9. Slowly. This is the world as it was meant to be. *What in this scene is most unlike the world you woke up in this morning?*

DAY 2

Read Genesis 3:1–13. Watch for what is lost, and in what order. *The first thing they did after the wall went up was hide. Where do you hide?*

DAY 3

Read Ephesians 2:11–22. Paul is describing demolition. *What does it cost God to remove the wall — and what does that tell you about how much He wanted you back?*

DAY 4

Read Luke 4:14–21 and 4:42–44. Jesus states His own job description twice. *If announcing the kingdom is what He was sent to do, what have you assumed He was sent to do?*

DAY 5

Read Matthew 28:16–20 alongside Genesis 1:26–28. Two mountains, one assignment. *Which of the four parts of the mandate is most absent from your life right now?*

DAY 6

Print your Session Map — use the button at the top of this page — and find one other person; anyone will do. Bring what you wrote in *Consider This*, then ask them for five minutes: walk them through the five circles, and tell them how your own answer to “what is the Bible about” moved along the way. *What*

surprised them? And what question of theirs could you not answer cleanly?

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

His Story

“What is God actually doing, and what does it have to do with you?”

THE BEGINNING

God made a world, placed His image bearers in it, and gave them a mandate to fill and rule it — nothing between Him and them.

Genesis 1:1
Genesis 1:28–29
Genesis 1:31
Genesis 2:7

THE FALL

Their eyes opened, and intimacy was gone — a wall rose between them and God.

Genesis 3:6–7

THE CROSS

The wall of hostility is destroyed — at God’s own cost, not ours.

Ephesians 2:14

THE KINGDOM

Jesus ascends as King and pours out His Spirit — His people are filled, commissioned, and sent to carry His reign outward.

Matthew 28:19–20
Acts 1:8

THE END

“The residence of God is among human beings” — permanent, and public.

Revelation 21:3

SO NOW

THE KINGDOM, ANNOUNCED

Not a place — God’s *reign*. It has drawn near and remains near; announcing it is what Jesus was sent to do.

Matthew 4:17 · *Luke 4:43*

ALREADY / NOT YET

The reign is present tense. Its completion is future. Both halves are Scripture’s own position, not a concession.

Hebrews 2:8 · *1 Corinthians 15:25–26*

THE MANDATE, REISSUED

Be fruitful, multiply, fill, rule (subdue) — given in the garden, reissued on the mountain as *make disciples*.

Genesis 1:27–28 · *Matthew 28:18–20*

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God is not recruiting an audience for His story. He is filling a cast, and He wrote a part for you before you were born.

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Next · Session 2, Kingdom Life. You have the story and the assignment. Session 2 is about the life this makes available — and about the gap between that life and the one you are currently living.

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2

KINGDOM LIFE

Kingdom Essentials: The Mission

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 The Announcement

03 What Is a Kingdom Life?

04 What Does a Kingdom Life Look Like?

05 Who Can Live a Kingdom Life?

06 The Gap

07 The Pursuit

08 The Turn

09 The Experience · Gap Assessment

10 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Session 1 ended with an assignment and a promise: God is filling a cast, and there is a part written for you. This session is about what that part actually looks like on a Tuesday.

Most Christians carry a quiet assumption they have never examined — that the Christian life is essentially *waiting*. Waiting for heaven, and coping in the meantime. Behave well, endure what comes, and one day it will be worth it. On that account, salvation is a rescue from here to there, and the years in between are a holding pattern with better morals.

If that is roughly your picture, this session is going to press on it.

So the question is: what did Jesus actually die to give you — and when does it start?

Not what you will receive later. What is on offer now, what it costs, and how far your present life sits from it.

CONSIDER THIS

Pull out your journal and finish this sentence in writing, before you read on: *Because I am a Christian, my life right now is different in that…*

Be honest rather than impressive. You will need this at the end.

One more thing. Keep your journal handy as you work through this and every subsequent session. Record your revelations, observations, and your discomforts. Ask the Holy Spirit what He wants you to see.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You know how small my expectations have become, and how much of that I have called realism. Show me the life Jesus actually died to give me. If I have settled, tell me. If I have been waiting for something You already handed me, open my eyes. Holy Spirit, teach me. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Announcement

Four hundred years of silence stood between the last Old Testament prophet and the next voice God raised up. Four centuries with no word. Israel lived under Roman occupation, taxed by an empire and policed in its own streets, waiting for a deliverer who did not come and did not come and did not come.

Then a man appeared in the wilderness with a message.

ILLUSTRATION

Consider what it cost to hear him.

Matthew reports that Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan went out to John. Understand what that sentence describes. No cars,

no trains, no buses — and for the overwhelming majority, no donkey either. It meant walking. From Jerusalem down to the Jordan is roughly twenty miles of descent through hard, dry country, and then the same twenty miles back up.

People do not walk forty miles in that terrain for a religious lecture. They walk it because they are desperate, and because they have heard that God has finally said something.

Hold that picture. The question this session eventually asks you is whether you want what is offered badly enough to walk toward it.

> *In those days John the Baptist came into the wilderness of Judea proclaiming, "**Repent** (μετανοέω), for the kingdom of heaven is near."*
>
> **MATTHEW 3:1–2**

We hear "repent" and think *apologize*. Feel bad, say sorry, resolve to do better. That is not what the word means, and the difference is the difference between guilt and transformation.

WORD STUDY

μετανοέω *metanoeō* G3340

"Repent" · Matthew 3:2 · Mark 1:15

Range. To change one's mind; to think differently afterward; to reconsider so thoroughly that the reconsideration reorders what one does.

The sense here. *Meta* ("after, change") + *noeō* ("to perceive, to think") — the verb is about the **mind**. Not primarily emotion, and not primarily behaviour, though both should follow. John is telling a nation to *think again* about what God is doing, because their assumptions are about to be overtaken by events.

Why it carries the argument. If repentance were merely regret, the appropriate response to the announcement would be sorrow. It is not. The appropriate response is a revised view of reality — the kingdom is *here*, so stop thinking as though it were elsewhere. That is the work this entire session is asking of you.

Source. BDAG, s.v. μετανοέω.

Then Jesus took up the identical message, and added a word that dates it.

> *Now after John was imprisoned, Jesus went into Galilee and proclaimed the gospel of God. He said, "The **time** (καιρός) is fulfilled and the **kingdom of God** is near. **Repent** (μετανοέω) and believe the gospel!"*
>
> **MARK 1:14–15**

WORD STUDY

καιρός *kairos* G2540

> **"time"** · Mark 1:15

Range. A decisive or appointed time; the right moment; an occasion with content, as distinct from duration.

The sense here. Greek has another word for time — *chronos*, the ticking of the clock, the sort you measure. Mark does not use it. Jesus does not say *enough time has passed*. He says **the appointed moment has arrived**.

Why it carries the argument. *Kairos* makes the announcement an event rather than a prediction. Something

has begun that had not begun the week before, and the required response is not preparation but a change of mind.

Source. BDAG, s.v. καιρός; contrast χρόνος.

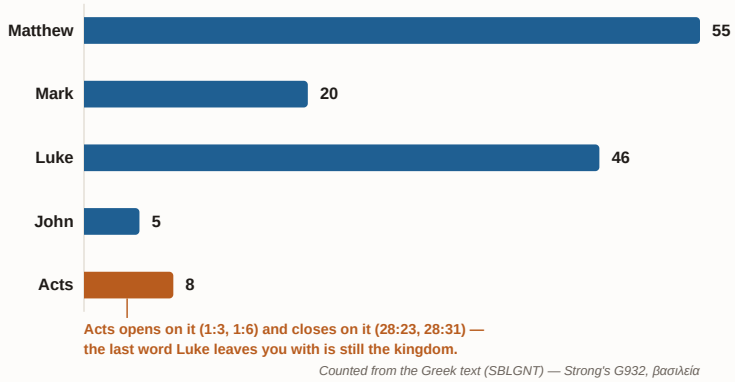
And when He sent the disciples out, He put the same sentence in their mouths — with instructions attached that are worth reading slowly.

> *As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near!' **Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.** Freely you received, freely give.*
>
> **MATTHEW 10:7–8**

Three voices, one message: John, then Jesus, then the Twelve. And the message is not *the kingdom is coming*. It is **near** — the perfect tense you met in Session 1, an arrival that has happened and stands.

The kingdom is not primarily somewhere you go. It is a reign you may live under, starting now.

And these three verses are not the exception. They are the pattern.



134 times. Count every occurrence of *basileia* — "kingdom" — across the four Gospels and Acts, straight from the Greek text, and this is what you get. Matthew and Luke carry the weight of it; John does something theologically different with the idea rather than dropping it (see John 3:3, 3:5, 18:36); and Luke does not let go of it even in Acts — the book opens on kingdom teaching and closes on it, four chapters and twenty-seven years apart.

What Is a Kingdom Life?

Here is the definition this course will use, and it is worth memorising:

A KINGDOM LIFE IS A LIFE SURRENDERED TO THE FATHER, MODELED AFTER THE LIFE OF JESUS, AND EMPOWERED BY THE INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT.

Three clauses, three Persons, and no room for a spectator. Surrender is a posture of the will. Modeled is a pattern for the journey. Empowered is a source that is not you.

Notice what the definition does *not* say. It does not say comfortable. It does not say successful. It does not say a life free of trouble — Jesus was explicit that

trouble is included (John 16:33). What it says is that the reign of God has an address, and the address is a human life.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Two doors, one house.
>
> The gospel of salvation is the front door. You come in out of the weather. You are safe, you belong, the danger is behind you — and that is not a small thing, because outside it was raining and dark and you were not going to survive the night.
>
> But nobody *lives* in an entryway. The kingdom is the kitchen. That is where the food is, where the conversation happens, where the tears flow, where healing and forgiveness happen, where people sit for hours without noticing. You have to come through the front door to get to the kitchen. But strangers get the front hall. **Only family gets the kitchen.**
>
> A great many Christians have come through the front door, hung up their coat, and stood in the entryway for thirty years, grateful to be dry and never once walking down the hall.

What Does a Kingdom Life Look Like?

Scripture describes this life in a dozen directions at once. Rather than give you a list to skim, here are four clusters — because they are not four unrelated benefits but one life seen from four sides.

Identity. Purpose. Power. Price. Those four words are worth keeping, because they are also the shape of the rest of this series, and because you will be asked to score yourself against them before this session ends.

Identity

What is now true of you. Not earned, not pending. Stated as accomplished fact, and unpacked properly in Sessions 11 and 12.

> *So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; what is old has passed away — look, what is new has come!*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

> *God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him **we would become the righteousness of God**.*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 5:21**

> *Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, "If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples and you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free**."*
>
> **JOHN 8:31–32**

New. Righteous. Free. All three in the indicative mood — descriptions, not targets. This is imputed righteousness

IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

Righteousness placed to a believer's account because of Christ, rather than earned by the believer's own record. "God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This is why God calls you righteous before He makes you righteous. The verdict comes first and the making follows — which means you are not working toward acceptance, you are working from it.

Treated fully in Session 11

: God calls you righteous *before* He makes you righteous, and that order is not a technicality. It is the ground you stand on while the making happens.

Purpose

What you were made for. Taken up in full in Session 8.

> *"The kingdom of heaven is like a **treasure**, hidden in a field, that a person found and hid. Then because of joy he went and **sold all that he had** and bought that field."*
>
> **MATTHEW 13:44**

A purposeful life and a fruitful life — a life with an assignment on it.

Power

What you have been given to work with. The whole second movement of this book — Sessions 9 through 15 — is about this one.

> *Look, I have given you **authority** (ἐξουσία) to tread on snakes and scorpions and on the full force of the enemy, and **nothing will hurt you**.*
>
> **LUKE 10:19**

WORD STUDY

ἐξουσία *exousia* G1849

> **"authority"** · Luke 10:19

Range. The right to act; delegated jurisdiction; permission that carries weight because of who granted it.

The sense here. Not raw force — Greek has *dynamis* for that, and Luke uses both in this very verse ("authority… over the full force of the enemy"). *Exousia* is the badge, not the muscle.

Why it carries the argument. A police officer stops traffic with a raised hand, not with superior strength. The hand works because of what stands behind it. This is why the Christian life is not a matter of summoning enough spiritual intensity. **You are not being asked to overpower anything. You are being asked to know what you carry.**

Source. BDAG, s.v. ἐξουσία; cf. δύναμις in the same verse.

> *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and may have it* ***abundantly*** (περισσός).
>
> JOHN 10:10

WORD STUDY

περισσός *perissos* G4053

> **“abundantly”** · John 10:10

Range. Over and above; beyond what is necessary; surplus, more than enough.

The sense here. The core idea is **excess relative to need** — not luxury, but more than the minimum required. In John 10 the contrast is with a thief who leaves a flock diminished; the shepherd leaves it with more life than survival requires.

Why it carries the argument. Western readers hear “abundantly” and think money. The word does not say what the surplus consists of; the context says it is *life*. What is promised is not a comfortable standard of living but a supply exceeding what the assignment demands.

Discipline check: the range of *perissos* includes “superior” and “extraordinary,” and it would be easy to import all of that here and land on a prosperity reading. One sense operates in one sentence, and John’s sentence is about life against death.

Source. BDAG, s.v. περισσός.

Price

What it will cost you. This cluster is usually left off the list, and leaving it off is how people are ambushed.

The first cost is the steepest, and Paul states it as something already done to him.

> *For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God.* ***I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*** *So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*
>
> **GALATIANS 2:19–20**

There is a practical consequence to that verse: **you cannot offend a dead man.** A life genuinely surrendered is a life increasingly difficult to insult, because the self that would have taken the insult has been handed over. That is a cost before it is a freedom, and it is worth being honest about the order.

Beyond it, a Kingdom Life is an *uncomfortable* life — the Spirit is named Comforter

> **PARACLETE**
>
> From the Greek παράκλητος (paraklētos) — one called to someone's side. English translations render it Helper, Advocate, Counselor, or Comforter, and no single word carries all of it. The word belongs to the courtroom as much as the sickroom.

> *Jesus uses it of the Spirit in John 14–16, and 1 John 2:1 uses it of Jesus Himself. Notice what "Comforter" implies about the conditions He is sent into: you do not send a comforter to someone who is comfortable.*
>
> Treated fully in Session 10

, which tells you something about the conditions He is sent into. It is a *warrior's* life, because the works of the devil do not dismantle themselves. And it is a life in which trouble is promised rather than avoided.

> *I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. **In the world you have trouble and suffering**, but take courage — I have conquered the world.*
>
> **JOHN 16:33**

Both halves of that verse are the same sentence. Any version of the Christian life that keeps one and drops the other is not the one Jesus described.

WHAT ABOUT …

"Nothing will hurt you" — when Christians are plainly hurt?

Luke 10:19 says *nothing will hurt you*. Believers are martyred every year. Believers get cancer, lose children, and are imprisoned for their faith. The objection is not clever; it is obvious, and anyone who reads that verse honestly will feel it.

Three things are worth saying, and the third is the one that matters most.

First, look at what provoked the sentence. The seventy-two had just come back exhilarated because demons submitted to them. Jesus grants the point — and then, in the very next breath, takes the ground out from under their excitement.

> *"Look, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and on the full force of the enemy, and nothing*

> *will hurt you.* ***Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names stand written in heaven.”***
>
> **LUKE 10:17–20**

Jesus Himself relativises the promise within two sentences of making it. The thing that cannot be taken from them is not their bodily safety. It is their names, written down.

Second, the New Testament nowhere treats this as a guarantee of physical immunity — and the men who heard it are the proof. Every one of them knew persecution; most of them, according to the early church’s memory, died violently. If they understood Luke 10:19 as a promise of safety, they were catastrophically wrong about it, and none of the writing they left behind suggests they felt betrayed.

Third, and most importantly: whatever *hurt* means in that verse, it cannot mean what the apostles’ own lives disprove. The enemy’s power to genuinely and finally damage a person who belongs to God is what has been broken. That is a claim about ultimate harm, not about comfort, and the difference is the difference between a promise you can trust and a promise you will watch fail.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture does not tell us where the line falls between the harm we are protected from and the harm we plainly are not. Jesus said the words, and Jesus also said we would have trouble, and He does not reconcile them for us. Anyone who resolves this neatly — in either direction — is adding to the text.

Who Can Live a Kingdom Life?

Jesus lived this life. That much is not in dispute. The question is whether it was available only to Him.

The usual assumption is that Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead **because He was God** — which would settle the matter, since we are not. But the New Testament writers keep going out of their way to say something else.

> *"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, **a man** clearly attested to you by God with powerful deeds, wonders, and miraculous signs that **God performed among you through him**…"*
>
> **ACTS 2:22**

Read that construction again. Peter, preaching at Pentecost with the events still fresh, says the miracles were things **God did through** a **man**.

> *So Jesus answered them, "I tell you the solemn truth, **the Son can do nothing on his own initiative**, but only what he sees the Father doing."*
>
> **JOHN 5:19**

> *Therefore he **had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect**, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God…*
>
> **HEBREWS 2:17**

Had to be. The writer of Hebrews treats Jesus' full humanity as a requirement, not a costume. And Luke tells us how the ministry was powered: Jesus went into the wilderness **full of the Holy Spirit** (Luke 4:1), and came out of it announcing that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him.

> *"**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me** to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*
>
> **LUKE 4:18–19**

If Jesus' works were done in the power of the same Holy Spirit who now lives in you, the question of who can live this life has an uncomfortable answer.

WHAT ABOUT …

The claim that Jesus worked as a man rather than as God?

This is the load-bearing claim of the session, and a thoughtful reader should push back hard. It sounds like a diminishment of Christ, and diminishments of Christ have a long and bad history.

State the concern at full strength: if Jesus' miracles were done by the Spirit's power rather than His own divine power, is He still fully God? Have we quietly traded the Christ of the creeds for an especially anointed man?

The answer is no, and the distinction is old. Historic Christian teaching holds that Jesus is one Person in two natures, fully God and fully man, neither confused nor divided. Nothing in this session touches His deity. What is at issue is not what He *was* but what He habitually *drew on*.

Paul's language is the hinge:

> *…who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but* ***emptied himself*** (κενόω) *by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature.*
>
> PHILIPPIANS 2:5–7

WORD STUDY

κενόω *kenoō* G2758

> **"emptied himself"** · Philippians 2:7

Range. To empty; to make void; to deprive of significance or effect.

The sense here. Paul does not say what was poured out, and the sentence's own grammar supplies the answer: He emptied Himself **by taking on** the form of a slave. The emptying happens *by way of* the addition, not by subtraction of deity.

Why it carries the argument. This is the difference between "He stopped being God" — which Paul does not say and the church has never taught — and "He declined to draw on what was His by right, and lived instead as a man dependent on the Father and the Spirit." The second is what the Gospels show us on every page.

Source. BDAG, s.v. κενόω. The theological discussion runs under the heading kenosis

> **KENOSIS**
>
> From the Greek κενόω (kenoō), "to empty" — the term for what Paul describes in Philippians 2:7, where Christ "emptied himself" by taking on human nature. It does not mean He stopped being God, or surrendered any divine attribute. It means He declined to draw on what was His by right, and lived instead as a man dependent on the Father and the Spirit.
>
> *You can see it in the Gospels: Jesus grows in wisdom (Luke 2:52), sleeps from exhaustion in a boat, and says plainly that He does not know the day or hour of His own return (Mark 13:32). None of that is pretence.*
>
> Treated fully in Session 2

.

> **I AM NOT SAYING**

- That Jesus was less than fully God, or that He set His deity aside.
- That you and I are the same kind of being Jesus is, or that His work can be repeated.
- That the absence of miracles in a believer's life is evidence of failure or insufficient faith.

I AM SAYING

- That the New Testament repeatedly and deliberately calls attention to Jesus' humanity and to His dependence on the Spirit.
- That He called us to imitate Him, and that the same Spirit indwells us.
- That the ceiling on the Christian life is lower in our expectations than it is in Scripture.

Where this stays unresolved. Precisely *how* a single Person can be fully God and fully man, and what it means for the divine nature to be present while the human nature depends on the Spirit, is beyond us. The church has named the mystery — the hypostatic union

HYPOSTATIC UNION

From the Greek ὑπόστασις (hypostasis), meaning a person or individual reality. The church's term for the truth that Jesus Christ is one Person in two natures, fully God and fully man, without the two being blended into a hybrid or split into two persons.

The wording was settled at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, which said the two natures are united "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." Note what that sentence does: it rules out four wrong answers

without supplying a mechanism. The term names the mystery; it does not explain it.

Treated fully in Session 2

— rather than explained it. Naming a thing is not the same as understanding it, and we should not pretend otherwise.

WHAT ABOUT …

“Greater works than these”?

> *I tell you the solemn truth, the person who believes in me* ***will perform the miraculous deeds that I am doing, and will perform greater deeds than these*** *because I am going to the Father.*
>
> JOHN 14:12

It is the most uncomfortable verse in the session, and the discomfort cuts two ways. Some readers have been taught it means nothing much; others have been taught it means everything and have been quietly crushed when their experience did not match.

Greater almost certainly does not mean *more impressive*. It is difficult to out-do raising Lazarus. The clause Jesus attaches gives the reason — **because I am going to the Father** — which points at scope rather than spectacle: one man in one province becomes a Spirit-filled church across the world, and the works multiply accordingly.

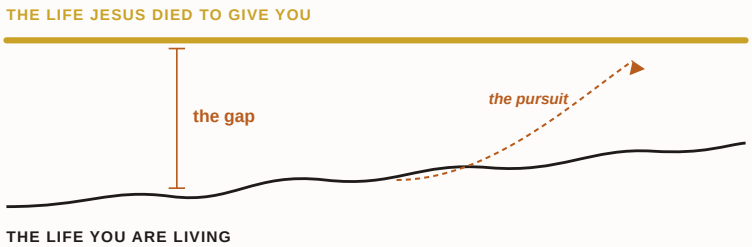
What the verse will not allow is the reading that Jesus’ works were a closed exhibition. He says *the person who believes in me*, and He does not qualify it.

Where this stays unresolved. Whether “greater” means larger in scope, different in kind, or something else is genuinely debated among careful readers, and John does not settle it. What cannot

be avoided is that Jesus expected His followers to do what He did.

The Gap

Put those two things beside each other — the life described in Scripture, and the life you are actually living — and there is a distance between them.



The gold line does not come down to meet you. You close the distance — and you never close it alone.

The gap. Every believer has one. The measure of maturity is not its absence but the direction of travel.

Everyone has a gap. The apostle Paul had a gap. Naming it is not self-condemnation, and it is not humility either — it is simply accurate, and you cannot close a distance you refuse to measure.

What makes the gap hard to see is that we mostly did not choose it. We inherited it.

> *"Our environment, our theological traditions, and our teachers have much more to do with what we believe than we realize. In some cases they have much more influence over what we believe than the Bible itself."*

Jack Deere · pastor, author, and former seminary professor · *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, 1996

That is why Session 1 spent time on confirmation bias, and why this session opened by asking you to write down what you actually expect. Most of the gap is

not rebellion. It is a ceiling somebody installed in you a long time ago, which you have never had reason to test.

The Pursuit

So there is a decision here, and it is smaller and harder than it sounds.

It is smaller because nothing is being asked of you that God has not already supplied. The authority is given. The Spirit is resident. The righteousness is credited. You are not climbing toward a life God is withholding.

It is harder because the pursuit is daily, unglamorous, and contested. Two of Jesus' kingdom parables end the same way — a man finds treasure and **sells everything he has**; a merchant finds one pearl and **sells everything he has**. In both, the finding is joy and the cost is total.

> *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he found a pearl of great value, **he went out and sold everything he had and bought it**."*
>
> **MATTHEW 13:45–46**

Neither man is portrayed as making a sacrifice. They are portrayed as making a *trade*, and as being delighted about it. That is the tell. If pursuing this life feels only like loss, you have not yet seen what is in the field.

CONSIDER THIS

Ask the question plainly and answer it out loud, because a decision you never say is a decision you have not made:

Do I want this?

Not *do I approve of it*. Not *does it sound biblical*. Do I want it enough to reorder my week around it.

The Turn

You have a definition, a description, and an honest picture of the distance. What remains is the one thing this material cannot do for you.

The gap does not close by being understood. It closes by being walked, and the first step is always the same: telling the truth about where you actually stand.

The Experience · Gap Assessment

Take thirty minutes, alone with your journal with nothing to prove.

One. Go back to the sentence you wrote in *Consider This* at the start — *because I am a Christian, my life right now is different in that…* Read it again now that you have read the session.

Two. Work down the four clusters and score each one honestly from 1 to 5, where 1 is *this is not my experience at all* and 5 is *this is plainly true of my life*:

- **Identity** — new, righteous, free
- **Purpose** — purposeful, fruitful, on assignment
- **Power** — authority, the Spirit's power, sufficiency
- **Price** — surrendered, willing to be uncomfortable, willing to fight, expecting trouble

Three. Look at your lowest number and ask one question: *is this low because I do not believe it, because I have never been taught it, or because I have never acted on it?* Those are three different problems with three different remedies, and mistaking one for another is why people stall.

Four. Write one sentence — not a plan, one sentence — naming what you will do about the lowest number this week. Then tell somebody.

Keep this page. You will be asked for it again at the end of the course. The point is not the score. The point is the direction of travel between now and then.

BIG IDEAS

1. The kingdom was announced as arrived, not approaching — and the required response was a changed mind, not an apology.

2. A Kingdom Life is a life surrendered to the Father, modeled after Jesus, and empowered by the indwelling Spirit.
3. The gospel of salvation is the front door. The Kingdom is the kitchen. Many believers have never left the entryway.
4. Jesus ministered as a man filled with the Spirit — which is why He can be a model and not only a Saviour.
5. Everyone has a gap. Maturity is not marked by its absence but the direction you are moving.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Jesus did not die to get you into heaven.
He died to get heaven into you.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!) — THANKS TO PASTOR MILES MCPHERSON OF ROCK CHURCH, SAN DIEGO

Father, give me a heart that desperately seeks face-to-face intimacy with You, and faithfully avoids what displeases You.

Jesus, create in me a heart guided by the Word of God, carrying a burden for people who are far off.

Holy Spirit, develop in me a heart that gives and receives forgiveness, worships without embarrassment, and depends on prayer rather than on my own competence.

> *With Christlikeness as my goal and the Holy Spirit as my guide, knit my heart to Yours. In Jesus' name, amen.*

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (1998).
The best-known modern argument that the kingdom is available now and that discipleship is apprenticeship to Jesus in ordinary life. Where this session states the case in twenty pages, Willard makes it in four hundred.

SUBSTANTIAL

Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (1991).
The scholarly treatment of this session's most contested claim. If the section on Jesus working as a man raised your eyebrows, this is where the argument is made carefully and at length.

ACADEMIC

C. Stephen Evans, ed., *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Oxford, 2006).
A collection of essays on Philippians 2 and what "emptied himself" can and cannot bear. Read this if you want to know exactly where the boundaries of orthodoxy sit on the question.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Luke 4:14–21 slowly. This is Jesus stating His own job description in His hometown synagogue. *Which line of that*

mandate excites you? Which one frightens you? Why that one?

DAY 2

Sit with the word *repent* as it actually reads — change your mind. Not *what should I feel sorry about* but *what have I been thinking that is not true? Name one belief about the Christian life you may have inherited rather than examined.*

DAY 3

Read Matthew 13:44–46. Two men, two finds, the same response. *What in your life would have to be sold to buy that field? Be specific.*

DAY 4

Read Luke 10:1–20 whole, so that verse 19 sits in its own story. *Why do you think Jesus redirected their joy in verse 20? What is He protecting them from?*

DAY 5

Read John 14:12 and Acts 2:22 together, then Luke 4:1. *If Jesus worked in the Spirit's power, what does that change about what you expect of an ordinary Tuesday?*

DAY 6

Print your Session Map — use the button at the bottom of this page — and find a believer you trust. Ask them for five minutes: walk them through the five stations, then read them the sentence you wrote about your lowest Gap Assessment score. *What did they see in you that you couldn't see in yourself? And did naming it out loud change anything about what you're willing to do this week?*

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email

me.

Kingdom Life

“What did Jesus actually die to give you — and when does it start?”

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

Four centuries of silence ended with one message, repeated by John, Jesus, and the Twelve: the Kingdom of Heaven is near — a decisive moment already arrived, not a someday.

Matthew 3:1–2
Mark 1:14–15
Matthew 10:7–8

THE DEFINITION

A Kingdom Life is a life surrendered to the Father, modeled after Jesus, and empowered by the indwelling Spirit — three Persons, and no room for a spectator.

John 16:33

THE SHAPE

Identity, Purpose, Power, Price — one life seen from four sides: new and free, on assignment, carrying real authority, and costly enough to name honestly.

2 Corinthians 5:17
Luke 10:19
John 10:10
Galatians 2:19–20

THE PATTERN

Jesus’ miracles were things God did through a man, full of the Spirit and dependent on the Father — not a private divine shortcut, but the same Spirit who now lives in you.

Acts 2:22
John 5:19
Hebrews 2:17
Luke 4:1

THE GAP

Everyone has a gap between this life and the one they’re living. Naming it isn’t shame — it’s the only way to actually close the distance.

Matthew 13:45–46

SO NOW

KINGDOM, NOT SOMEDAY

The reign of God isn’t somewhere you go. It’s available now — and it has an address: a human life.

Matthew 3:1–2 · Mark 1:14–15

FOUR SIDES, ONE LIFE

Identity, Purpose, Power, Price — not four separate benefits, but one Kingdom Life seen from every angle.

2 Corinthians 5:17 · Luke 10:19

A TRADE, NOT A SACRIFICE

The man who found the pearl sold everything gladly. If pursuing this life feels only like loss, you haven’t yet seen what’s in the field.

Matthew 13:45–46

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Jesus did not die to get you into heaven. He died to get heaven into you.

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Next · Session 3, The Nature of Man. You have seen the life on offer. Session 3 asks what kind of creature you would have to be for any of it to be possible — and the answer starts in Genesis, with the words *image* and *breath*.

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3

KINGDOM MAN

Kingdom Essentials: The Mission

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Image Bearers

03 Spirit, Soul, and Body

04 The Position of Man

05 The Creative Power of Words

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Blessing Declaration

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Before Session 4 asks what you are invited into, and long before this course asks what you are meant to *do*, one question has to be answered first, because every session after this one quietly assumes an answer to it.

What is a human being?

Get this wrong and everything built on top of it tilts. If you believe you are an accident of matter and time, dignity becomes a courtesy rather than a fact. If you believe your body is the whole of you, prayer and spiritual warfare stop making sense. If you believe your worth has to be earned, you will spend your life earning it — and never quite finish.

This session gives you four answers, in order: what you *are* (an image bearer), what you are *made of* (spirit, soul, and body), where you *stand* (your position), and what you *carry* that no other creature does (the power of your own words). Everything else this course teaches about identity, authority, prayer, and transformation is downstream of what you decide here.

CONSIDER THIS

Before you read further, finish this sentence in your own words, in writing: *"A human being is fundamentally —"*

Come back to it on Day 6.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I want to understand who I am, whose I am, and where I am. Show me anywhere I have been living by the flesh's account of me rather than Yours. I am willing to be corrected. In Jesus' name, amen.

Image Bearers

Genesis makes one claim about human beings that it makes about nothing else in creation, and the whole session rests on it: you are made in God's image.

> *Then God said, "Let us make humankind in* ***our image*** (צֶלֶם), ***after our likeness*** (דְּמוּת), *so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." God created humankind in* ***his own image****, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.*
>
> **GENESIS 1:26–27**

WORD STUDY

צֶלֶם *tselem* H6754 · and דְּמוּת *demuth* H1823

> **“image”** · Genesis 1:26 · **“likeness”** · Genesis 1:26

Range. *tselem* — a representative figure, a statue or carved image; used elsewhere of an idol set up to stand for a king or a god in a place he could not personally occupy. *demuth* — resemblance, model, shape.

The sense here. In the Ancient Near East a king who ruled territory he could not personally stand in would set up his *tselem* there — a statue at a border or a relief on a rock face. It was not decoration. It was a legal marker: *this ground answers to the one this looks like.* Genesis reaches for that exact piece of royal furniture and hands it to the entire human race.

Why it carries the argument. If *tselem* names a king’s stand-in, then “image of God” is not primarily a claim about a component installed inside you — a soul-faculty you possess. It is a claim about a role you fill. You are not merely *carrying* God’s image. You are placed on the earth *as* it — His declared, living representative, everywhere you stand.

Source. HALOT, s.v. צלם; BDB, s.v. דמות.

No other creature carries this designation — not the animals, and so far as Scripture tells us, not the angels. That single fact settles a question every generation tries to reopen: where does human worth come from? Not usefulness. Not intelligence. Not health, productivity, or age. It comes from an assignment given once, to everyone, that cannot be revoked.

“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations

— these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit — immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."

C. S. Lewis · Oxford and Cambridge literary scholar · *The Weight of Glory*, 1949

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> In 1 BC a Roman soldier named Hilarion, stationed away from home, wrote to his pregnant wife Alis with plain, unremarkable instructions: *"If by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be; if it is a girl, cast it out."* The letter survives — Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 744 — and what makes it chilling is not malice. It is the tone. Exposing an unwanted infant, especially a girl, was routine enough to be mentioned the way you'd mention the household accounts.
>
> Roughly a century later, a Christian manual called the *Didache* — a document of instruction for new believers, usually dated to the late first or early second century — gave the opposite instruction in the same flat, practical tone: *"you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born."* Historians who study the period have noted the same pattern repeatedly: early Christian communities did not merely refuse to expose infants themselves; they had a documented reputation for taking in children abandoned by others.
>
> Same empire, same century, two irreconcilable instructions — and the difference traces directly back to whether the person in question was believed to carry the image of God.

Human dignity has never been an obvious idea. It is a specific, historically contested claim that this exact doctrine put into the world and has been defending ever since — for the unborn, the elderly, the disabled, and everyone whose usefulness has run out. *My own conviction is that a discipleship course cannot teach the image of God honestly without stating that this doctrine has real, contested implications for how we treat human life at every stage — including before birth and at its end. I hold that conviction; this course is not the place to adjudicate every policy question it touches, and readers who land differently on the hard cases are not thereby rejecting the doctrine this section teaches.*

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Who is someone whose usefulness, to you or to society, has run out — and what changes if their worth was never based on usefulness in the first place?
2. Where have you been treating your own worth as something to *earn* rather than something already *given* at creation?

Spirit, Soul, and Body

Image Bearers answered *what* you are. This section answers *what you are made of* — and Scripture's answer has three parts, not one.

> *The Lord God formed the man from the soil of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became* ***a living being****.*
>
> **GENESIS 2:7**

The Hebrew behind "a living being" is *nephesh chayyah* — *nephesh* (H5315), a breathing self, the word Scripture uses of both animals and humans; *chayyah*, living. Adam's body, formed from dust, became a living *nephesh* only when God's own breath — *ruach* (H7307), the same word used of the Spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2 — entered him. You are not an animated body. You are dust that God breathed into, and Solomon describes death as the exact reversal:

> *… and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and* ***the life's breath returns to God who gave it****.*
>
> **ECCLESIASTES 12:7**

The New Testament sharpens this into three named parts.

> *Now may the God of peace himself make you completely holy and may **your spirit and soul and body** (πνεῦμα, ψυχή, σῶμα) be kept entirely blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
>
> **1 THESSALONIANS 5:23**

> *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of **dividing soul from spirit**, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart.*
>
> **HEBREWS 4:12**

WORD STUDY

πνεῦμα *pneuma* G4151 · ψυχή *psychē* G5590 · σῶμα *sōma* G4983

> **“spirit and soul and body”** · 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Range. *pneuma* — wind, breath, and by extension the immaterial, God-facing part of a person; the same word used of the Holy Spirit. *psychē* — the mind, will, and emotions; the seat of personality; the animating life-principle. *sōma* — the physical frame.

The sense here. Paul names all three side by side, as a set, in a single benediction — the clearest verse in Scripture on this structure, alongside Hebrews 4:12’s “dividing soul from spirit.”

Why it carries the argument. Only these two verses in the whole New Testament name spirit and soul as distinct, and neither stops to define the difference between them — which is exactly why the next section exists. But the pattern itself gives working language for something you have already experienced: the difference between *knowing* a thing is true (spirit — a settled conviction) and merely *feeling* it is true (soul — an emotion, which moves).

Source. BDAG, s.vv. πνεῦμα, ψυχή, σῶμα.

ILLUSTRATION

Watchman Nee, a Chinese pastor, was arrested in Shanghai on April 10, 1952, and sentenced to fifteen years of labor reform. He was never released. He died in a labor camp in Guangde, Anhui province, on May 30, 1972 — twenty years after his arrest, his family permitted almost no contact with him the entire time. According to his family's account, a note was found under his pillow after his death: *"Christ is the Son of God who died for the redemption of sinners and resurrected after three days. This is the greatest truth in the universe. I die because of my belief in Christ. Watchman Nee."*

Whatever else two decades in a Chinese labor camp did to Nee's body and his emotions, something in him held that his soul and body could not touch. Scripture does not promise your circumstances will spare your feelings. It promises there is a part of you circumstances cannot reach.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Think of a recent moment when what you *knew* to be true from Scripture and what you *felt* to be true from your circumstances pulled in opposite directions. Which one did you follow — and what would it have looked like to follow the other? If nothing comes to mind, ask Holy Spirit to bring a memory of a recent event to your mind.

WHAT ABOUT …

Soul and spirit being the same thing?

Not every careful reader of Scripture agrees that soul and spirit name two separate things, and the objection deserves a straight answer rather than a dismissal.

The strongest case for **dichotomy** — body plus one immaterial soul/spirit, not two — is that Scripture itself sometimes uses the words as though they were interchangeable.

> *And Mary said, "**My soul exalts the Lord**, and my spirit has begun to rejoice in God my Savior,"*
>
> **LUKE 1:46–47**

That reads less like two faculties doing two different things than like Hebrew poetic parallelism — the same statement twice, in different words, the way the Psalms do constantly. And facing the cross, Jesus says this:

> *"**My soul is deeply grieved**, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me."*
>
> **MATTHEW 26:38**

A trichotomist's working definitions would expect *spirit* there, not *soul*. Only two verses in the entire New Testament — the two already quoted, 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 — name spirit and soul as though they are distinct, and neither one pauses to define the line between them.

This series teaches **trichotomy** because it best accounts for those two verses and because it supplies coherent, useful language for something real: the gap between what you know and what you feel. *That is my own judgment call, not a line Scripture states outright,* — So, hold it as a working framework, not as a wall between orthodox and unorthodox belief. Dichotomists who take Scripture just as seriously are not denying anything essential. They are reading two genuinely ambiguous verses differently than this course does.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture never states outright whether soul and spirit are two distinct faculties or one immaterial nature described two ways. Both readings are built from the same handful of verses. What does not move either way: your inner life is being renewed progressively, not completely at the new birth (2 Corinthians 4:16) — so a soul-level struggle is not evidence that something is broken in your spirit.

The Position of Man

Image Bearers answered *what*. Spirit, Soul, and Body answered *what you are made of*. This section answers *where you stand* — and Scripture gives you a position both lower and higher than you'd expect.

> *When I look up at the heavens, which your fingers made, and see the moon and the stars, which you set in place, of what importance is the human race, that you should notice them? Of what importance is mankind, that you should pay attention to them? You made them a little less than* ***heavenly beings*** (אֱלֹהִים)*. You crowned mankind with honor and majesty; you appoint them to rule over your creation.*
>
> **PSALM 8:3–6**

WORD STUDY

אֱלֹהִים *elohim* H430

> **"heavenly beings"** · Psalm 8:5

Range. The ordinary Hebrew word for "God" — but plural in form, and used in a handful of places (as here) of divine or angelic beings generally rather than God Himself.

The sense here. The context decides the sense. The next clause — "crowned … with honor and majesty" — is language the Old Testament otherwise reserves for kings, not for God alone, which is why translators read *elohim* here as the heavenly court rather than God's own person.

Why it carries the argument. The verse holds two facts in tension and refuses to soften either one: you rank below the heavenly realm, and you are crowned and given rule over everything else God made. Not the highest being that exists. Not an afterthought either. A specific rank — and the specificity is the point.

Source. HALOT, s.v. אלהים.

Paul names a second coordinate, and it is stranger still.

> *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows — was caught up to* ***the third heaven*** *… was caught up into paradise and heard things too sacred to be put into words.*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 12:2, 4**

This course uses "third heaven" as shorthand for a working map: the first heaven is the sky and world you can touch, where your body and soul are right now — "the earth he has given to mankind" (Psalm 115:16). The third heaven is God's throne room, where Christ is seated — and where, in Him, your spirit already is.

> *… and he raised us up together with him and* ***seated us together with him in the heavenly realms*** *in Christ Jesus*
>
> **EPHESIANS 2:6**

Here is a caveat I want to be honest about, because precision matters more than tidiness. Paul names a "third heaven" exactly once in all of Scripture, almost certainly borrowing language already familiar in first-century Jewish thought. He never numbers a first or second heaven. The popular teaching that "the second heaven is Satan's current territory" is a widely taught *pastoral inference*, not a sentence Scripture states. It leans on real texts —

> *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against* ***the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens****.*
>
> **EPHESIANS 6:12**

— but that text describes contested authority in *some* aerial or heavenly realm. It does not hand you a numbered three-story cosmology with the enemy assigned to floor two. Remember the map, because it is a genuinely useful way to hold real texts about real spiritual conflict — but hold it as a concept, not as inspired Scripture in its own right.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> An embassy is, legally, the territory of the country it represents — not the country it sits in. Walk onto the grounds of a foreign embassy and you have, in a real legal sense, left the host country without leaving the city. That principle — extraterritoriality — was formalized internationally in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations in 1961, but the practice long predates the treaty.
>
> Your spirit, in Christ, works the same way. Your body and soul are still walking around inside the borders of a contested world - this earthly world. But your spirit is already standing on otherworldly ground — seated, the text says, in the heavenly realms in Christ. You have not yet left the physical earth. But legally, a piece of you already has.

That distinction — **position** versus **condition** — is the load-bearing idea in this section. Your *position* is a legal, settled fact established the moment you were born again: seated with Christ, not up for renegotiation by your performance. Your *condition* is your day-to-day experience of that position, which does fluctuate with obedience and the renewing of your mind.

> *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on the cause of your anger.* ***Do not give the devil an opportunity.***
>
> **EPHESIANS 4:26–27**

Unconfessed sin does not change your position. It changes how much *ground* — the Greek is *topos*, literally "place" — you hand the enemy to operate in your condition. Confusing the two is one of the most common sources of needless Christian discouragement: considering a bad week or a besetting sin as proof your position has shifted, when Scripture insists it has not.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where have you been treating a *condition* problem — an emotional low, an unanswered prayer, a besetting sin — as though it were a *position* problem, evidence God has pulled back from you?

The Creative Power of Words

One question is left: what did God give His image bearers that no other creature received? Scripture's answer, from its first page, is words.

> *God said, "****Let there be light****." And there was light!*
>
> **GENESIS 1:2–3**

Ten times in Genesis 1, creation proceeds the same way — God speaks, and what He speaks comes to be.

> *By faith we understand that the worlds were set in order at God's command, so that **the visible has its origin in the invisible**.*
>
> **HEBREWS 11:3**

John reaches for a richer word to name the One doing the speaking:

> *In the beginning was **the Word** (λόγος), and the Word was with God, and **the Word was fully God**.*
>
> **JOHN 1:1**

WORD STUDY

λόγος *logos* G3056 · and ῥῆμα *rhēma* G4487

> **"the Word"** · John 1:1 · **"word"** · Romans 10:8

Range. *logos* — reasoned, purposeful speech; a discourse, an account, a message; here, with the article, John's own term for the eternal Son. *rhēma* — a specific spoken utterance, narrower than *logos*'s wider sense of a whole message.

The sense here. John 1:1 is deliberately unusual Greek — *theos* appears without the definite article, and the NET translators render the effect as "the Word was **fully** God" rather than simply "was God," to signal that John is describing the Word's nature rather than collapsing the Word into the Father as the same person. In Romans 10:8, Paul's *rhēma* is specifically the confession spoken aloud — "in your mouth" — not merely something privately believed.

Why it carries the argument. If you are made in the image of a God whose own eternal identity is Word, your own words are not incidental to who you are. And *rhēma* narrows the point to something practical: the New Testament's confidence is not in words in general but in a specific, spoken alignment with what God has already said — not in speech as a force that operates on its own.

Source. BDAG, s.vv. λόγος, ῥῆμα.

Paul makes the same distinction concrete a few chapters later, in a verse this session's I Am Not Saying will return to:

> *But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is,* ***the word of faith*** (ῥῆμα) *that we preach),*
>
> **ROMANS 10:8**

> ***Death and life are in the power of the tongue****, and those who love its use will eat its fruit.*
>
> **PROVERBS 18:21**

> *Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it are* ***the sources of life****.*
>
> **PROVERBS 4:23**

Proverbs is naming what Jesus later states plainly — "the mouth speaks from what fills the heart" (Matthew 12:34). Your words are not a separate compartment from your heart. They are its mirror.

ILLUSTRATION

> Beginning around 2000, researchers on the Bucharest Early Intervention Project — led by Charles Nelson, Charles Zeanah, and Nathan Fox — studied children raised in Romanian state institutions, many of whom received almost no spoken language directed at them: fed, changed, and kept alive, but rarely spoken to or answered. The measurable outcomes were severe and specific — delayed language, altered brain development, impaired attachment — and the deficits were sharpest exactly where speech had been absent.
>
> No one needed to say a cruel word to those children to damage them. Silence where words belonged was enough. If the mere *absence* of ordinary human speech measurably shapes a developing person, Scripture's insistence that words carry real weight is not superstition. It is naming something true that a secular research team later confirmed from the outside.

Naming carries the same weight throughout Scripture. God brought the animals to Adam "to see what he would name them" (Genesis 2:19). When God renamed Abram "Abraham" — father of a multitude (Genesis 17:5) — or Jesus renamed Simon "Cephas" (John 1:42), a spoken word did not merely describe an identity. Scripture treats it as establishing one.

James refuses to let this stay abstract:

> *With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we **curse people made in God's image**. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. These things should not be so, my brothers and sisters.*
>
> **JAMES 3:9–10**

Cursing another person, James says, is a direct offense against the image they carry. This section and Image Bearers are one topic, not two.

> **I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> - That your words create reality the way God's words created the universe.
> - That the right words, spoken with enough conviction, guarantee an outcome regardless of God's will.

- That an unguarded negative sentence will summon disaster on you, or that faith is a formula you can work if you say it correctly.

I AM SAYING

- That Scripture takes speech far more seriously than our culture or most Christians do — words genuinely build up, tear down, bless, and grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:29–30).
- That confession which flows *from* real faith is a biblical category (Romans 10:8–10) — it aligns you with a reality God has already declared; it does not manufacture one He has not.
- That what you habitually say about yourself and about other people shapes what you are able to believe, whether or not it changes anything outside you.

That fence is deliberately drawn narrow. Whether it is drawn in exactly the right place — whether the church's necessary caution against health-and-wealth excess has also cost us something true about how seriously God takes a spoken word — is a bigger question than this session can carry. Session 15 takes it up directly.

Even Mark 11 — the passage most often reached for to argue words alone move mountains — sits inside a Gospel devoted to Jesus submitting every request to the Father's will.

> *"I tell you the truth, if someone says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and* ***does not doubt in his heart but believes*** *that what he says will happen, it will be done for him."*
>
> **MARK 11:23**

> *“Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me.* ***Yet not what I will, but what you will.”***
>
> **MARK 14:36**

Read together, the same Jesus who taught that a word of faith moves mountains also modeled, in Gethsemane, submitting His own spoken request entirely to the Father’s will. Faith is not a formula or technology for overriding that will. It is confidence that aligns with it.

PAUSE & REFLECT

James says cursing another person is really an offense against the image of God they carry. Is there someone you have been speaking about — even privately, even if they never hear it — that this reframes for you?

The Turn

You now know what you are, what you are made of, where you stand, and what you carry. None of it was information you needed for its own sake.

Here is where it turns into obligation. If every person you meet today is an image bearer, your words about them are never a neutral act — they are either treating God’s representative the way His representative deserves, or they are not. If your spirit is already seated with Christ, then today’s condition does not get the final word about your position, and you are permitted to stop negotiating for a status you already hold. And if your words carry the weight this session has just shown you, then the sentence you were about to say — about yourself, or about someone else — is worth one more second of thought before it leaves your mouth.

The Experience · Blessing Declaration

Scripture gives you a model for speaking deliberately rather than carelessly: a structured, repeatable blessing God gave Aaron to speak over Israel, not invented on the spot.

> *"The Lord bless you and protect you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;* ***the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace****."*
>
> **NUMBERS 6:24–26**

That is the pattern for this week's practice: not composing new words under pressure, but learning a structure of Scripture-rooted declarations you can return to until you know it without looking.

Over yourself, aloud, slowly: *I am made in the image of God — His representative, carrying a dignity that was given to me, not earned by me. My spirit, soul, and body belong to Him. My position in Christ is secure, not because of what I have done, but because of what He has done. Today, I choose words that build rather than tear down — starting with the words I speak over myself.*

Over one other person, aloud or in writing: *[Name], you are made in the image of God, carrying a dignity that is yours by design. I bless your spirit, soul, and body. The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance on you and give you peace.*

BIG IDEAS

1. You are made in God's image — His representative on the earth — and that alone, not usefulness or ability, is where your worth comes from.
2. You are a three-part being — spirit, soul, and body — and the distinction gives you real language for the gap between what you know and what you feel.
3. Your position in Christ is secure and does not move; your condition is your present walk, and confusing the two costs believers more than almost anything else in the Christian life.

4. Your words carry real, God-given weight to bless or curse — not because they manufacture outcomes, but because you were made in the image of a God whose own identity is *Word*.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You were not made to become God's representative someday. You already are one — starting with the next word out of your mouth.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for making me in Your image and giving me words that carry real weight. Forgive me for the times I have used that weight carelessly, against myself and against others. Teach me to speak the way You speak — truthfully, purposefully, for the building up of whoever hears me. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body* (Baker Books, 2018).
A readable, contemporary defense of human dignity grounded in the image of God, applied directly to the sanctity-of-life and disability questions this session only introduces.

SUBSTANTIAL

Watchman Nee, *The Spiritual Man* (Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1968).
The classic full-length case for the trichotomy this session teaches — written, in part, out of the same imprisonment named in this session's illustration.

ACADEMIC

J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Brazos Press, 2005).
The scholarly case for the royal, representational reading of tselem this session's word study relies on — including the Ancient Near Eastern background in full.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Zondervan, 2020), chapter on the dichotomy/trichotomy debate.
The strongest available case for dichotomy, written by a careful scholar who lands differently than this course does. Read it if the What About section above did not fully persuade you either way.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Genesis 1:26–31. Slowly. *If "image" means a king's representative marker, what does it mean, practically, that you are God's tselem everywhere you go today?*

DAY 2

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12. *Name one recent moment where your soul (emotion) and your spirit (settled*

conviction) were telling you two different things.

DAY 3

Read Psalm 8:3–6 and Ephesians 2:6. *Where right now have you been living from your condition instead of your position?*

DAY 4

Read Ephesians 4:26–27. *Is there unresolved anger you are carrying that may be giving the enemy ground — topos — in your life?*

DAY 5

Read Proverbs 18:21 and James 3:9–10. Keep a simple tally today. *How many of your words built someone up, and how many tore someone down — including yourself?*

DAY 6

Find what you wrote in *Consider This* at the start of this session. *Read it again. What would you change — and what does the change tell you?*

Practice the Blessing Declaration this week: once over yourself, once over someone else. Notice what shifts, even slightly, in how you carry yourself afterward.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Man

“What is a human being — and what does that make you responsible for the next time you open your mouth?”

THE IMAGE

Genesis makes one claim about you it makes about nothing else in creation: you bear God’s image — not a soul-faculty installed inside you, but a role you fill, His representative wherever you stand.

Genesis 1:26–27

THE MAKEUP

You are not an animated body. Scripture names three parts — spirit, soul, and body — giving you real language for the gap between what you know and what you merely feel.

1 Thessalonians 5:23
Hebrews 4:12

THE POSITION

Ranked below the heavenly realm, yet crowned — and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. A legal position, settled at new birth, that does not move with your condition.

Psalm 8:3–6
Ephesians 2:6

THE WORD

Made in the image of a God whose own identity is Word, your words carry real weight to bless or curse — not a formula for outcomes, but a mirror of what fills your heart.

John 1:1
Proverbs 18:21
James 3:9–10

THE TURN

What you are, what you’re made of, where you stand, and what you carry all turn into the same obligation: the next word out of your mouth is never a neutral act.

Matthew 12:36
Colossians 4:6

SO NOW

DIGNITY, NOT PERFORMANCE

Your worth comes from being God’s representative on the earth — a gift given, not a wage earned by usefulness or ability.

Genesis 1:26–27

POSITION, NOT CONDITION

Your standing in Christ is a legal fact that does not move. A bad week is a condition problem — never proof your position has shifted.

Ephesians 2:6

WORDS ARE NEVER NEUTRAL

Every sentence you speak — about yourself or someone else — either honors an image bearer or offends one. There is no third option.

James 3:9–10

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You were not made to become God’s representative someday. You already are one — starting with the next word out of your mouth.

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Next · Session 4, Kingdom Invitation. You now know what you are. Session 4 is about the invitation extended to you — and the design, the fall, and the solution that make it possible.

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4

KINGDOM INVITATION

Kingdom Essentials: The Mission

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 The Design

03 The Fall

04 The Solution

05 The Result

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Assurance of Salvation

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Every invitation assumes a relationship. You don’t get invited to a birthday party by a stranger who has never met you — you get one from someone who already knows you and wants you there. But a real invitation, as opposed to a summons or an order, assumes something more specific: the recipient is actually free to decline. An invitation that cannot be refused isn’t an invitation anymore; it’s a command wearing an invitation’s clothes. And a real invitation costs something to extend — and something to accept — on both sides. The invitation this session is about is exactly that kind: genuine, refusable, and expensive at both ends, offered by the God whose image you carry, to bring you back into a relationship you were designed for and broke.

What is God actually inviting you into, and what did it cost to make the invitation possible?

Session 3 told you what you are — an image bearer, built for relationship with the God whose image you carry. This session tells you what happened to that relationship, why you can’t fix it by trying harder, and what God did instead. If Session 3 was the anatomy, this is the rescue.

CONSIDER THIS

Before you read further, answer honestly, in writing: *if someone asked you right now to explain, in under a minute, what it means to be saved, what would you say?* Don't polish it. Write what you'd actually say.

Come back to it on Day 6.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I want to understand what You've actually done for me — not the shorthand version, the real one. Show me where I've been treating my salvation as something I earned or something I'm still earning. I'm willing to see this clearly. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Design

Before there was a fall to recover from, there was a relationship to have. That order matters — the invitation this session describes is not God's plan B. It's the restoration of plan A.

Session 3 already established that you are made in God's image — His representative, carrying a dignity given rather than earned. This session picks up where that leaves off: image bearing was never meant to be a status held at a distance. It was designed to be lived out in relationship.

> *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the orchard at the breezy time of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the orchard.*

> **GENESIS 3:8**

Notice what this verse assumes even as it describes the first act of hiding: God walking in the orchard in the cool of the day is presented as an ordinary, expected thing — the text's casual tone implies this was already a pattern, not a one-time visit. Before anyone hid from anything, two people walked with their Maker the way you'd walk with someone you loved and weren't afraid of.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Several Ancient Near Eastern temples were built with a garden motif — trees, water, cherubim carvings — because a temple was understood as the place where a god's presence rested among people. Genesis describes Eden in exactly those terms: a garden with cherubim guarding it (Genesis 3:24), rivers flowing from it, humanity placed there "to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15) — priestly language, the same verbs later used of the Levites serving in the tabernacle. Old Testament scholars have long noted the pattern: Eden functions in the text as the first sanctuary, and Adam as the first priest in it.
>
> That reframes the whole story. The Fall wasn't a rule broken in a garden. It was access lost to a sanctuary — the place where God's presence and human presence overlapped without anything between them.

That is the relationship this whole session is about restoring: not a transaction completed, but a nearness recovered. Every later Bible or theology word for salvation — redemption, reconciliation, adoption, justification — names one facet of getting back to that garden-nearness. None of them is the point by itself. The nearness is the point.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If intimacy with God — not distant respect, actual nearness — was the original design, how close is that to how you currently picture your relationship with Him?

The Fall

Every relationship depends on trust holding at exactly one point: will the other person keep their word when it costs them something? God gave Adam one instruction with one consequence attached.

> *Then the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the orchard, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die."*
>
> **GENESIS 2:16–17**

That's a strikingly generous covenant before it's a restrictive one — every tree but one. And then:

> *When the woman saw that the tree produced fruit that was good for food, was attractive to the eye, and was desirable for making one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it.*
>
> **GENESIS 3:6**

Notice what isn't in that verse: coercion, ignorance, trickery strong enough to remove responsibility. The fruit was good, attractive, and desirable — an honest description of what temptation actually feels like, not a caricature of it. Eve wasn't stupid. Adam wasn't absent (he "was with her"). They both, with eyes open, decided they knew better than their Maker what was good for them.

WORD STUDY

ἁμαρτία *hamartia* G266

"sinned" · Romans 3:23

Range. Originally an archery term — to miss the target. By the time of the New Testament it had broadened to any failure to hit a moral or relational mark: a wrong action, a wrong state, a falling short of what should have been.

The sense here. Paul doesn't reach for a legal word first. He reaches for a word that means *aimed and missed*. Every human being, without exception, has aimed at something other than God's glory and missed it — not always dramatically, but universally.

Why it carries the argument. "Miss the mark" is a quieter word than "crime" or "rebellion," but it is not a softer verdict — it still means the target wasn't hit, every time, by everyone. That is exactly why "Sin is always irrational" is this session's Kingdom Principle: no one aims at missing. Sin is what happens when you aim at your own judgment instead of God's — and it turns out you were never that good a shot.

Source. BDAG, s.v. ἁμαρτία.

> *for all have sinned* (ἁμαρτία) *and fall short of the glory of God.*
>
> **ROMANS 3:23**

The consequence God named wasn't arbitrary. It was already built into the relationship.

> *For the payoff of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
>
> **ROMANS 6:23**

Scripture's word for death is broader than a heartbeat stopping. It means *separation* — physical death separates you from your body; the Bible calls the deeper problem spiritual death, separation from God Himself. Isaiah names the mechanism plainly: "your sins have hidden his face from you" (Isaiah 59:2). Adam and Eve didn't wait decades to die. Something separated the moment they ate — which is why the text's very next scene is God asking, into the silence, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9), not because He didn't know, but because they had moved.

You may be tempted to file this under other people's problem — a category for the openly, dramatically depraved. Scripture doesn't let the door out that easily.

> *For the one who obeys the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.*
>
> **JAMES 2:10**

God never graded on a curve. God's standard was never "better than most." It was perfection — because His own holiness is the standard, and holiness doesn't average. One missed mark is enough to establish that you, like everyone else, need something you cannot generate yourself.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where have you been measuring your own goodness against other people instead of against God's actual standard? What changes when the comparison group is Him, not them?

WHAT ABOUT …

Why would a good God allow the possibility of sin?

If God is good, and God is all-powerful, why did He make a world where this was even possible? This is one of the oldest objections in the book, and it deserves a real answer, not a dodge.

Start with what Scripture rules out immediately and without qualification:

> *Therefore, listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do wickedness, from the Almighty to do evil.*
>
> **JOB 34:10**

> *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one.*
>
> **JAMES 1:13**

Whatever explanation this session lands on, it cannot be one where God authored sin, wanted sin, or is its hidden source. Those two verses close that door completely.

The strongest case that has been made, across centuries of careful theology, runs like this: love that cannot be refused isn't love — it's programming. For Adam and Eve's "yes" to God to mean anything, a real "no" had to be available. God didn't create evil as a thing; He created the possibility of a genuine choice, and evil is what a creature can choose when it turns from the Giver toward the gift. C. S. Lewis put the same logic more sharply than most:

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it."

C. S. Lewis · Oxford and Cambridge literary scholar · *The Great Divorce*, 1945

Here is where I land, and why. I find the free-will explanation genuinely persuasive as far as it goes — it protects both God's goodness and the reality of the choice Adam and Eve actually made. What I don't find in Scripture is a tidy answer to the next question: why did an all-knowing God create beings He knew would choose this, rather than a world where the good was chosen freely every time? Smarter theologians than me have proposed answers. None of them, in my reading, closes the question completely.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture is airtight that God does not do evil and is not its author (Job 34:10; James 1:13). It is far less explicit about *why* He permitted its possibility rather than preventing it while preserving genuine freedom — if that combination was even available to Him to create. Both classical answers (the free-will defense above, and the "soul-making" idea that some goods, like courage or forgiveness, cannot exist without the possibility of evil to respond to) are serious, faithful attempts at an answer Scripture itself does not fully spell out. Hold the conclusion — God is not the author of sin — with full confidence. Hold the explanation for *why He allowed it* more loosely than that.

The Solution

You have a problem you cannot fix from the inside: a broken relationship, a debt you keep adding to, and a standard you cannot reach by trying harder. Scripture's answer starts with a claim about how many paths exist back to God.

> *For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human.*
>
> **1 TIMOTHY 2:5**

> *I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*
>
> **JOHN 14:6**

> *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved.*
>
> **ACTS 4:12**

That claim sounds narrow until you notice what it's actually built on: not that God is stingy with access, but that God Himself supplied the only sufficient bridge, at infinite personal cost, rather than leaving you to build one that could never reach.

WORD STUDY

ἱλασμός *hilasmos* G2434

> **"atoning sacrifice"** · 1 John 4:10

Range. A sacrifice that turns aside deserved wrath and makes relationship possible again. The related word *hilastērion* names the "mercy seat" — the gold cover on the ark of the covenant where, once a year on the Day of Atonement, blood was applied so a holy God could remain present among a sinful people without consuming them (Leviticus 16).

The sense here. NET renders *hilasmos* here as "atoning sacrifice" rather than the older English "propitiation" — both are attempts to carry the same freight: this isn't merely a sacrifice that covers sin from view, but one that actually satisfies what a holy God's justice requires, so that wrath and mercy meet at the same point rather than mercy simply overriding justice.

Why it carries the argument. This is the word that answers the question The Fall raised and left open: if God's standard is perfection and the penalty is death, how does anyone survive contact with Him? Not by God lowering the standard. By God Himself becoming the mercy seat — the place where His own justice against sin and His own love for sinners meet, in the same event, at the same moment, without contradiction.

Source. BDAG, s.v. ἱλασμός.

> *In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be **the atoning sacrifice** (ἱλασμός) for our sins.*
>
> **1 JOHN 4:10**

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> In the ancient world, a *lytron* — the same word family Scripture uses for redemption — was the price paid to free a prisoner of war, a debtor sold into slavery, or a slave being purchased out of bondage entirely. It was never a metaphor to a first-century reader. It was the actual line item in a real transaction: someone owed something they could not pay, and someone else paid it, and the ownership changed hands as a documented legal fact.
>
> Paul reaches for exactly that picture: Jesus "gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness" (Titus 2:14). Not a feeling of freedom. A purchase, completed, with a receipt only Heaven needed to see.

Scripture is equally specific about what response actually receives this gift.

> *because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation.*

> **ROMANS 10:9–10**

Believe — trust the historical fact and the person behind it, not just acknowledge it happened. Confess — say so, out loud, to God and eventually to others. That's the whole transaction on your side, and it is emphatically not a transaction of equals.

> *For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast.*
>
> **EPHESIANS 2:8–9**

Every other religious system humans have invented is, at its core, a ladder — climb high enough and you arrive. This is the only account of reality where the ladder is replaced with a gift, handed down rather than climbed up to, specifically so that no one gets to stand at the top and take credit.

WORD STUDY

δικαιόω *dikaioō* G1344

> **"declared righteous"** · Romans 3:28 · **"declared righteous"** · Romans 5:1

Range. A courtroom word — to pronounce a verdict, specifically the verdict "not guilty" or "righteous." It does not mean *to make morally perfect on the spot*. It means a judge declares your legal status settled.

The sense here. Paul places this word in a sentence built entirely around legal categories: works of the law, faith, apart from. The verdict is rendered on the basis of faith in what Christ did, not on the basis of a performance record that could never clear the bar The Fall already established.

Why it carries the argument. This is the difference between feeling forgiven and being declared righteous. Feelings fluctuate with your day. A legal verdict, rightly rendered by the only Judge whose ruling counts, does not need to be re-argued every time you feel far from God. Justification is the settled fact The Solution supplies; how that fact is lived out day to day is the subject of The Result.

Source. BDAG, s.v. δικαιόω.

> *For we consider that a person is declared righteous* (δικαιόω) *by faith apart from the works of the law.*
>
> **ROMANS 3:28**

> *Therefore, since we have been declared righteous* (δικαιόω) *by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
>
> **ROMANS 5:1**

PAUSE & REFLECT

Justification is a verdict, not a feeling. Where have you been trying to *feel* forgiven again instead of resting in a verdict that was already rendered?

The Result

Salvation is not only a moment. It's also the name for everything that moment sets in motion.

> *For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who **are being saved** it is the power of God.*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 1:18**

Notice the tense. Paul doesn't write "were saved" and stop there. "Are being saved" describes an ongoing process — present, continuing, not yet finished. Justification, the verdict The Solution described, happens once and settles your legal standing permanently. Sanctification — the lifelong process of your character actually catching up to that verdict — begins the moment justification does and continues for the rest of your life. (Session 17, Kingdom Transformation, is where this course takes up that process in full.)

Think of it this way: justification changes what's true about you the instant you believe. Sanctification is what it looks like for the rest of your life to *become* what is already legally true. Neither one waits for the other to finish. Both start at the same moment, from the same gift, and they never work against each other.

That raises a question every honest believer eventually asks, and this session won't dodge it.

WHAT ABOUT …

Can you lose your salvation?

If salvation is a gift and not a performance, can a believer un-receive it? This question has divided sincere, Scripture-loving Christians for five hundred years, and it deserves the strongest form of both answers before this session tells you where it lands.

The case for security rests on some of Scripture's most emphatic language:

> *My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them from my Father's hand.*
>
> **JOHN 10:27–29**

> *because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son … And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.*
>
> **ROMANS 8:29–30**

Notice what Paul does in that last sentence: every verb is past tense, including *glorified* — an event still future for every believer alive when he wrote it. Paul is so confident the chain completes that he describes the end of it as already accomplished.

WORD STUDY

ἀρραβών *arrabōn* G728

"down payment" · Ephesians 1:13–14

Range. A commercial term for a deposit — money paid up front in a purchase that legally obligates the buyer to complete the full payment. Modern Greek still uses the same word for an engagement ring.

The sense here. Paul says the Holy Spirit Himself, given to every believer at the moment they trust Christ, *is* this down payment — not a receipt for a past purchase, but a guarantee that the remainder of what was promised is coming.

Why it carries the argument. A down payment is not a hint or a hope. It's a legal commitment from the party who paid it. If God Himself is the guarantor, the question "can I lose this?" becomes a question about whether God can fail to complete a purchase He already started and sealed with His own Spirit.

Source. BDAG, s.v. ἀρραβών.

> *And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation)—when you believed in Christ—you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, who is* ***the down payment*** (ἀρραβών) *of our inheritance, until the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory.*
>
> **EPHESIANS 1:13–14**

> *For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*
>
> **PHILIPPIANS 1:6**

That is the strongest case for eternal security, and it is not a weak case. But Scripture also contains real, unavoidable language about a believer's responsibility to continue.

> *For we have become partners with Christ, if in fact we hold our initial confidence firm until the end.*
>
> **HEBREWS 3:14**

> *if indeed you remain in the faith, established and firm, without shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.*
>
> **COLOSSIANS 1:22–23**

Those *if* clauses are genuinely in the text. They cannot be defined away, and a session that only quoted the security passages would not be telling you the whole truth Scripture actually contains.

Here is where I land, and why. I hold, with real conviction, that a person who is truly, savingly united to Christ cannot be separated from Him by anything outside themselves — Romans 8 and John 10 are too emphatic to read any other way. I hold that conviction alongside a second one: not everyone who makes a profession of faith, or who was active in a church for years, was necessarily ever savingly united to Christ in the first place. Judas walked with Jesus for three years and was never truly His. The "if you continue" passages, on this reading, are not a threat that grace can run out — they're a test of whether the faith was ever real to begin with, the way a plant that never puts down roots eventually shows it in the wilting, not because something was taken from it but because it was never rooted.

That reading resolves the tension for me. It does not resolve it for every careful theologian who has studied these same texts.

Where this stays unresolved. The Calvinist reading above (real faith perseveres; apparent falling-away reveals faith that was never saving) and the Arminian reading (genuine believers can, through sustained unbelief, forfeit a salvation that was truly theirs) are both held by serious, Scripture-loving theologians who take the perseverance passages with full seriousness rather than explaining them away. This session states its own position plainly, but five centuries of careful exegesis on both sides means you should hold your own conclusion with conviction, and hold your neighbor's different conclusion without contempt.

If you are reading this and the "if you continue" language has put you in a spiral of doubt rather than a posture of trust: that anxiety is itself worth noticing. Scripture never asks you to manufacture certainty about your own heart from scratch. It points you to Christ, and to the ordinary marks of a life still turning toward Him, and lets that evidence carry the weight your feelings can't.

The Turn

You now know the shape of it: a relationship you were designed for, broken by a debt you couldn't pay, settled by a mediator who paid it in full, received by trusting and saying so, and secured by a Spirit who is Himself God's down payment on finishing what He started.

None of that was meant to end as information. If Christ is the only mediator, then every other bridge you've been quietly building — performance, comparison, religious effort — can be set down, because it was never load-bearing in the first place. If justification is a verdict and not a feeling, then the next time your feelings say otherwise, you have somewhere true to stand while you wait for the feeling to catch up. And if the invitation is this real, it is worth answering out loud, not just believing privately.

The Experience · Assurance of Salvation

Romans 10:9–10 names two acts: believing in your heart, and confessing with your mouth. This week's practice is doing both, deliberately, in words — whether for the first time or the thousandth.

If you have never trusted Christ, or you are not sure you ever have, pray this aloud, and mean it: *Father, I admit I have missed the mark — I have trusted my own judgment over Yours, and I cannot fix the separation that created. I believe Jesus Christ died in my place and rose from the dead. Jesus, I trust You as my mediator, and I confess You now as my Lord. Thank You for the down payment of Your Spirit as proof this is real. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If you have already trusted Christ and simply need to hear it again, pray this aloud: *Father, thank You that my standing with You is a verdict You rendered, not a performance I'm still auditioning for. Where I've been living like the case is still open, close it in my heart today. I rest in what Christ finished, not in what I can finish myself. In Jesus' name, amen.*

BIG IDEAS

1. You were designed for actual nearness to God, not distant respect — Eden's whole architecture was built around His presence among people.

2. Sin is universal, and it is always irrational — missing a mark no one intends to miss, by trusting your own judgment over your Maker's.
3. Jesus is the one sufficient mediator; His death was a real payment (redemption) that satisfied real justice (propitiation) so mercy and holiness could meet without contradiction.
4. Justification is a legal verdict rendered once, by faith; sanctification is the lifelong process of becoming what that verdict already declared true.
5. Scripture speaks with full seriousness both to your security in Christ and to your responsibility to keep believing — hold both, and hold your own conclusion about their relationship with humility.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Sin is always irrational.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for a gift I could never have earned and a Judge who has already ruled in my favor because of what Christ did. Where I have been treating my salvation as a project instead of a gift, forgive me and reset me. Teach me to rest in the verdict, not re-argue the case. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (IVP, 1958).
The classic short, plain-language explanation of exactly what this session covers — sin, Christ, and the response of faith — from a widely trusted evangelical statesman.

SUBSTANTIAL

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (IVP, 1973).
Packer's chapter "The Heart of the Gospel" is the single best accessible treatment of propitiation in print — the word study above only opens a door Packer walks all the way through.

ACADEMIC

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Zondervan, 2020), chapters on justification and the perseverance of the saints.
The fullest, fairest academic treatment of the eternal security debate this session's What About only summarizes — read it before you firm up your own position past what this session gave you.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Genesis 3:1–8, slowly. *Before you read of the hiding, read of the walking. What does it change to know intimacy, not distance, was the original design?*

DAY 2

Read Romans 3:23 and James 2:10. *Where have you been grading your own sin on a curve against other people instead of against God's actual standard?*

DAY 3

Read 1 John 4:10 and Titus 2:14. *Sit with the word "ransom." What was the actual, specific price? Let it be concrete, not abstract.*

DAY 4

Read Romans 10:9–10 aloud, as your own words, whether for the first time or the hundredth. *What did it feel like to say it rather than just think it?*

DAY 5

Read Philippians 1:6 and Hebrews 3:14 back to back. *Hold both without resolving the tension. What does it do in you to let Scripture's full range stand instead of picking a side to feel settled?*

DAY 6

Find what you wrote for *Consider This* at the start of this session. *Rewrite your answer now. What's different?*

Practice the Assurance prayer this week — once for yourself, and once with someone who needs to hear either version of it.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Arc and timing (90 minutes). The Design and The Fall move quickly — most groups already agree on the basic shape of "we're all sinners." Don't linger there. Budget real time for the two *What About* sections; they are where the room will actually engage, and rushing them defeats the point of including them.

Where the room stalls. Expect the "why would God allow sin" question to produce either silence or a rapid, over-confident answer someone learned in another setting. Let the silence sit for a few seconds before you fill it — that's usually the room actually thinking, not the room being stuck. On eternal security, expect strong opinions arriving already formed from someone's prior church background. Your job is not to resolve the debate in the room. It's to make sure both positions get stated in their strongest form before anyone responds to a weaker version of the other side.

Discussion questions, if you need more than the Pause & Reflect prompts:

1. Before this session, how would you have answered "what is the gospel" in one sentence? How would you answer it now?
2. Does the security-vs-responsibility tension in Scripture unsettle you, or does it feel honest? Why?
3. Justification is described as a verdict, not a feeling. What would change this week if you actually lived like the verdict was already final?

What to cut if you're behind. Trim The Result's justification/sanctification distinction to one sentence

and point the group to Session 17, where it returns in full. Do not cut either *What About* section — they are the two places this session earns its length, and the risk map exists specifically because Sessions like this one need the room, not because the content is optional.

Kingdom Invitation

“What is God actually inviting you into, and what did it cost to make the invitation possible?”

THE DESIGN

Before there was a fall to recover from, there was a relationship to have. Eden functioned as a sanctuary, not just a garden — humanity placed there to walk with God in unbroken nearness. That nearness, not a transaction, is what salvation exists to restore.

Genesis 2:15
Genesis 3:8

THE FALL

Sin is a miss, not a mistake made in the dark — the same word Scripture uses for an arrow that misses its target. Eve wasn’t tricked and Adam wasn’t absent; both, eyes open, decided they knew better than their Maker. One missed mark was enough.

Romans 3:23
James 2:10

THE SOLUTION

Christ is not one path among many but the one mediator who paid, in full, a debt no effort could clear. His death satisfied real justice rather than merely covering sin from view, so mercy and holiness could meet at the same moment, without contradiction.

1 Timothy 2:5
Ephesians 2:8–9

THE RESULT

Salvation is a verdict rendered once, by faith apart from works — and also a process, still underway, of your life catching up to what is already legally true. Justification settles the case; sanctification is what living like the verdict is final looks like.

Romans 3:28
1 Corinthians 1:18

THE TURN

Every other bridge you’ve been quietly building — performance, comparison, religious effort — can be set down, because it was never load-bearing. If justification is a verdict, you have somewhere true to stand while your feelings catch up.

Romans 10:9–10

SO NOW

GRACE, NOT LADDER

Every other religious system is a ladder to climb. This is the only account of reality where the gift is handed down, not climbed up to — so no one gets to stand at the top and take credit.

Ephesians 2:8–9

VERDICT, NOT FEELING

Justification is a legal fact rendered once, not a feeling that fluctuates with your day. When your feelings say otherwise, you have somewhere true to stand while they catch up.

Romans 3:28

ANCHORED, NOT ANXIOUS

Assurance rests on the down payment of God’s own Spirit, not on how certain you feel about your own heart on a given day.

Ephesians 1:13–14

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Sin is always irrational.

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Next · Session 5, Kingdom Partnership. You've received the invitation. Session 5 is about what God gives you to actually live inside it — His partnership, His power, and His promises.

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5

KINGDOM PARTNERSHIP

Kingdom Essentials: The Mission

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 His Partnership

03 The Gifts of the Father

04 The Gifts of the Son

05 The Gifts of the Spirit

06 His Promises

07 The Turn

08 The Experience · Declarations

09 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Every gift implies a giver, and every gift implies a purpose. God did not save you and then leave you standing at the door with nothing to do. He handed you tools, and He asked you to work alongside Him.

What has God actually given you to work with, and why does He work through you instead of just doing it Himself?

Session 4 told you how the relationship was restored. This session tells you what that restored relationship is *for*. If Session 4 was the rescue, this is the assignment.

CONSIDER THIS

Name one thing you are naturally good at, and one thing you have watched the Holy Spirit do through you that you could not have produced on your own. Write both down.

Come back to it on Day 6.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for choosing to work with me rather than around me. Show me what You have already given me, and show me where I have been sitting on gifts I was meant to use. In Jesus' name, amen.

His Partnership

God does not need your help. He is omnipotent — able to accomplish anything He wills, by Himself, instantly. And yet Scripture shows a God who has repeatedly chosen not to act alone.

> *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground."*
>
> **GENESIS 1:28**

> *The heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to mankind.*
>
> **PSALM 115:16**

Notice what that pair of verses does together. God retains the heavens — His own direct, unmediated domain — but hands the earth's day-to-day governance to the creatures He made in His image. That was true before the Fall and it is still true after it: God's ordinary way of working on earth is through the hands of the people He has placed here, not around them.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> In 1836, George Müller opened the first of what would become five orphan houses on Ashley Down in Bristol, England. Over six decades he housed, fed, and educated more than 10,000 children — and he made it a fixed policy never to ask any person directly for money or supplies. He prayed, and he kept detailed, published records of exactly how each need was met, often within hours of the prayer being prayed. But Müller did not only pray. He also negotiated leases, hired staff, balanced ledgers, and administered a large, complicated institution for most of his adult life. He treated the praying and the working as one act, not two competing strategies.
>
> Müller's own explanation was simple: God could have supplied everything by a single word, the way He spoke light into being. Instead, God chose to supply it through a man who prayed and then got up and did the next practical thing.

That is what partnership looks like in practice: total dependence on God's provision, joined to full engagement in the work itself. Neither half is optional, and neither half is in competition with the other.

Notice, too, what Müller's own half of the work actually was: stewardship — managing leases, ledgers, and other people's trust with the same seriousness he brought to the praying. This session doesn't have room to develop that half of partnership on its own; a separate course, *Kingdom Stewardship*, will.

I AM NOT SAYING

- That God is dependent on you, or that His plans could fail without your cooperation.
- That your gifts are somehow more essential to the outcome than His power.
- That partnering with God earns you standing with Him you did not already have as His child.

I AM SAYING

- That God has sovereignly chosen to accomplish His will through willing people rather than around them.
- That this choice is a gift to you, not a need in Him — He invites you into something real, not something He couldn't do without you.
- That your obedience and your gifts genuinely matter to how His will gets done in your corner of the earth, even though His will is not ultimately at risk.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where in your life have you been waiting for God to act alone, when what He's actually waiting for is your next obedient step?

WHAT ABOUT …

If God could act alone, why does He work through us?

If partnership is a choice and not a necessity, a fair question follows: why would an all-sufficient God choose the slower, messier path of working through flawed people at all?

Scripture's own answer is relational, not efficient. God did not design creation to be managed by a distant sovereign issuing decrees from a throne no one could approach. He designed it to be governed in relationship — first with Adam and Eve in the garden, then through judges, kings, prophets, and now through everyone united to Christ.

> *“I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted;”*
>
> **JOB 42:2**

> *Jesus looked at them and replied, “This is impossible for mere humans, but for God all things are possible.”*
>
> **MATTHEW 19:26**

Both verses affirm the same thing this session already assumes: God’s capability was never the question. The question is what kind of world He chose to build with that capability, and Scripture’s answer is consistent from Genesis to Revelation — a world where His image bearers act, choose, and are held responsible for what they do with what they’re given. A world managed entirely by unilateral divine action would not need image bearers at all. It would need employees, or puppets. God built neither. He built partners.

Here is where I land, and why. I don’t think Scripture treats this as a mystery to be solved so much as a relationship to be entered. God’s choice to work through people costs Him something real — the gifts get misused, the timing gets delayed, the message gets garbled by the messenger. He accepts that cost because the alternative — a world where nothing is genuinely entrusted to anyone — isn’t the kind of relationship He built us for in the first place.

The Gifts of the Father

For a partnership to work in practice, both parties need something to bring to it. God didn’t just invite you to work — He equipped you first.

> *For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think with sober discernment, as God [the Father] has distributed to each of you a measure of faith. For just as in one body we have many members, and not all the members serve the same function, so we who are many are one body*

> *in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another. And we have* ***different gifts*** (χάρισμα) *according to the grace given to us. If the gift is prophecy, that individual must use it in proportion to his faith. If it is service, he must serve; if it is teaching, he must teach; if it is exhortation, he must exhort; if it is contributing, he must do so with sincerity; if it is leadership, he must do so with diligence; if it is showing mercy, he must do so with cheerfulness.*
>
> **ROMANS 12:3–8**

WORD STUDY

χάρισμα *charisma* G5486

> **"different gifts"** · Romans 12:6 · **"different gifts"** · 1 Corinthians 12:4

Range. Built from *charis* — grace. A *charisma* is not a natural talent you were born with and not a reward you earned. It's a specific capacity handed to you as an act of grace, for a purpose you didn't set.

The sense here. Paul lists seven gifts in Romans 12 — prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy — that look almost ordinary next to the more dramatic list in 1 Corinthians 12. That's the point. These are the gifts that keep a body of believers functioning day to day, and Paul treats them with exactly the same word, the same dignity, as the more visibly supernatural ones.

Why it carries the argument. If every believer carries a *charisma* — not some believers, all of them — then no one gets to sit out the partnership on the grounds that they weren't given anything. The measure differs. The grace behind it doesn't.

Source. BDAG, s.v. χάρισμα.

Notice what the list is *not*: a ranking. Paul doesn't say prophecy matters more than mercy, or that leadership outranks service. Each function is named, each is given a way to do it well — "in proportion to his faith," "with sincerity," "with cheerfulness" — and none is treated as more essential to the body than another. Your gift may not look dramatic. Scripture doesn't require it to.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Of the seven gifts Paul names — prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy — which one do people who know you well say fits you? Do you agree, or have you been undervaluing it?

The Gifts of the Son

The Father gives capacities. The Son, as head of the church, gives something different: He gives people.

> *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he [Jesus] ascended on high he captured captives; he* ***gave gifts*** (δόμα) *to men." Now what is the meaning of "he ascended," except that he also descended to the lower regions, namely, the earth? He, the very one who descended, is also the one who ascended above all the heavens, in order to fill all things. And he himself gave some as apostles, some as prophets,*

> *some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God — a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature.*
>
> **EPHESIANS 4:7–13**

WORD STUDY

δόμα *doma* G1390

> **"gave gifts"** · Ephesians 4:8

Range. A general word for a gift or present — related to *didōmi*, "to give," but broader and plainer than *charisma*. Paul is quoting Psalm 68:18, where a victorious king returns from battle and distributes plunder to his own people.

The sense here. Paul's application is deliberate: the risen Christ, having conquered sin and death, doesn't hand out abilities here. He hands out *people* — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers — as gifts to the rest of the church.

Why it carries the argument. This is a genuinely different category from Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12. The Father distributes capacities to individuals; the Spirit distributes enablements as He decides; the Son gives the church specific *leaders*, appointed to a role, whose entire job is to equip everyone else for the work in front of them (v. 12). If you have ever been built up by a pastor, teacher, or someone who functioned prophetically or evangelistically in your life, Scripture says you were looking at Christ's own gift to you.

Source. BDAG, s.v. δόμα.

That last phrase is worth sitting with: these roles exist “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” — not to do the ministry for them. A pastor who does all the caring so the congregation never has to, or a teacher who never expects anyone to act on what they’ve learned, has misunderstood the gift. The Son’s gifts exist to multiply workers, not to replace them.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Think of someone whose teaching, pastoring, or example genuinely equipped you for something. Have you ever told them that, or thanked God for them as Christ’s specific gift to you?

The Gifts of the Spirit

The Father gives capacity. The Son gives leaders. The Spirit gives power — and distributes it Himself, as He sees fit.

> *But you will receive **power** (δύναμις) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.*
>
> **ACTS 1:8**

WORD STUDY

δύναμις *dynamis* G1411

> **“power”** · Acts 1:8

Range. Inherent capability — the power residing in a thing by virtue of what it is, or exerted by a person to perform a mighty work. It’s the root behind the English word “dynamite.” The noun is grammatically feminine in Greek, which is worth noting only because it settles a confusion some believers carry: this power is not simply another name for the Holy Spirit Himself, who is consistently referred to as “He” throughout the New Testament. It is something He gives.

The sense here. Jesus doesn’t promise His disciples better arguments, more confidence, or improved character when the Spirit comes — though all of those may follow. He promises *dynamis*: a capability that wasn’t available to them before, given for a stated purpose — to be His witnesses.

Why it carries the argument. Power that is never released produces nothing. Whatever *dynamis* you were given at your own baptism with the Holy Spirit was not given to sit unused. It was given so that something true about Jesus would become visible through your life that would not have been visible otherwise.

Source. BDAG, s.v. δύναμις.

That power is not distributed evenly or automatically. Scripture gives it a name, a source, and a decision-maker.

> *Now there are **different gifts** (χάρισμα), but the same Spirit. And there are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all. For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these things.*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–11**

Three things in that passage are easy to skim past. First, “for the benefit of all” — these gifts are never given for the receiver’s private advantage; they exist to serve the rest of the body. Second, “as he decides” — the Spirit assigns, you don’t select from a catalog. And third, the list itself refuses to rank: wisdom and tongues appear in the same sentence, with no hierarchy attached.

Paul is not shy about the stakes of leaving these gifts unopened.

> *For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.*
>
> **ROMANS 11:29**

> *so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 1:7**

> *But you should be eager for the greater gifts. And now I will show you a way that is beyond comparison.*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 12:31**

Notice the tension Paul holds without resolving it: pursue the gifts earnestly — and the "way beyond comparison" he's about to describe in Chapter 13 is love, not a replacement for the gifts but the only right motive for using them. A gift exercised without love isn't a virtue. It's noise (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Here is where I land, and why — this one is a personal conviction, held loosely. I believe the gifts of the Spirit are available to every believer baptized with the Holy Spirit, and that a given gift is released the moment you step out in faith and actually begin to exercise it — not a moment before. In my own experience, words of wisdom or words of prophecy have never come until I opened my mouth to speak them. It seems the Holy Spirit was waiting for me to move before He moved.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Is there a spiritual gift you believe you've been given but have left unopened — out of fear, self-doubt, or simply never having tried? What would it look like to test it this week, in a low-stakes setting, with people who love you?

WHAT ABOUT …

Did the spiritual gifts stop with the apostles?

Some careful, Bible-believing Christians hold that the more dramatic gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 — prophecy, tongues, healing, miracles — were given specifically to authenticate the apostles' message while the New Testament was still being

written, and ceased once the canon of Scripture was complete. This position is called cessationism, and it deserves a fair hearing rather than a caricature.

The strongest form of that argument starts here:

> *Love never ends. But if there are prophecies, they will be set aside; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be set aside. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when what is perfect comes, the partial will be set aside.*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 13:8–10**

Cessationists argue that "what is perfect" refers to the completed canon of Scripture — once the full, sufficient written revelation existed, the argument goes, the partial, revelatory gifts that filled the gap were no longer needed and gracefully retired. It's a coherent reading, and it's held by careful theologians who take Scripture, not sensationalism, as their guide.

It's also not the reading this session takes, for a specific textual reason: Paul's own description of when "the partial will be set aside" is "face to face" knowledge that matches being "fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12) — language that reads far more naturally as Christ's return than as the closing of a first-century book collection. Paired with Paul telling the Corinthians they don't "lack any spiritual gift" while they "wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7) — a phrase that names Christ's return, not the canon — the more natural reading is that these gifts continue operating until the same event ends the need for prophecy and knowledge altogether: seeing Him face to face.

Here is where I land, and why. I hold a continuationist position — that the Spirit still distributes every gift named in 1 Corinthians 12, including the more dramatic ones, to the church today, because I don't find "the completed canon" as the referent for "what is perfect" in the text itself. I hold that position with real respect for cessationist brothers and sisters who read the same nine verses and land elsewhere; this is not a gospel-level disagreement, and treating it as one does more damage to the body than either position does on its own.

His Promises

Everything this session has described — the partnership, the gifts, the power — rests on one further claim: that the God who gave these things can be trusted to keep His word about them.

> *God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a human being, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it happen?*
>
> **NUMBERS 23:19**

> *"Since, I, the Lord, do not go back on my promises, you, sons of Jacob, have not perished."*
>
> **MALACHI 3:6**

> *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever!*
>
> **HEBREWS 13:8**

> *All generous giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change.*
>
> **JAMES 1:17**

Four different writers over a period of nearly two thousand years, saying the same thing: God's character doesn't drift. He cannot lie, because lying would mean becoming something other than what He already, perfectly, is. That's not a limitation on His power. It's the reason His promises are worth anything at all — a being who could change His mind tomorrow couldn't actually promise anything today.

WORD STUDY

ἐπαγγελία *epangelia* G1860

> **“promises”** · 2 Corinthians 1:20

Range. A formal announcement or pledge — not a hope or a hint, but a specific, binding commitment made publicly and on the record.

The sense here. Paul isn’t describing God’s promises as generally trustworthy in the way a friend’s word is generally trustworthy. He’s describing every single one — “every one,” without exception — as already settled, already guaranteed, in Christ.

Why it carries the argument. If even one of God’s *epangeliai* had failed, the whole category would be suspect. Paul’s claim is total precisely because it has to be: a partly-reliable promise is not a promise from an immutable God — it’s evidence against one.

Source. BDAG, s.v. ἐπαγγελία.

> *For every one of God’s **promises** (ἐπαγγελία) are “Yes” in him; therefore also through him the “Amen” is spoken, to the glory we give to God.*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 1:20**

Scripture doesn’t leave that as an abstract claim. It shows its work.

> *Not one of the Lord’s faithful promises to the family of Israel was left unfulfilled; every one was realized.*
>
> **JOSHUA 21:45**

ILLUSTRATION

Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute in a city under a death sentence. When she hid two Israelite spies from Jericho's king, she asked for one thing in return.

> *"So now, promise me this with an oath sworn in the Lord's name. Because I have shown allegiance to you, show allegiance to my family. Give me a solemn pledge that you will spare the lives of my father, mother, brothers, sisters, and all who belong to them, and will rescue us from death."*
>
> **JOSHUA 2:12–13**

The spies swore it. Weeks later, Jericho's walls fell and the city was destroyed — every household in it, with one exception.

> *Yet Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, her father's family, and all who belonged to her. She lives in Israel to this very day because she hid the messengers Joshua sent to spy on Jericho.*
>
> **JOSHUA 6:25**

The promise was made to a foreign woman with no standing to demand it, in the middle of a war, by two men who had every incentive to forget it once they were safely back across the Jordan. It was kept anyway, to the letter, in the same book of Scripture that later states flatly: not one promise failed.

Scripture is equally direct about who this reliability is available to.

> *Then Peter started speaking: "I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him."*

ACTS 10:34–35

God does not play favorites by nation, status, background, or how impressive your résumé looks to Him — a truth Peter needed a vision and a Roman centurion's household to fully learn (Acts 10:1–33). That doesn't mean He treats every response to Him identically; Scripture is just as clear that He draws close to those who draw close to Him (James 4:8). One author's paraphrase of that tension, written as though God Himself were speaking, captures it well:

> *"It's true that My gifts and blessings are available to anyone who chooses to enter into a relationship with Me and live by faith… In that sense, I am no respecter of persons. But I don't treat everyone the same, because not everyone responds to Me the same way."*
>
> C. Tiegreen · devotional author · *The One Year Hearing His Voice Devotional*, 2014

No favoritism in who is welcome. No formula for how present He feels. Both are true, and neither cancels the other.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Is there a promise of God you have been treating as generally true but not specifically true for you? What would change if you took Numbers 23:19 at face value about that exact situation?

The Turn

You now have what this session set out to give you: a Father who chose partnership over unilateral control, gifts from all three Persons of the Trinity waiting to be used rather than admired, and a God whose promises about all of it are as reliable as His own unchanging character.

None of that was meant to stay theoretical. If God has genuinely given you a *charisma*, leaving it unopened isn't humility — it's declining the gift. If the Spirit distributes power "for the benefit of all," then the gift you've been sitting on was never yours to keep to yourself. And if His promises really are "Yes" in Christ, then the specific promise you've been hedging on deserves to be taken at face value starting today, not someday.

The Experience · Declarations

Speak these aloud, as your own declaration — not because the words themselves carry power apart from what they're rooted in, but because Scripture repeatedly calls you to say out loud what God has already said is true (Romans 10:9–10).

On partnership: *Father, You didn't need me, but You chose me. I am not a spectator in Your story — I am called and equipped to play my part. Today I will act, not wait, on what You've already given me to do.*

On the gifts: *I have been given grace-gifts by the Father, I have been built up by leaders Christ Himself appointed as gifts to me, and I have received power from the Holy Spirit — not for my own advantage, but for the benefit of the people around me. I will not leave what I've been given unopened.*

On the promises: *God is not a man, that He should lie. What He has spoken, He will do. I will take Him at His word today, specifically, not just in general.*

BIG IDEAS

1. God is fully capable of acting alone, and has chosen instead to accomplish His will through willing partners — a relational choice, not a necessity.
2. The Father gives every believer a *charisma* — a grace-gift for ordinary, essential service; no one is left out.
3. The Son gives the church people — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers — whose job is to equip everyone else, not replace them.

4. The Spirit distributes *dynamis*, supernatural power, as He decides, for the benefit of the whole body — a gift meant to be exercised, not admired.
5. Every one of God's promises is reliable because His character is unchanging; He cannot lie, does not play favorites, and has never once failed to keep His word.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God doesn't need a partner. He wants one.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for choosing me as a partner instead of leaving me a spectator. Thank You for gifts I didn't earn and promises I can't outlast. Show me what I've left unopened, and give me the courage to use it — for the benefit of the people You've put around me. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Chris Vallotton, *Prophecy: The Gift vs. the Office*.

A short, practical treatment of one specific gift from 1 Corinthians 12 — useful for seeing how this session's principles play out for a single gift in real church life.

SUBSTANTIAL

Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*.
Written by a former cessationist seminary professor who changed his position — the most honest, textually serious account available of why someone moves from one side of this session's What About to the other.

ACADEMIC

Graves, *The Kingdom Case Against Cessationism* (2022).
The fullest, most recent academic-tier case for continuationism in my own research library — read it before you firm up your own position past what this session gave you.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Psalm 115:16 and Genesis 1:28. *Where has God given you real responsibility rather than a spectator's seat? Are you exercising it, or waiting for Him to act alone?*

DAY 2

Read Romans 12:3–8 slowly. *Which of the seven gifts fits you, according to people who know you well — and are you using it?*

DAY 3

Read Ephesians 4:11–13. *Name someone whose teaching or example was genuinely Christ's gift to you. Thank God for them by name.*

DAY 4

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–11. *Is there a gift of the Spirit you believe you've been given but never tested? What's one low-stakes way to test it this week?*

DAY 5

Read Numbers 23:19 and 2 Corinthians 1:20. *Name one specific promise of God you've been treating as generally true but not specifically true for your situation.*

DAY 6

Find what you wrote for *Consider This* at the start of this session. *Has anything changed in how you see what you're naturally good at, or what the Spirit has done through you?*

Practice this week's declarations aloud — once alone, once with someone who can hold you to using what you name.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Partnership

"What has God actually given you to work with, and why does He work through you instead of just doing it Himself?"

THE PARTNERSHIP

God is fully capable of acting alone, and has chosen instead to work through willing people — the earth handed to Adam and Eve to govern, the same trust extended to every believer since. That's not a concession to weakness. It's the kind of world a relational God builds on purpose.

Genesis 1:28
Psalm 115:16

THE GIFTS

The Father hands every believer a charisma — a grace-gift for ordinary, essential service, with no one left out. The Son hands the church people: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, given to equip everyone else, not replace them.

Romans 12:3–8
Ephesians 4:7–13

THE POWER

The Spirit distributes dynamis — power for a purpose — not evenly and not on request, but "as he decides," for the benefit of the whole body. Power that's never released produces nothing; it was never given to sit unused.

Acts 1:8
1 Corinthians 12:4–11

THE PROMISES

God cannot lie, and has never once failed to keep His word — not because His power guarantees it, but because His character does. What He has spoken, He will do, for you specifically, not just in general.

Numbers 23:19
2 Corinthians 1:20

THE TURN

None of this was meant to stay theoretical. If God has genuinely given you a charisma, leaving it unopened isn't humility — it's declining the gift. Fan back into flame what you've been sitting on.

2 Timothy 1:6

SO NOW

PARTNER, NOT PUPPET

God doesn't need your help to accomplish His will. He has chosen to work through you rather than around you — a relational choice, not a necessity, and not a demand you have to meet.

Genesis 1:28

GIVEN, NOT EARNED

A charisma isn't a natural talent you were born with or a reward you earned. It's a specific capacity handed to you by grace, for a purpose you didn't set — and every believer has one.

Romans 12:6

RELIABLE, NOT REACTIVE

God's promises don't fluctuate with the day, your mood, or your performance. His character doesn't drift, so His word doesn't either.

Numbers 23:19

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God doesn't need a partner. He wants one.

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Next · Session 6, Kingdom Violence. You've been given a partnership, gifts, and promises. Session 6 is honest about what opposes all three — the violence the Kingdom provokes, from the culture and from inside the church itself.

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6

KINGDOM VIOLENCE

Kingdom Essentials: The Mission

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Violence and the Kingdom

03 Violence from the Culture

04 Labels & Dissonance

05 Violence from Inside the Church

06 Consequences

07 The Turn

08 The Experience · Testimony

09 Six-Day Practice

The Question

A Kingdom life is not a quieter life. Session 5 told you that God has given you real gifts and real partnership — and the moment you start using either one, something pushes back. Not sometimes. Every time.

Why does living for the Kingdom provoke opposition instead of applause, and where does that opposition actually come from?

Session 5 told you what God has given you to work with. This session tells you what stands against it — from the culture around you, from inside the church itself, and from the quiet mislabeling that can happen in your own mind before you ever notice it happening.

CONSIDER THIS

Name the last time living out your faith cost you something — an awkward conversation, a strained relationship, a moment you stayed

quiet when you should have spoken, or spoke when it would have been easier not to. Don't judge it yet. Just name it.

Come back to it on Day 6.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I want to see clearly what actually opposes the life You've called me to — not more vividly than I see Your authority over it, but clearly enough to stop being surprised by it. Teach me to stand firm without becoming bitter, and to tell the difference between the enemy's voice and my own fear. In Jesus' name, amen.

Violence and the Kingdom

Jesus said something genuinely strange about His own Kingdom: it suffers violence, and violent people are the ones who take hold of it. That is not a promise of ease. It is a warning built into the invitation itself.

> *"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has **suffered violence** (βιάζεται), and forceful people lay hold of it."*
>
> **MATTHEW 11:12**

WORD STUDY

βιάζεται *biazetai* G971

> **“suffered violence”** · Matthew 11:12

Range. From *biazō* — to use force, to press or crowd forcibly, to constrain. Here in the passive/middle voice: the kingdom is being pressed upon, forced, taken by storm. The very next clause supplies the human agents: *biastai* (G973), “forceful people” — and what they do to the kingdom is *harpazousin* (G726), the same verb used elsewhere for wolves snatching sheep or a thief seizing goods.

The sense here. Jesus is not describing the kingdom as fragile. He is describing the intensity required to enter it, and the intensity of the resistance surrounding it. Something worth having is also something worth fighting for — and something the enemy will fight to keep you from.

Why it carries the argument. If the kingdom could be entered casually, the New Testament’s repeated language of contending, struggling, and standing firm would be theatrical. It isn’t. From the first mention of the kingdom’s advance in the Gospels, Scripture tells you plainly: this will cost you effort, and something will resist that effort.

Source. BDAG, s.v. βιάζω.

Jesus is not talking about life in heaven — there is no violence there — and He is not talking only about physical violence. He is describing life on earth, right now, for anyone who actually tries to live the life He offers. The kingdom is worth everything it costs.

> *“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, hidden in a field, that a person found and hid. Then because of joy he went and sold all that he had and bought that field.”*

> **MATTHEW 13:44**

Notice the order: joy comes *before* the selling, not after. The man doesn't grit his teeth and give up everything, hoping it's worth it. He has already seen enough to know it is, and the sale is the easy part.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Around AD 155, an elderly bishop named Polycarp was arrested in Smyrna, a city in modern-day Turkey. He had been a Christian for most of his life and was reportedly the last living person known to have been personally taught by an apostle. When Roman authorities pressed him to curse Christ and swear allegiance to Caesar in exchange for his life, Polycarp gave an answer that has survived for nineteen centuries: "Eighty-six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King?" The authorities burned him at the stake. According to the earliest surviving account of his death, when the fire did not kill him, a soldier ended his life with a blade instead.
>
> Polycarp did not go looking for violence. He simply refused to stop being who eighty-six years with Christ had made him — and the kingdom of heaven, once again, suffered violence.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where has the intensity Jesus describes here — pressing in, taking hold, refusing to let go — actually shown up in your own pursuit of Him? Where has it been missing?

Violence from the Culture

Some opposition to the Kingdom is loud and physical. Most of what you will personally face is quieter — but Jesus told His disciples to expect both, and to

expect neither to have the final word.

> *"I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have **trouble** (θλῖψιν) and suffering, but take courage — I have conquered the world."*
>
> **JOHN 16:33**

WORD STUDY

θλῖψις *thlipsis* G2347

> **"trouble"** · John 16:33

Range. Literally a pressing-together, a crushing weight. Used throughout the New Testament for affliction, distress, and persecution — the kind of pressure applied from the outside that you cannot simply decide your way out of.

The sense here. Jesus says this hours before His own arrest — His own *thlipsis*, more crushing than any His disciples would face. He does not promise them an exemption. He promises them His own outcome: *nenikēka*, "I have conquered" (from *nikaō*, G3528) — a verb in the perfect tense, meaning the victory is already won and its result still stands.

Why it carries the argument. *Thlipsis* is not a sign that something has gone wrong with your faith. Jesus predicts it in the same breath He promises peace. The pressure and the peace were never meant to cancel each other out.

Source. BDAG, s.v. θλῖψις.

Jesus told His own disciples this the night before His crucifixion. Decades later, the apostle John — by then an old man, exiled for his faith — wrote to churches under active Roman persecution and told them the same thing was still true, with a promise attached.

> *"Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering for ten days. Remain faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown that is life itself."*
>
> **REVELATION 2:10**

For most readers of this session, that will not mean prison. It will mean the quieter costs: a promotion that goes to someone else, a family relationship that cools, a friendship that cannot survive an honest conversation about what you believe. Those costs are real, even when they are not dramatic — and for hundreds of millions of believers in the world today, the costs are not quiet at all.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Richard Wurmbrand was a Lutheran pastor in Romania when the Communist government took power in 1948. He was arrested that same year for continuing to preach and spent roughly fourteen years total in Communist prisons across two separate terms of imprisonment, including years in solitary confinement and repeated torture — scars he would later show the United States Senate in 1966 to make the reality of Christian persecution impossible to dismiss as rumor. After his release and his family's emigration, Wurmbrand spent the rest of his life building what became The Voice of the Martyrs, an organization still serving persecuted believers in dozens of countries today.
>
> Wurmbrand did not describe his imprisonment as a tragedy that happened *to* his faith. He described it as the place his faith became real to him in a way it never had been in freedom.

WHAT ABOUT …

Why would a good God let living for Him provoke violence?

This is the question underneath everything in this session, and it deserves a straight answer rather than a deflection. If God is good and all-powerful, why does He allow — sometimes even seem to *build in* — real cost for the people who follow Him most closely?

Scripture never pretends this isn't a real tension. It doesn't offer a tidy resolution so much as a reframing on two fronts. First, the opposition is not evidence that God has lost control; it is evidence that something true and valuable is under attack, and nothing false is worth attacking. Second, Scripture consistently locates the final word not in the absence of suffering but in what stands on the other side of it.

> *"But they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die."*
>
> **REVELATION 12:11**

That verse does not minimize what it cost the people it describes. It says plainly that some of them died. And it calls that outcome an *overcoming* — because the thing being fought for was never merely staying alive.

Here is where I land, and why. I don't think Scripture answers the philosophical form of this question — why an all-good, all-powerful God permits any suffering at all is a bigger question than this session can carry, and I'd rather say that plainly than manufacture a tidy answer the text doesn't give. What Scripture does answer is the pastoral form of the question: what do I do with the opposition I'm actually facing? And there, the answer is consistent from Matthew to Revelation — the opposition is real, it is not a sign of divine absence, and it does not get the last word.

Where this stays unresolved: Scripture tells you that opposition is certain and that Christ has already overcome it. It does not tell you why this particular arrangement — real cost, guaranteed victory, but not guaranteed comfort in the meantime — was the one God chose. That is a genuine limit on what the text says, not a gap in your understanding.

Labels & Dissonance

Not all opposition to the Kingdom looks like opposition. Some of it arrives wearing the language of kindness, and it is aimed at the one thing the enemy has

always targeted first: what you believe is actually true.

> *"Those who **call evil good and good evil** are as good as dead, who turn darkness into light and light into darkness, who turn bitter into sweet and sweet into bitter."*
>
> **ISAIAH 5:20**

You have heard the modern versions of exactly this move, and they usually sound reasonable, even loving, on first hearing: *God would never be intolerant. God loves me just as I am. God made me this way. Love is love, and God approves every expression of it.* Each one borrows real, true words — love, acceptance, God's character — and rearranges them into something Scripture does not actually say. That is not an accident. It is the same strategy the serpent used in the garden, and it works today for the same reason it worked then: because it doesn't announce itself as an attack.

> *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires. Then when desire conceives, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death. Do not be **led astray** (πλανᾶσθε), my dear brothers and sisters."*
>
> **JAMES 1:13–16**

WORD STUDY

πλανάω *planaō* G4105

> **"led astray"** · James 1:16

Range. To cause to wander, to lead off the correct path, to deceive. The noun form gives English the word "planet" — a wandering star, one that doesn't hold a fixed course.

The sense here. James doesn't warn his readers about a hypothetical trap. He warns them because being led astray usually doesn't feel like being led astray *while it's happening*. It feels like following a plausible path that simply, gradually, isn't the one you started on.

Why it carries the argument. A label doesn't have to be a lie to do damage. It only has to be slightly off — true-sounding enough to relax your guard, off-course enough to end somewhere Scripture never sent you.

Source. BDAG, s.v. πλανάω.

Truth, in Scripture, is not primarily a set of correct statements. It is a Person.

> *"I [Jesus] am **the way**, and **the truth**, and **the life**. No one comes to the Father except through me."*
>
> **JOHN 14:6**

That is why relabeling truth is never a neutral act. When a claim reshapes what love means, or what freedom means, or what God approves, it is not adjusting a definition. It is describing a different god than the one who actually exists — and Scripture calls that, plainly, idolatry.

> *"Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, 'If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples' — and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*
>
> **JOHN 8:31–32**

Freedom, on this account, is not the absence of definition. It is *correct* definition — knowing what is actually real closely enough to stop organizing your life around what isn't.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn’t calling these ideas “deception” just intolerance?

A fair-minded person could push back hard here: *Some of those phrases you just called deceptive — “God loves me as I am,” “God made me this way” — are said by people trying to be kind, often to someone who has been genuinely hurt by the church. Calling that deception sounds less like discernment and more like judgment wearing a theology degree.*

That concern deserves to be taken seriously, because the concern about *how* something is said is often more valid than the objection to it realizes. Cruelty delivered with correct doctrine is still cruelty, and Scripture has no patience for it (1 Corinthians 13:1–2). But the concern about kindness and the question of accuracy are two different questions, and collapsing them is exactly the move this section is describing. A doctor’s diagnosis is not made cruel by being accurate, and it is not made kind by being softened until it stops describing what’s actually there. The label “God loves me just as I am” is not false because it is unkind to say. It is false — or at least dangerously incomplete — because Scripture’s own account of God’s love always pairs it with a call to change (Romans 2:4, John 8:11), and a love that asks nothing of you is not the love the text describes.

Here is where I land, and why. I think this section can be lived out with real gentleness toward the person still holding one of these phrases, most of whom absorbed it in good faith rather than constructed it in bad faith — and with real clarity about the phrase itself, because the two are not in tension. The goal was never to catch someone in an error. It was to keep you, the reader, from quietly adopting one.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Which of the phrases named in this section have you repeated yourself, without stopping to check it against Scripture? What would the more accurate version sound like?

Violence from Inside the Church

You might expect the church to be the one place safe from this kind of opposition. Scripture never promises that, and your own experience has probably already told you why.

> *"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the **gates of Hades** will not overpower it."*
>
> **MATTHEW 16:18**

That promise is real, and it is worth holding onto before reading the rest of this section: Jesus is building His church, and nothing — not even the internal damage this section describes — will stop Him from finishing. But the promise is about the church's ultimate outcome, not about your own local congregation being immune to the ordinary failures of a fallen world staffed by forgiven-but-not-yet-perfected people.

> *"But understand this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant… They will maintain the outward appearance of religion but will have repudiated its power. So avoid people like these."*
>
> **2 TIMOTHY 3:1–2, 5**

Paul is not describing outsiders. He is describing people who look, from the outside, like they belong — appearance of godliness intact, power of it gone. Scripture gives you two real, named accounts of exactly this happening inside the earliest church.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Simon, a well-known sorcerer in Samaria, believed the gospel Philip preached and was baptized alongside the rest of the city (Acts 8:9–13). By every outward measure, he belonged. Then he watched Peter and John lay hands on new believers and saw the Holy Spirit move — and offered them money to buy that same ability for himself. Peter's answer was not gentle:

> *"May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could acquire God's gift with money! You have no share or part in this matter because your heart is not right before God!… For I see that you are bitterly envious and in bondage to sin"* (Acts 8:20–23). Simon had the right baptism and the wrong heart, and Scripture does not soften that gap to make the story easier.
>
> A generation later, Paul wrote from prison about a co-worker who had once traveled with him: *"For Demas deserted me, since he loved the present age"* (2 Timothy 4:10). No scandal, no dramatic fall — just a slow trade of the kingdom for something more comfortable, made by someone who had been close enough to Paul to be named in his letters.

Not every internal failure is a moral collapse or a slow drift. Some of it is doctrinal — genuine believers, convinced they are defending the truth, who instead multiply confusion.

> *"And just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these people — who have warped minds and are disqualified in the faith — also oppose the truth… But they will not go much further, for their foolishness will be obvious to everyone."*
>
> **2 TIMOTHY 3:8–9**

Paul isn't describing enemies outside the church. He's describing people confident they're serving God who are, in fact, working against Him — a warning with an obvious modern application every time you scroll past a self-appointed doctrine-watcher more interested in being right than in building anyone up. An old, source-unknown maxim has guided the church through exactly this problem for centuries, and it's worth keeping close: *In the essentials, unity. In the non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.* Most of what divides believers online falls in the second category, argued as if it belonged in the first.

I AM NOT SAYING

- That every leader is secretly compromised, or that every ministry should be approached with suspicion by default.

- That naming these failures gives you license to gossip about, or write off, a specific person or church.
- That your own church's flaws — and it has some — mean you should disengage from it rather than stay and help it heal.

I AM SAYING

- That Scripture is honest about failure inside the believing community precisely because pretending it doesn't happen leaves you unprepared when it does.
- That discernment — testing what you're taught against Scripture (Acts 17:11) — is a normal, healthy practice, not a mark of cynicism.
- That the church's failures are real without being final; Christ is still building what He said He would build.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Has a failure inside the church — someone else's, or your own — ever made you quieter about your faith than Simon's or Demas's story should allow? What would it look like to stay engaged without pretending the risk isn't real?

Consequences

Every claim this session has made has a cost attached when it's ignored, and Scripture names two of them plainly.

> *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes… For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness."*
>
> **ROMANS 1:16, 18**

A church that trades the actual gospel for a softer, more palatable version does not become more loving. It becomes powerless — Paul ties the gospel's *power* directly to the gospel actually being preached, not a relabeled substitute for it. The same trade that costs a culture its footing costs a congregation its effectiveness, for the same reason: it is no longer describing what's real.

> *"The Lord approves of the godly, but he hates the wicked and those who love to do violence… Certainly the Lord is just; he rewards godly deeds; the upright will experience his favor."*
>
> **PSALM 11:5, 7**

The personal consequence is quieter but no less real. What you believe about God — whether He is trustworthy, whether His commands are for your good, whether His truth is worth defending even when it costs you — determines whether the opposition this session describes leaves you standing or leaves you shaken. That is not a threat. It is a description of how the tests you will actually face tend to work.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where have you already seen this play out — either a "softened" version of truth losing its power somewhere in your own life, or a wrong idea of God leaving you less able to withstand something hard?

The Turn

None of this was meant to leave you braced for an ambush. It was meant to take away the surprise. The kingdom suffers violence — from a culture that relabels what's true, from failures inside the church you belong to, from the ordinary pressure of living for something the world around you does not. Jesus told you all of it in advance, in the same breath He told you He had already conquered it.

That means the choice in front of you now is not whether opposition comes. It already has, and it will again. The choice is what you do with what you now know: whether you meet the next relabeled truth with Scripture instead of a shrug, whether you stay in a flawed church instead of a cynical exit, whether you let *thlipsis* surprise you into doubting God's goodness or remind you that He already said this would happen — and already told you how it ends.

The Experience · Testimony

Scripture ties overcoming directly to *telling* — "they overcame him… by the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11). A testimony is not a performance and not a polished conversion story reserved for people with dramatic pasts. It is a specific, true account of where opposition met you and did not win.

Write one page, in your own words, answering these in order: Where did you face real cost — cultural, internal to the church, or a deception you nearly believed — for following Christ? What did it actually cost you? Where was Christ's promise of peace or victory (John 16:33) true in the middle of it, even if you didn't recognize it until later?

Keep what you write. You will need it again — both for Day 6 below, and because Scripture's own pattern is that a testimony kept private has not finished doing its work.

BIG IDEAS

1. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence — real opposition is not a sign that something has gone wrong with your faith; it is what Jesus told you to expect.
2. That opposition comes from the culture, sometimes bluntly and sometimes disguised as kindness, and its primary weapon is a relabeling of what's true.
3. The church is not exempt from this — Scripture names real, specific failures inside the believing community without ever treating them as final.
4. A softened gospel loses its power; a wrong concept of God leaves you less able to withstand what's hard. Both are real, measurable costs of trading truth for comfort.
5. Jesus has already conquered the world you're opposed in. The opposition is certain. So is the outcome.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

The kingdom that suffers violence is the same kingdom that has already overcome the world.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for telling me the truth about what following You costs, instead of letting me discover it unprepared. Where I've absorbed a relabeled version of Your truth, show me plainly. Where the church has

> *wounded me, keep me from either pretending it didn't happen or walking away from what You're still building. And where the cost is simply the ordinary pressure of this world, remind me that You already told me — and You already conquered it. In Jesus' name, amen.*

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Frank Turek, apologetics talks and podcast episodes (available via CrossExamined.org and YouTube).
Practical, conversational responses to the cultural relabeling this session names — useful for the actual conversation, not just the concept.

SUBSTANTIAL

Watchman Nee, *Spiritual Warfare*.
A sustained, pastorally serious treatment of the opposition believers face, written by someone who paid for his faith with decades of imprisonment in China — the accessible-to-substantial bridge this session's "Violence from the Culture" material only sketches.

ACADEMIC

George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (1959).
The classic scholarly treatment of what "kingdom of heaven has suffered violence" (Matthew 11:12) actually means in its first-century context — read this before you teach this session to anyone else.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Matthew 11:12 and Matthew 13:44 slowly. *Where has entering the kingdom actually cost you effort, the way Jesus describes? Does the "joy first" order of Matthew 13:44 match your own experience of that cost?*

DAY 2

Read John 16:33 and Revelation 2:10. *Name one form of thlipsis — pressure, not necessarily persecution — you are carrying right now for following Christ. Where is Christ's "I have conquered" true in the middle of it?*

DAY 3

Read Isaiah 5:20 and James 1:13–16. *Which "reasonable-sounding" phrase from this week's culture have you caught yourself almost believing? Test it against Scripture directly, not against how it made you feel.*

DAY 4

Read Acts 8:9–24 and 2 Timothy 4:10. *Simon wanted power without a right heart. Demas wanted comfort more than the kingdom. Which pull is more familiar to you right now?*

DAY 5

Read Romans 1:16, 18 and Psalm 11:5–7. *Is there a place you've quietly softened what you actually believe to avoid a cost? What would it look like to stop?*

DAY 6

Find what you wrote for *Consider This* at the start of this session, and the page you wrote for *The Experience*. *Read both together. What do they tell you about how you actually respond when the kingdom you're pursuing meets resistance?*

Tell your Day 6 testimony to one other person this week — not the polished version, the true one.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Violence

"Why does living for the Kingdom provoke opposition instead of applause, and where does that opposition actually come from?"

THE KINGDOM

Jesus said something strange about His own Kingdom: it suffers violence, and forceful people take hold of it. That's not a design flaw. Something worth everything it costs is also something worth fighting for — and worth resisting.

Matthew 11:12
Matthew 13:44

THE CULTURE

Some opposition is loud persecution; a lot more of it arrives quietly relabeled as kindness — "God loves me just as I am," "love is love." Real words, rearranged into something Scripture never actually says. Both are opposition. Only one announces itself.

John 16:33
Isaiah 5:20

THE CHURCH

Scripture never promises your own congregation is immune to the ordinary failures of a fallen world staffed by forgiven-but-not-yet-perfected people — a Simon Magus chasing power, a Demas trading the kingdom for comfort. The church's failures are real. They are not final.

Matthew 16:18
2 Timothy 3:1–2, 5

THE COST

A softened gospel doesn't become more loving. It becomes powerless — Paul ties the gospel's power to the gospel actually being preached, not a relabeled substitute. What you actually believe about God determines whether opposition leaves you standing or shaken.

Romans 1:16, 18
Psalm 11:5, 7

THE TURN

None of this was meant to leave you braced for an ambush. It was meant to remove the surprise. Opposition has already come, and it will again — met now with Scripture instead of a shrug, and the same confidence that already overcame it.

Revelation 12:11

SO NOW

EXPECTED, NOT EXCEPTIONAL

Real opposition to a Kingdom life isn't evidence something has gone wrong with your faith. It's exactly what Jesus told you to expect the moment you actually started living it.

John 16:33

RELABELED, NOT REAL

A phrase can borrow true words — love, acceptance, God's character — and still describe a different god than the one who exists. Test the phrase, not just how kind it sounds.

Isaiah 5:20

CERTAIN, NOT FINAL

The opposition is certain. So is the outcome. Jesus told His disciples both in the same breath, the night before His own arrest.

Revelation 12:11

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

The kingdom that suffers violence is the same kingdom that has already overcome the world.

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Next · Session 7, Kingdom Conflict. You've seen how the kingdom is opposed. Session 7 names the four worldviews actually competing for your mind when that opposition arrives, and which one Scripture teaches.

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7

KINGDOM CONFLICT

Kingdom Essentials: The Mission

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Pursuit of Truth

03 Western Worldview

04 Sovereign Worldview

05 Warfare Worldview

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The Question

Something happens — a diagnosis, a betrayal, a war on the news, a child who walks away from faith — and before you have thought about it at all, you have already explained it to yourself. *God is teaching me something. That is just how people are. It is spiritual warfare. It is random.* You did not choose that explanation in the moment. You reached for whichever one was already loaded, because you had already decided, long before this happened, what kind of universe you live in.

That decision has a name. It is called a worldview, and this session asks which one Scripture actually teaches — because the wrong one will have you blaming God for what He never did, or missing a real battle He has already told you about.

A worldview is not a doctrine you chose; it is the lens you already look through, usually without knowing it is there. Four such lenses compete for the space behind every “why” question a painful world puts to you. This session holds all four against the whole of Scripture, not against whichever handful of verses feels most comfortable — and the way you engage that test matters as much as the

answer, since the reader most of this session is written for is also the one who will one day be asked to defend it.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I want to see the world the way You do — not the way my culture, my pain, or my habits have quietly taught me to. Show me where what I assume about You is not actually what You have said. Give me the courage to let go of an explanation that felt safe if it is not true, and to hold one that costs something if it is. In Jesus' name, amen.

CONSIDER THIS

Think of the last time something painful happened and you reached for an explanation — *God is teaching me a lesson, it is spiritual warfare, that is just bad luck, people are basically good, this was an outlier.* Name which one you actually reached for. Do not defend it yet.

Come back to it on Day 6.

Pursuit of Truth

Before you can decide which worldview is correct, you have to still believe "correct" is a category that applies — that some explanations of reality are actually true and others are actually false, regardless of who holds them or how sincerely. That belief is not as safe as it used to be, and the most powerful man in Jerusalem said the quiet part out loud.

> *"You say that I am a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world — to testify to the* ***truth*** *(ἀλήθειαν)." … "****What is truth?****"*
>
> **JOHN 18:37–38**

WORD STUDY

ἀλήθεια *alētheia* G225

> **"truth"** · John 18:37

Range. What is real, factual, and undisguised — the opposite of illusion, pretense, or a merely useful story. In classical Greek the word carries a sense of "unconcealment": reality with nothing hidden.

The sense here. Jesus does not say He knows the truth, teaches the truth, or has found the truth. He says He came to *testify* to it — a courtroom verb, used moments before He stands trial. Pilate's answering question is not curiosity. It is a shrug from a man with the power to kill Him, dismissing the category itself.

Why it carries the argument. Every worldview in this session is a claim about what is real. If *alētheia* is not a category anything can actually be — if it is only ever "true for you" — then this entire session is a preference, and so is the opposition it describes. The rest of this book only matters if Pilate's question has a real answer.

Source. BDAG, s.v. ἀλήθεια.

Pilate asked the right question and walked away before he got an answer. That is still the most common response to it — not denial, just an exit.

This session argues for truth as a category — that reality is not negotiable just because sincere people disagree about it. It does not, on its own, make the narrower case for why the specific book this whole curriculum quotes on every page should be trusted: how it was written, preserved across centuries of copying, and gathered into the canon you're holding. That case deserves its own full treatment rather than a paragraph borrowed from a different argument, and it has one — another course, *Kingdom Guide*.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn't all truth relative?

Here is the objection at its strongest, because a weak version of it is not worth answering. *Every culture, every religion, has arrived at its own account of ultimate reality through centuries of sincere searching. People who have never heard of Jesus live generous, sacrificial, admirable lives inside other frameworks entirely. Who are you — who is any single tradition — to say it has cornered the market on truth, while billions of thoughtful people have gotten it wrong?*

That concern deserves respect rather than a slogan. Sincerity is real, and it is not nothing. But sincerity and accuracy are two different measurements, and the objection quietly collapses them. A pilot can be entirely sincere about his coordinates and still be flying into a mountain. The claim "no single framework has access to the whole truth" is not a modest, humble claim, either — it is itself a sweeping claim about ultimate reality, asserted with more confidence than anything this session argues, and it exempts itself from its own rule.

Scripture's answer is not that Christians reasoned their way to a superior conclusion. It is that truth showed up as a person, made a specific claim, and backed it with more than words.

> ILLUSTRATION
>
> Lee Strobel spent the first half of his adult life as an award-winning legal journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*, and as an atheist who considered religious belief a symptom of wishful thinking. When his wife became a Christian in 1979, he treated it, in his own later words, as something to be corrected. Instead of arguing with her, he did what his training had taught him to do with any claim: he investigated it, spending nearly two years interviewing scholars, cross-examining the historical evidence for the resurrection the way he would cross-examine a witness. On November 8, 1981, he concluded — his phrase — that it would take more faith to sustain his atheism than to become a Christian. He left journalism, took a significant pay cut, and spent the rest of his career writing the case out for others, most famously in *The Case for Christ* (1998).

> Strobel did not abandon evidence to find faith. He followed it further than he expected it to go.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture does not explain why God allowed truth to be a thing that could be investigated, doubted, and rejected at all, rather than making it undeniable to every observer. It tells you truth is real and knowable. It does not tell you why belief was made to cost something.

Western Worldview

The most common lens in educated Western culture is not atheism exactly — it is *naturalism*: the working assumption that the physical world runs on cause and effect alone, that every event has a material explanation in principle, and that anything "supernatural" is, by definition, not a real category. You do not have to reject God outright to think this way. You only have to have absorbed, without examining it, the idea that reasonable explanations are material ones and everything else is a nicer word for superstition.

> *"Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in the law? Where is* ***the debater of this age****? Has God not made the wisdom of the world foolish? … For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 1:20, 25**

Paul is not anti-intellectual — he reasoned in synagogues and debated philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:16–34). His target is narrower: a *wisdom* that has quietly ruled out, in advance, the very category of an answer that requires God to act. Jesus met that same instinct directly, and He did not argue it down.

> *John [the Baptist] sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for*

> *another?" Jesus answered them, "Go tell John what you hear and see: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news proclaimed to them."*
>
> **MATTHEW 11:2–5**

Notice what He did not do. He did not out-argue John's doubt. He pointed at what naturalism has no category for, and let it speak for itself.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Antony Flew was, for roughly fifty years, one of the twentieth century's most influential philosophical atheists — a professor at Oxford, Aberdeen, and Reading whose 1950 essay "Theology and Falsification" became a staple of philosophy curricula precisely because of how forcefully it argued that religious claims were empty. In 2004, at eighty-one, Flew stunned the philosophical world by announcing he had changed his mind: not through a religious experience, but through following philosophical arguments about the origin of the universe's laws and the origin of self-replicating life to where he judged they actually led — the existence of "an infinitely intelligent Mind." He went on to publish *There Is a God* in 2007.
>
> Flew's own honesty about where he stopped is worth as much as the reversal itself: he became a deist, explicitly declining special revelation, miracles, and the Christian claim about Jesus. Naturalism's own most rigorous defender found it could not survive sustained philosophical pressure — and reason alone, without revelation, brought him only partway. That gap is exactly what 1 Corinthians 1 and Matthew 11 describe: argument can clear the ground; it takes power and testimony to finish the walk.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where has "there's probably a rational explanation" quietly become your default response to anything that might be spiritual — including the good things, not only the frightening ones?

Sovereign Worldview

Many careful, godly believers hold a view we will call the *sovereign worldview*: that because God is all-powerful and all-knowing, nothing happens outside His direct will — not a diagnosis, not a betrayal, not a single event in a fallen world — and that every one of them serves a purpose only He can see. This view is trying to protect something true and precious: that God is never surprised, never overruled, and that nothing that happens to you is ultimately wasted. It has serious defenders across the church's history, and it deserves to be stated that well before it is questioned at all.

The difficulty is not the goal. It is the further step some teaching built on it takes — from *God will use this* to *God caused this, and specifically willed the evil in it, for a reason you are not permitted to see.* Scripture will not sign that second sentence.

> *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God,' for* ***God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one****."*
>
> **JAMES 1:13**

The pattern shows up first in the book that puts the question most starkly. Satan asks permission to strike Job; God sets the boundary and Satan does the striking.

ILLUSTRATION

When Satan accused Job before God's own council, God did not claim credit for what followed. He drew a line: "All right then, everything he has is in your power. Only do not extend your hand against the man himself!" (Job 1:12). Two chapters and two rounds of catastrophe later, the text is unambiguous about who acted: "So Satan went out from the LORD's presence and inflicted Job with malignant ulcers" (Job 2:7). God is sovereign over the encounter from the first verse to the last. He is nowhere named as the one who caused Job's sores.

The same pattern closes the story of Joseph, sold into slavery by his own brothers and imprisoned on a false charge for years before rising to save the

very family that betrayed him. He does not tell his brothers God made them do it.

> *"As for you,* ***you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose****, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day."*
>
> **GENESIS 50:20**

Two intentions occupy the same sentence without collapsing into one. The brothers' evil was genuinely theirs. God's good purpose was genuinely His. Neither statement needed the other to be false.

WORD STUDY

παντοκράτωρ *pantokratōr* G3841

> **"the All-Powerful"** · Revelation 19:6

Range. Literally "the all-ruling one" — from *pas* (all) and *kratos* (dominion, might). The New Testament's word for the Old Testament's "LORD of Hosts" and "God Almighty." It clusters overwhelmingly in Revelation's worship and judgment scenes: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the **All-Powerful** (ὁ παντοκράτωρ), reigns!" (Revelation 19:6).

The sense here. The verb paired with it is *basileuei* — reigns, exercises kingship. It is a claim about rule, not a claim about direct causation of every discrete event within that rule. A king reigns over a kingdom whose subjects still act, sin, and rebel; his reign is not falsified by their choices, and it is not identical to having personally caused them.

Why it carries the argument. Calling God *sovereign* and calling God *the direct cause of every evil act* are not the same claim, and this session's whole argument in this

section depends on the difference holding. Scripture gives God the first title constantly. It never gives Him the second.

Source. BDAG, s.v. παντοκράτωρ.

Here is where I land, and why. I do not think Scripture answers the philosophical question of exactly how God's rule and creaturely freedom relate at the level of mechanism — serious, careful theologians across the church's history have answered that differently, and I am not going to pretend this session settles a debate that old. What I do think Scripture answers plainly is narrower and more pastoral: whatever the mechanism, God is never the author of the evil itself (James 1:13), and He is always sovereign over the outcome (Genesis 50:20). Those two things are compatible, and the sovereign worldview's costliest habit is treating them as if the second required abandoning the first.

I AM NOT SAYING

- That God is absent, weak, or merely watching from a distance while events run without Him.
- That your suffering has no purpose, or that God cannot bring real good out of real evil.
- That "free will" means the outcome of history is ever actually in question.

I AM SAYING

- That "sovereign" means God's rule cannot be overthrown — not that every specific evil was directly authored by Him.
- That Scripture distinguishes what God causes from what He permits and then redeems, and the distinction is not a evasion — it is what James 1:13 and Genesis 50:20 both require.

> - That you can trust God's purpose in what happened to you without believing He was the one who did it to you.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture does not give us the mechanism connecting God's sovereignty to the free acts of both angels and humans — how permission works, where its boundary sits, or why this arrangement was the one God chose over one with less genuine evil in it. It gives us the outcome and the character. It does not give us the machinery.

Warfare Worldview

Scripture's own account of why bad things happen is not silence and it is not "God's mysterious plan." It is a war — real, active, currently underway, fought by real combatants who are not God and not you.

> *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens."*
>
> **EPHESIANS 6:12**

Paul is not being poetic. Jesus names the same figure directly, and names him with a title.

> *"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler* (ἄρχων) *of this world will be driven out."*
>
> **JOHN 12:31**

WORD STUDY

ἄρχων *archōn* G758

Range. A ruler, chief, or magistrate — someone with genuine, recognized authority over a specific jurisdiction, not a rogue actor operating outside any structure.

The sense here. Jesus applies this word to Satan three times in one discourse (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). John repeats the point in his own voice — "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19) — and Paul calls him "the god of this age" who has actively blinded unbelieving minds (2 Corinthians 4:4). None of these writers treats him as a nuisance.

Why it carries the argument. A worldview that treats spiritual opposition as background noise is not the one the New Testament's own authors held. They describe a real jurisdiction under a real, hostile ruler — which is precisely why the war language in Ephesians 6:12 is not exaggeration.

Source. BDAG, s.v. ἄρχων.

Daniel's own account shows what this looks like from the inside of a single answered prayer.

ILLUSTRATION

Daniel prayed and fasted for three weeks over a troubling vision. When the answer finally came, the messenger explained the delay: "from the very first day you applied your mind to understand and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard. I have come in response to your words. However, the prince of the kingdom of Persia was opposing me for twenty-one days. But Michael, one of the leading princes, came to help me" (Daniel 10:12–13).

> The prayer was heard on day one. The answer took twenty-one days to arrive, and the text names the reason: something opposed it, and it took reinforcement to get through. Daniel never sees any of it happen. He only sees the delay, and later, the explanation.

WHAT ABOUT …

Satan’s claim to the kingdoms of the world?

Session 1 left a question open deliberately. In the wilderness, the enemy offered Jesus every kingdom on earth and justified the offer by claiming they were his to give — and Jesus did not dispute it.

> *Then the devil led him up to a high place and showed him in a flash* ***all the kingdoms of the world****. And he said to him, “To you I will grant this whole realm — and the glory that goes along with it, for* ***it has been relinquished to me****, and I can give it to anyone I wish. So then, if you will worship me, all this will be yours.”*
>
> LUKE 4:5-7

If the offer was empty, why was it a temptation? And if it was not empty, in what sense did the kingdoms of the world belong to him?

Three things can be said with confidence. One cannot.

First, Scripture grants him a real authority. Jesus calls him “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) — three times, in the same discourse. John writes that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Paul calls him “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Jesus’ silence in Luke 4 is consistent with all of it. He does not correct the claim because there is something to it, and a worldview that treats the enemy as a nuisance rather than a power is not the one the New Testament writers held.

Second, the authority is derivative, not owned. Luke’s own wording concedes it — *it has been relinquished to me*. Whatever he holds, he holds because it was handed over, which means it was someone else’s to hand. This is the hinge between the warfare worldview and the sovereign worldview, and it is why

neither one alone is adequate: the conflict is real, and it is being fought inside a jurisdiction that was never actually lost.

Third, the claim has an expiration date. Jesus refused the shortcut because He intended to take the kingdoms back the hard way, and Paul says He did — publicly.

> *Disarming the rulers and authorities, he has made a public disgrace of them, **triumphing over them by the cross**.*
>
> **COLOSSIANS 2:15**

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture does not tell us the mechanism — when this authority passed to him, on what terms, or what its precise limits are. Genesis 3 is the usual answer and it is a reasonable inference, but the Bible nowhere states it. Teachers who narrate the transaction in detail are filling a gap the text leaves open, and you should notice when they do.

Kingdom Worldview

If the first three worldviews describe the battlefield, this one tells you who wins it, and what that means for you before the winning is visible. God's people are not spectators to this conflict, waiting it out. They are ambassadors of a kingdom that is already advancing, with real authority delegated to them inside a war whose outcome is not actually in doubt.

> *"Look, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and on the full force of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you."*
>
> **LUKE 10:19**

Paul takes the same confidence and pushes it further than "you'll survive."

> *"No, in all these things we **have complete victory** (ὑπερνικῶμεν) through him who loved us! For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*
>
> **ROMANS 8:37–39**

WORD STUDY

ὑπερνικῶμεν *hypernikōmen* G5245

> **"have complete victory"** · Romans 8:37

Range. From *hyper* (beyond, over) fused onto *nikaō* (to conquer). Paul appears to have coined it for this sentence — it occurs nowhere else in the entire New Testament. The ordinary word for winning was not, in his judgment, going to be enough.

The sense here. Paul lists the very things that would count as losing — death, danger, hostile powers — in the same breath he uses this word. He is not describing an absence of those things. He is describing what happens to a believer inside them.

Why it carries the argument. The kingdom worldview's claim is not that conflict will not touch you. It is that conflict cannot separate you from what matters most, and Scripture reaches for a word it has to invent to say so. That is a stronger claim than "you'll get through it," and it is the one this whole session has been building toward.

Source. BDAG, s.v. ὑπερνικάω.

Paul is not writing this from comfort. He wrote it as a man repeatedly imprisoned, shipwrecked, and beaten, and he tells the Philippians directly that the secret is not the absence of hardship.

> *"I have experienced times of need and times of abundance. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing. I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me."*
>
> **PHILIPPIANS 4:12–13**

ILLUSTRATION

On November 22, 1873, the passenger ship *Ville du Havre* sank in the mid-Atlantic after a collision, going down in about twelve minutes and taking 226 lives. Anna Spafford survived, clinging to wreckage; all four of her daughters — Maggie, Annie, Bessie, and three-year-old Tanetta — drowned. Her husband, Chicago attorney and church elder Horatio Spafford, learned of the disaster by telegram and sailed to meet his grieving wife, passing near the site of the wreck.

He did not write anything that week. According to the earliest documented account, it was roughly three years later, in 1876, that Spafford wrote the words that became a hymn: *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.* The grief was not resolved by the time he wrote it. The love that held him through it was more certain than the grief.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Which of the four worldviews in this session has actually been running underneath your own explanations — not the one you would pick on a test, but the one you reach for first when something goes wrong?

The Turn

You now have a name for something you were already doing. Every day, without announcing it to yourself, you interpret what happens to you through one of four lenses — and three of them will eventually cost you either an accurate view of God or the nerve to actually fight the battle Scripture says is real.

That means the choice in front of you is not whether to have a worldview. You already have one. The choice is whether to keep the one you inherited or to test it — against James 1:13, against Genesis 50:20, against Ephesians 6:12, against a Savior who answered doubt with power and answered a throne's worth of temptation with a refusal — and to trade it for the one that survives all four.

The Experience · Apologetics

Peter's instruction was never addressed to scholars: "set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess" (1 Peter 3:15). *Apologia* — the word Peter uses — is a courtroom term for a reasoned defense, not a scripted argument to win a debate. You are not being asked to memorize a case. You are being asked to have one, in your own words, ready.

Write one page. Answer three questions in order: What have you actually seen of the war this session describes — where has opposition been real, and where has God's kingdom actually broken in against it? What is the single strongest piece of evidence, reason, or experience that keeps *your* worldview from collapsing into naturalism when pressure is applied? And if someone who held the sovereign worldview — sincerely, not as a caricature — asked you why you don't say "everything happens for a reason," what would you actually say to them, out loud, with respect?

Keep what you write. Session 8 assumes you have already done the work of knowing what you believe and why — not just that you believe it.

BIG IDEAS

1. Every person operates out of a worldview, chosen or inherited, examined or not — and it decides how you interpret pain, evil, and God's role in both.
2. Naturalism can be dismantled by good philosophy, but reason alone stops short of the gospel; it takes power and testimony to finish what argument starts.
3. Scripture will not let you say God authored the evil that happened to you — but it will let you trust that He reigns over what comes next.
4. Real spiritual conflict exists behind ordinary conflict, fought by an enemy with real, derivative, expiring authority — and its outcome does not depend on your composure.
5. In Christ you are not a survivor of this war. You are, in Paul's own coined word, a hyper-conqueror.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

The Kingdom worldview does not deny the war. It just tells you who has already won it.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for a truth that is real whether or not I feel it, in a war that is real whether or not I see it. Where I have quietly blamed You for what an enemy did, forgive me and correct me. Where I have

treated the opposition as bigger than the cross that already disarmed it, remind me who reigns. Make me more than a survivor of what's ahead — make me, as You have already named me, a conqueror who has more than enough. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Frank Turek, talks and podcast episodes at CrossExamined.org.
Practical, conversational apologetics on exactly the naturalism-vs-truth ground this session covers — built for the actual conversation, not just the concept.

SUBSTANTIAL

John Lennox, *Seven Words That Divide the World* (2021).
A working Christian mathematician and philosopher takes the same worldview categories this session names — naturalism, determinism, a designed and contested universe — and argues them out at greater length and with more of the science this session only gestures at.

ACADEMIC

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (1994), the chapters on providence and the problem of evil.
Read this one specifically to hear the sovereign worldview argued at its strongest by a serious, careful theologian — not as this session summarizes it, but as its most capable defenders actually state it.

FORTHCOMING FROM THIS CURRICULUM

Kingdom Guide (forthcoming).
This session makes the general case for truth as a real category. It doesn't make the specific case for Scripture's own reliability — composition, transmission, canon, and why the

book itself can be trusted. That's this companion course's whole job.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read John 18:37–38 slowly. *Pilate asked the right question and walked away before he got an answer. Where in your own life have you done the same — asked, then left before the answer arrived?*

DAY 2

Read 1 Corinthians 1:20–25 and Matthew 11:2–5 together. *Where has "there's probably a rational explanation" become your automatic response to anything that might be God? What would it cost you to leave that door open?*

DAY 3

Read James 1:13 and Genesis 50:20 side by side. *Have you ever told yourself, or someone else, that God caused a specific evil "for a reason"? Try rewriting that sentence the way Joseph's does — two intentions, not one.*

DAY 4

Read Ephesians 6:12 and Daniel 10:12–14. *Daniel never saw the twenty-one days of opposition happening. What answered prayer in your own life might have had a harder road than you ever knew?*

DAY 5

Read Romans 8:37–39 and Philippians 4:12–13. *Paul wrote both from hardship, not comfort. Where do you need "complete victory" to mean something more than "I got through it"?*

DAY 6

Find what you wrote for *Consider This* at the start of this session, and the page you wrote for *The Experience*. *Read both together. Which worldview actually shaped your first explanation — and does the case you wrote for Session 8 match the one you now know is true?*

Tell one other person this week what you actually believe about the last hard thing that happened to you, and why.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Conflict

"Which of the four lenses competing for your mind does Scripture actually teach — and which one is already running yours?"

THE WESTERN

Naturalism assumes, without ever quite arguing it, that reasonable explanations are material ones and everything else is a nicer word for superstition. Jesus didn't out-argue that instinct. He pointed at what it has no category for — the blind seeing, the dead raised — and let it speak for itself.

1 Corinthians 1:20, 25
Matthew 11:2–5

THE SOVEREIGN

Careful believers rightly insist nothing surprises God. The costly next step some teaching takes is further: that God specifically willed the evil itself, for a reason you're not permitted to see. Scripture will not sign that sentence — sovereignty means His rule can't be overthrown, not that He authored what overthrows you.

James 1:13
Genesis 50:20

THE WARFARE

Scripture's own account of why bad things happen is not silence. It's a war, fought by a real ruler with real, derivative, expiring authority — which is why Daniel's prayer was heard on day one and still took twenty-one days, against real opposition, to arrive.

Ephesians 6:12
John 12:31

THE KINGDOM

God's people aren't spectators to this conflict, waiting it out. They're ambassadors of a kingdom already advancing, with real authority delegated to them, inside a war whose outcome was never actually in doubt.

Luke 10:19
Romans 8:37–39

THE TURN

You already have a worldview running underneath every explanation you reach for. The choice isn't whether to have one. It's whether to keep the one you inherited, or trade it for the one that survives contact with all of Scripture — and to have a reason ready when someone asks.

1 Peter 3:15

SO NOW

REIGNS, NOT AUTHORS

"Sovereign" means God's rule cannot be overthrown — not that every specific evil was directly authored by Him. You can trust His purpose in what happened without believing He was the one who did it.

Genesis 50:20

DERIVATIVE, NOT OWNED

Whatever authority the enemy holds, he holds because it was handed over — which means it was someone else's to hand, and it comes with an expiration date already set by the cross.

John 12:31

CONQUEROR, NOT SURVIVOR

Paul had to invent a word to say it: not merely surviving what's ahead, but overwhelmingly winning it, in the same breath he lists the very things that would count as losing.

Romans 8:37

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

The Kingdom worldview does not deny the war. It just tells you who has already won it.

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Next · Session 8, Kingdom Purpose. You now know the battlefield and who wins it. Session 8 asks what you were actually put here to do while the war is still underway.

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KINGDOM PURPOSE

Kingdom Essentials: The Mission

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 God of Purpose

03 Man of Purpose

04 The Mandate Reissued

05 Victorious Purposes

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Discovering Purpose

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Two people can live the same number of years, in the same city, attend the same church, sit through the same sermons, and arrive at the end having lived entirely different kinds of lives — one *accumulating*, the other *investing*. The first collected achievements the way a hand collects sand: real while held, gone the moment the grip relaxes. The second built something that outlasted them. The difference was never talent, and it was rarely opportunity. It was whether they ever answered a question most people spend a lifetime avoiding.

So the question is: were you put here to do something specific, or are you improvising a life out of whatever shows up? And if it is specific — how would you know?

Most people never answer that question directly. They answer it by default, years later, by noticing what they actually spent their life on — and sometimes discovering it was never what they meant to choose. The Bible does not treat that as inevitable. It treats it as a failure to ask early enough.

This is not a session about finding your dream job, and it is not a session about discovering your spiritual gifts — that fuller work deserves its own course, and it is coming. This session makes a narrower and more foundational claim: that God is the kind of God who works with intention, that you were made by Him for

exactly that reason, and that the life you are already living is not a blank page waiting for a theme. It has one. Sessions 1 through 7 told you what that life is rescued from and equipped with. This one asks what all of it is actually *for*.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You do not improvise, and I am tired of living like I have to. Show me what You actually built me for — not the version I would choose to impress someone, but the real one, even if it is smaller and quieter than I expected. I want to invest my life, not just fill it. In Jesus' name, amen.

CONSIDER THIS

Without editing it, finish this sentence honestly: *"If I'm honest, most days I feel like my life is mostly about _____."* Write down whatever comes — even if it is not a word you are proud of.

Come back to it on Day 6.

God of Purpose

Before purpose is something you go looking for, it is something built into how God works. He does not create and then decide afterward what a thing is for. He decides the ending first.

*"Remember what I accomplished in antiquity! Truly I am God, and there is no one like me, **who announces the end from the beginning** and reveals beforehand what has not*

> *yet occurred, who says, ‘My plan will be realized, I will accomplish what I desire.’”*
>
> **ISAIAH 46:9–10**

That is not a claim about God’s power in the abstract. It is a claim about how He works — plan first, then accomplishment, every time, without exception. And Scripture says plainly that this habit did not stop at the world’s creation. It continued into yours.

> *“For we are his **workmanship** (ποίημα), having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.”*
>
> **EPHESIANS 2:10**

WORD STUDY

ποίημα *poiēma* G4161

> **“workmanship”** · Ephesians 2:10

Range. A thing made — a product, a fabric, a piece of work. The English word “poem” descends from it: something composed, not accidental.

The sense here. Paul has just spent nine verses arguing that you contributed nothing to your own salvation — it is “not from yourselves… so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). Then, in the very next breath, he calls you God’s *poiēma*. The same grace that made your rescue entirely God’s doing also made your existence entirely His composition.

Why it carries the argument. You cannot be both an accident and a *poiēma*. The verse does not merely say God can use you. It says He composed you, and that the

composing had an intended use already attached — “good works… prepared beforehand.” Purpose is not a feature added later. It is baked into the making.

Source. BDAG, s.v. ποίημα.

Paul is not finished. The same letter that calls you God’s workmanship also insists that the making itself is not passive — it requires your effort, even while it remains entirely God’s initiative.

> *“Continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, for the one bringing forth in you **both the desire and the effort** — for the sake of his good pleasure — is God.”*
>
> **PHILIPPIANS 2:12–13**

You do not manufacture purpose. You do not discover it lying around, either, as if it were hidden treasure you might miss. God supplies the wanting *and* the working. Your part is not invention. It is cooperation — which means the anxious search so many believers describe, the sense that purpose is a rare object hidden somewhere you haven’t looked yet, is aimed at the wrong verb entirely. You are not hunting. You are cooperating with a project already under construction.

ILLUSTRATION

William Carey began his working life as a shoemaker’s apprentice at sixteen, in an English village, with no formal theological training and no reason anyone would have predicted what came next. In his spare hours over the cobbler’s bench he taught himself to read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, then Dutch and French — not for any stated purpose, simply because he could not stop. By the time he sailed for India on June 13, 1793, that self-taught linguistic hunger had become the one tool the mission actually needed. He would go on to translate the entire Bible into Bengali by 1809 and oversee translation work into dozens of Indian languages, printing more than 200,000 volumes of Scripture from the Serampore press before his death — work still called foundational to modern Bible translation two centuries later.

No one designed Carey’s shoemaking years as missionary training. God did. He was already at work inside a trade Carey himself would never have called

spiritual — the same pattern Ephesians 2:10 describes: good works prepared beforehand, running years ahead of the person who will eventually walk into them.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What skill, wound, or interest in your own life looks, on the surface, like it has nothing to do with God — the way a cobbler's bench had nothing to do with Bengali Scripture?

Man of Purpose

Because you bear the image of a God who works this way, purpose is not reserved for the unusually gifted or unusually called. It is built into what it means to be made by Him — before you have done anything to earn it, and before you have discovered what it looks like.

> *"Certainly you made my mind and heart; you wove me together in my mother's womb… my bones were not hidden from you, when I was made in secret and sewed together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw me when I was inside the womb.* ***All the days ordained for me were recorded in your scroll before one of them came into existence.****"*
>
> **PSALM 139:13, 15–16**

The Psalm is not only about your body. It is about your timeline — days planned before you lived a single one of them. Paul assumes the same thing about the church, using the language of a construction site rather than a poem.

> *"The one who plants and the one who waters work as one, but each will receive his reward according to his work. We are **coworkers belonging to God**. You are God's field, God's building."*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 3:8–9**

Coworkers, not spectators. Every believer — not the exceptional ones — is assigned actual work inside an actual project, with an actual reward attached to actually doing it.

> *"I… urge you to live worthy of the calling with which you have been called."*
>
> **EPHESIANS 4:1**

The command is not *find* your calling. It is *live worthy of* one you already have. Jesus told a story about exactly this difference — and about what He actually rewards.

> *"To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, **each according to his ability**… [The master said to the one with five and the one with two, alike:] 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You have been faithful in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things.'"*
>
> **MATTHEW 25:15, 21, 23**

WORD STUDY

σκοπός *skopos* G4649

> **"goal"** · Philippians 3:14

Range. A watchman's fixed point, a mark aimed at, a finish line kept in view. It occurs only once in the entire New Testament.

The sense here. "I strive toward the **goal (σκοπόν)** for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Paul writes this after listing his own considerable resume in the same chapter — and calling all of it rubbish next to what he is actually running toward.

Why it carries the argument. Paul does not describe a scattered life waiting for direction. He describes a single, fixed point he never takes his eyes off, and every talent from Matthew 25 — five, two, or one — is measured against the same *skopos*: not how much you were given, but whether you kept moving toward what you were given it for.

Source. BDAG, s.v. σκοπός.

The master in the parable never asks the two-talent servant to produce what the five-talent servant produced. He asks only whether each one moved toward the goal with what he actually had — and rewards both of them, in the same words, for doing exactly that. The only servant the parable condemns is the one who did nothing at all with what he was given, out of fear (Matthew 25:24–25). Comparison was never the danger in this story. Paralysis was.

WHAT ABOUT …

What if I don't have a "special" calling?

Say this plainly, because it is the objection most readers of this session are actually forming: *All of this "purpose" language is easy to say and hard to feel. Most of my life looks ordinary. I don't have a dramatic testimony, a rare gift, or a visible assignment — I go to work, I raise my kids, I pay the bills. Either purpose talk isn't for people like me, or I've somehow missed mine.*

That is not a small feeling to talk someone out of. It is usually formed over years of comparing your ordinary Tuesday to someone else's highlight reel, and it deserves a better answer than a slogan about how "God has a plan for everyone." Take the objection seriously, because Scripture does. The single most direct answer to it is not a verse about greatness. It is a call God addressed to someone actively hiding.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Gideon was threshing wheat inside a winepress — a task normally done in the open, where wind separates grain from chaff — specifically so the raiding Midianites would not see him and take his food. It is not a heroic first scene. Into that hiding place, an angel of the Lord arrived with an opening line Gideon must have thought was aimed at someone else: "The Lord is with you, courageous warrior!" (Judges 6:12). Gideon's own account of himself, seconds later, was the opposite of the greeting: "My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my family" (Judges 6:15). God did not correct the self-assessment. He simply repeated the assignment: "Ah, but I will be with you! You will strike down the whole Midianite army" (Judges 6:16).
>
> Nothing about Gideon's circumstances changed between the hiding and the calling. What changed was which one he believed defined him.

The parable in the previous section makes the same point with arithmetic instead of a story. The servant given one talent was not judged against the one given five. He was judged against what he did with what he actually had — and the servants who received less were praised in the exact same words as the one who received more.

I AM NOT SAYING

- That an ordinary-looking life is a smaller purpose, or a consolation prize next to a visible one.
- That you have failed if your calling never produces a platform, a title, or a public story.
- That "purpose" means you must eventually do something everyone would recognize as significant.

I AM SAYING

> - That Scripture measures faithfulness against what you were given, not against what someone else was given.
> - That most of the purpose described in this session is lived in rooms no one is filming — a shoemaker's bench, a winepress, a kitchen table.
> - That the invitation is to *find out what you were actually given*, not to manufacture a version of purpose you think sounds important enough.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture does not promise that every believer's purpose will feel significant to them while they are living it, or that clarity arrives on a predictable schedule. Gideon did not feel like a warrior when he was called one, and nothing in the text suggests the feeling changed quickly. Some of what you were given may only look like purpose in hindsight — or from where God is standing, which is not always where you are standing. This session cannot promise you the feeling. It can only tell you the feeling was never the evidence.

The Mandate Reissued

Purpose was never a private arrangement between you and God, invented for your generation alone. It is a single mandate, handed to humanity once in a garden, and reissued every time it looked lost.

God's first assignment to the human race was not a suggestion. It was a commission — to fill the earth and govern it on His behalf, the mandate Session 1 called the *Garden Mandate*. The Fall did not cancel that assignment. It only meant it would now have to be recovered rather than simply carried out.

Watch how carefully God reissues it rather than replacing it. After the flood had erased nearly everyone who had ever heard the original commission, the very first thing God says to the one family left is almost word for word what He said in Eden.

> *“Then God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’”*
>
> **GENESIS 9:1**

Same words, new generation, same assignment. Abraham gets his own version of it (Genesis 12:1–3), and Israel gets it again as a nation. By the time Jesus gathers His own followers on a hillside, He is not founding something new. He is handing His generation their turn at a commission that has been reissued, unbroken, since Eden — and He does not soften it into a suggestion either.

> *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*
>
> **MATTHEW 28:18–20**

Notice what this means for the question this whole session is asking. Your purpose is not a private hobby God happens to bless. It is your specific placement inside a commission that is thousands of years older than you and was never actually withdrawn.

ILLUSTRATION

Adoniram Judson sailed for Burma in February 1812, one of the first missionaries to leave American shores, with no guarantee the country would even permit him to stay. It took years before he saw his first convert. In 1824, during a war between Britain and Burma, he was arrested as a suspected spy and spent nineteen months in two different prisons, one of them staffed by convicted murderers as jailers. His wife, Ann, sewed his partially completed Burmese Bible manuscript into a pillow and smuggled it to him so the work would survive his imprisonment. He outlived two wives on the mission field and buried several of his own children in Burmese soil. He went on to complete a full Burmese Bible translation and to see a Burmese church established before his death in 1850 — a church that endures today.

> Judson never met most of the people his translation would eventually reach. That was never the point. The mandate was never his to finish. It was his to carry his stretch of — the same posture Matthew 28:20 quietly assumes when it promises Christ's presence "to the end of the age" rather than to the end of any one disciple's assignment.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What has already been "handed to you" — a family, a workplace, a neighborhood, a skill — that you have been treating as merely your circumstances rather than your assignment?

Victorious Purposes

Here is what makes Kingdom purpose different from every other kind: it is not a bet on an uncertain outcome. You are not spending your life on a cause that might fail. You are participating in a Kingdom whose victory was never actually in question.

> *"Now this phrase 'once more' indicates the removal of what is shaken, that is, of created things, so that what is unshaken may remain. So since we are receiving an* ***unshakable*** **(ἀσάλευτον)** ***kingdom****, let us give thanks, and through this let us offer worship pleasing to God in devotion and awe."*
>
> **HEBREWS 12:27–28**

WORD STUDY

ἀσάλευτος *asaleutos* G761

Range. From *a-* (not) and *saleuō* (to shake, agitate, cause to totter). Literally: unable to be shaken. It occurs only twice in the New Testament — here, and of an anchored ship in Acts 27:41.

The sense here. The writer has just listed everything that will be shaken — the created order itself. He does not say the kingdom will survive the shaking. He says it is the one thing the shaking cannot touch in the first place, because it was never built on the kind of foundation that shakes.

Why it carries the argument. Your purpose is not invested in a shakable enterprise that could still lose. It is invested in the one *asaleutos* thing in existence. That changes what failure can actually mean for something done in service of it — not whether the cause wins, but only whether you were faithful to your part of it.

Source. BDAG, s.v. ἀσάλευτος.

Paul says the same thing with a battlefield metaphor instead of an architectural one, and he says it about an outcome that is not pending — it is scheduled.

> *"For he must reign until **he has put all his enemies under his feet**… The God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet."*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 15:25; ROMANS 16:20**

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> In 1727, a fractured community of refugees at Herrnhut, in what is now eastern Germany, gathered under the leadership of a young nobleman named Nikolaus von Zinzendorf and committed to something almost no one remembers arranging: continuous, round-the-clock prayer, one person

handing off to the next, every hour of every day. What began as an attempt to hold a divided community together did not stop after a week, or a year. It continued for over a hundred years. Within just over sixty years of that first prayer watch, this small community — never more than a few hundred people — had sent out roughly three hundred missionaries to places most of Europe had never heard of: Greenland, the West Indies, South Africa, the American colonies. They sent out, in other words, roughly as many missionaries as the entire community had members.

Better known as the Moravians, no one at Herrnhut in 1727 could have shown you the missions movement their prayer would launch. They just kept showing up for their hour, inside a Kingdom they trusted was already winning — the same trust Session 7 named as the *hypernikaō* Paul described: not merely surviving conflict, but overwhelmingly winning it, for reasons that had nothing to do with how the war looked from inside any single hour.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If you genuinely believed your specific assignment was attached to a cause that cannot lose, what would you stop being afraid of?

The Turn

Every session up to this one has told you something true about who you are and what you have been given. This one asks what you are going to do about it — not someday, when clarity finally arrives in full, but now, with whatever you can already see.

That is the trade this session is actually asking you to make. Not *wait until you're certain what your purpose is*, but *start treating the life you're already living — the bench, the winepress, the kitchen table — as the assignment it already is.* Carey did not wait for a title. Judson did not wait for comfort. Fifty refugees at Herrnhut did not wait until their prayer watch felt significant. They simply kept their hour.

None of them could see, from where they were standing, what their faithfulness would eventually become. That is not a reason to wait for clarity before you start. It is the whole reason clarity was never the requirement in the first place.

The Experience · Discovering Purpose

This session has deliberately not asked you to complete a spiritual gifts inventory, a personality profile, or a full accounting of your design, affinity, and shaping — that fuller discovery process is real, it matters, and it deserves an entire course of its own rather than a rushed appendix here. Consider this your on-ramp, not your destination.

Write one paragraph in answer to a single question: *Looking honestly at your actual life — not the one you wish you had — what has God clearly been training you for through the skills you've built, the wounds you've survived, the things you love, and the assignments already sitting in front of you?* Do not wait for the answer to sound impressive. Carey's answer would have sounded like a shoemaker's apprenticeship. Gideon's would have sounded like hiding in a winepress. Write what is actually true, not what would sound good read aloud in a small group.

Keep what you write. You will need it again on Day 6, and again when the fuller discovery course arrives — this paragraph is the seed that course will ask you to grow, not a rough draft you will need to discard and start over.

BIG IDEAS

1. God does not improvise. He plans the end before the beginning, and He built you the same way — on purpose, for a purpose already prepared.
2. Purpose is not reserved for the unusually gifted. Every believer is a coworker with an actual assignment, not a spectator waiting for one.
3. Faithfulness is measured against what you were given, not against what someone else was given — five talents, two, or one, praised in the same words.
4. Your purpose is not a private hobby. It is your placement inside a single mandate handed to humanity in a garden and never withdrawn.

5. You are not betting your life on a cause that might fail. The Kingdom you are working for is the one thing in existence that cannot be shaken.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You were not thrown here to improvise a life. You were sent here to invest one.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for planning the end before You began — and for meaning it when You made me. Forgive me for treating my actual life as a placeholder for some more impressive one I think I'm supposed to be living, and forgive me for the seasons I buried what You gave me out of the same fear the third servant felt. Show me the assignment already sitting in front of me, and give me the courage to keep my hour, whether or not I ever see what it becomes. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* (2003).
Short, direct, and aimed at exactly this session's core question — what does it look like to spend a life instead of waste one.

SUBSTANTIAL

Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (1998).
The fullest accessible treatment of Kingdom calling available — the natural next stop before the dedicated discovery course this session points toward.

ACADEMIC

N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (2008), part III.
Grounds this session's "unshakable Kingdom" claim in the New Testament's actual resurrection hope — read this to see the theology behind Hebrews 12's confidence argued out in full.

FORTHCOMING FROM THIS CURRICULUM

Kingdom Purpose (forthcoming).
This session deliberately didn't ask you to complete a spiritual gifts inventory, a personality profile, or a full accounting of your design, affinity, and shaping — that fuller discovery process deserves an entire course of its own. Consider this session your on-ramp, not your destination.

Kingdom Stewardship (forthcoming).
The Parable of the Talents, quoted above, is Scripture's classic text on stewardship — but this session puts it to work answering a different question (what you're for, not how you manage what you've been given). This companion course takes up the second half directly.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Isaiah 46:9–10 and Ephesians 2:10 slowly. *Where in your life have you assumed you were an accident — random, unplanned, patched together — rather than a poiēma, a composition?*

DAY 2

Read Psalm 139:13–16 and 1 Corinthians 3:8–9. *"Coworker" is a different word than "spectator." Where have you been watching your own life rather than working it?*

DAY 3

Read Matthew 25:14–15, 20–23, 29 slowly, twice. *Stop comparing your talents to anyone else's. What have you actually been given — skills, resources, relationships — and are you moving toward the goal with it, or just holding it?*

DAY 4

Read Judges 6:11–16. *Gideon's circumstances didn't change between the hiding and the calling — only which one he believed. Which one are you currently believing about yourself?*

DAY 5

Read Matthew 28:18–20 and Hebrews 12:27–28. *You are carrying a stretch of a commission older than you are, inside a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. Where has fear of failure been shaping a decision that confidence in an unshakable outcome should be shaping instead?*

DAY 6

Find what you wrote for *Consider This* and the paragraph you wrote for *The Experience*. *Read both together. Does what you actually wrote for The Experience answer the sentence you started with — or does it reveal that the two don't yet match?*

Tell one other person this week what you wrote for The Experience — not the polished version, the honest one.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Purpose

“Were you put here to do something specific, or are you improvising a life out of whatever shows up?”

THE MAKER

God announces the end from the beginning and then accomplishes exactly what He planned — and Scripture says that habit didn’t stop at creation. You are His poiēma, His composition, with the good works already prepared before you ever walked into them.

Isaiah 46:9–10
Ephesians 2:10

THE WORKER

Your days were recorded in God’s scroll before you lived a single one of them. You are not a spectator to your own life. You are, in Paul’s own word, a coworker — measured against what you were actually given, not against what someone else was given.

Psalm 139:13, 15–16
1 Corinthians 3:8–9

THE MANDATE

The assignment God gave humanity in a garden was never withdrawn. It was reissued to Noah, to Abraham, to Israel, and to you — your specific placement inside a commission thousands of years older than you are.

Genesis 9:1
Matthew 28:18–20

THE VICTORY

You are not betting your life on a cause that might fail. You are working inside the one unshakable thing in existence, for a King who must reign until every enemy is already under His feet.

Hebrews 12:27–28
1 Corinthians 15:25
Romans 16:20

THE TURN

Every session up to this one told you something true about who you are. This one asks what you’re going to do about it — not someday, once clarity fully arrives, but now, with whatever you can already see.

Ephesians 4:1

SO NOW

COMPOSED, NOT ACCIDENTAL

You cannot be both an accident and a poiēma. God composed you, and the composing already had its intended use attached, prepared beforehand.

Ephesians 2:10

GIVEN, NOT COMPARED

The servant given one talent was never judged against the one given five. He was judged against what he actually did with what he actually had — and praised in the very same words.

Matthew 25:23

ASSIGNED, NOT OPTIONAL

Your purpose is not a private hobby God happens to bless. It is your specific placement inside a commission that has been reissued, unbroken, since Eden.

Matthew 28:19

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You were not thrown here to improvise a life. You were sent here to invest one.

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Next · Session 9, Kingdom Voice. You now have a name for your assignment. Session 9 is about the ongoing conversation you will need to actually carry it out — learning to hear the God who gave it to you.

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9

KINGDOM VOICE

Kingdom Essentials: The Power

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Hearing God

03 Testimony of Scripture

04 Jesus As Role Model

05 How to Hear God

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Conversation

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Session 8 answered what you were put here to do. It did not answer how you find out, week to week, what that looks like for the actual decision sitting in front of you Tuesday morning. A purpose you can only access by rereading a book is not much of a relationship — and the God who assigned you that purpose does not seem to think a book was ever the whole plan.

So the question is: is God still speaking, right now, to ordinary people — and if He is, can that actually be learned, or is it reserved for a spiritually gifted few?

Most believers land somewhere they never chose on purpose. Some quietly assume the Bible was God’s one and only word, fully delivered, and that anyone claiming more is either mistaken or manufacturing something — a position with a real name, cessationism, and real reasons behind it. Others assume the opposite — that God chatters constantly, and if they aren’t hearing anything, something is wrong with them, or worse, that they simply lack whatever spiritual sensitivity other believers seem to have. Both positions are common. Scripture supports neither one as stated, and both leave a sincere believer in the same place: unsure whether the silence they’re experiencing is normal, or a problem they should be able to fix.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I don't want a relationship built on a book I read about You. I want the real thing — Your actual voice, however You choose to give it. Teach me to recognize it, and give me the patience to learn something You clearly want me to have. In Jesus' name, amen.

CONSIDER THIS

Before you read another word, answer honestly: *In the last month, can you name one specific moment you believe God said something to you?* Not a feeling in general — a specific moment. Write down what you remember, even if you're not fully sure it was Him.

Come back to it on Day 6.

Hearing God

God is not a God who spoke once and went quiet. He is, by His own testimony, a God who wants an ongoing, two-way relationship with the people who bear His image — and Scripture opens that case before it opens almost anything else.

> *"**Listen** (שְׁמַע), Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You must love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and all your strength."*
>
> **DEUTERONOMY 6:4–5**

Israel's central daily prayer (called the Shema) — recited morning and evening for three thousand years — does not open with a command to love. It opens with a command to *listen*. The Hebrew tradition built its entire relationship with God on the assumption that loving Him rightly is impossible without first hearing Him, and hearing Him is not a one-time historical event. It is a discipline still being practiced by everyone who prays the Shema today.

Voices

"God gave the Bible not so we can know it but so we can know and love God through it… Our relationship to the God of the Bible is to listen to God so we can love him more deeply and love others more completely."

— Scot McKnight, The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible (2008)

That is not a small distinction. The Bible is not the relationship. It is the reliable, unchanging record that trains you to recognize the voice of the God who wants to keep talking. Jesus said as much to His own disciples, the night before He died — and He did not promise them a longer book.

> *"I have spoken these things while staying with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything I said to you."*
>
> **JOHN 14:25–26**

WORD STUDY

ῥῆμα *rhēma* G4487

> **“word”** · Matthew 4:4
>
> **Range.** A spoken utterance — a word made by a living voice, in the present moment, to a specific hearer. Distinct from *logos* (λόγος), which can mean a written text, a body of teaching, or reasoned discourse in general. Not every occurrence of “word” in the New Testament is the same Greek word.
>
> **The sense here.** “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every **word (ῥήματι)** that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 in the wilderness, starving, being tempted to solve His hunger His own way. He does not say man lives by *the Book*. He says man lives by what is currently proceeding from God’s mouth — present tense, ongoing, as necessary as food.
>
> **Why it carries the argument.** If Matthew 4:4 used *logos* instead, the verse would still be true and would mean something close to “keep Scripture in mind.” It uses *rhēma* instead, and that changes the claim: you do not survive on words God said once. You survive on words He is still saying — which only works if He is still speaking and you are actually positioned to hear it.
>
> **Source.** BDAG, s.v. ῥῆμα.

Chris Tiegreen makes the same point at devotional length, writing in the voice of God — a device his book uses throughout, worth reading as a distillation of what Scripture already teaches about the Spirit’s role rather than as new revelation:

Voices

“I created your brain. I know its wonderful abilities as well as its limitations. When I left My Word with you, I never intended to abandon it entirely to the mental

capacities of theologians and preachers and your own thinking… Human thinking is finite and flawed. I left My written Word in the hands of My Spirit — your Counselor and Advocate and Friend. You only hear My words in it when you read it and listen to it with Him.

"My followers were guided by My Spirit when they wrote down our conversations… But the Spirit didn't leave when these writers died. He remains with you even today. He will bring to mind everything I want you to know and teach you things you have never learned from a human being.

"Look to the Spirit as your Teacher. This is a learning process; it doesn't come naturally. Your habit is to look to your own mind and to the minds of your experts and teachers. Use your mind, yes; but don't depend on it. Depend on the Spirit… Never interpret My Word without first asking the Holy Spirit what it means."

— Chris Tiegreen, The One Year Hearing His Voice Devotional (2014)

ILLUSTRATION

I used to believe God only spoke through Scripture — full stop. I had reasons: 2 Timothy 3:16–17 says Scripture equips believers for every good work, so I reasoned nothing else was necessary. I had also watched Christians who claimed to hear God constantly live chaotic, drama-filled lives, and concluded that "hearing God" must be spiritual nonsense dressed up as maturity.

Then, on January 1, 2015, everything I believed about that got tested. I had done everything right — daily Bible reading, prayer, faithful church attendance, even teaching Bible classes thirty weeks a year — and I knew, with real clarity, that I was not growing. I called a friend, one of the very people whose "God told me" language I had privately dismissed, and asked him the question I never expected to ask: *"Will you teach me how to hear God's voice?"*

That phone call is the reason this session exists. I was not wrong that some people mishandle claims about hearing God. I was wrong to conclude from their mishandling that the practice itself was fiction — and it took someone I had privately written off to show me the difference.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Which is closer to where you actually live — quietly assuming God only speaks through the Bible, or quietly assuming He should be speaking constantly and wondering why you can't hear Him? Name it honestly.

Testimony of Scripture

If hearing God's voice were a novelty, you would expect to find it introduced somewhere partway through the Bible, after the theology had been established. Instead, it is present from the very first pages — before there was a single verse of Scripture for anyone to read.

> *"Then the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the orchard, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die.'"*

> **GENESIS 2:16–17**

Adam received an audible, specific, consequential word from God with no Scripture in existence yet to check it against. The pattern continues with Abram, called out of everything familiar by a voice he had no book to verify.

> *"Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go out from your country, your relatives, and your father's household to the land that I will show you… I will bless those who bless you, but the one who treats you lightly I must curse, and all the families of the earth will bless one another by your name.'"*
>
> **GENESIS 12:1–3**

This is not a pattern confined to a handful of extraordinary founders. At Sinai, God addressed an entire nation the same way — and the nation's response is worth noticing as closely as the invitation.

> *"And now, if you will diligently listen to me and keep my covenant, then you will be my special possession out of all the nations… So Moses came and summoned the elders of Israel. He set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him, and all the people answered together, 'All that the Lord has commanded we will do!'"*
>
> **EXODUS 19:5, 7–8**

The prophets carried the same expectation forward for centuries — sometimes obeyed, as often ignored, including one, Jonah, who heard the assignment clearly and ran the opposite direction before finally doing what he was told (Jonah 1:1–3; 3:3). None of that history is presented in Scripture as belonging only to a spiritual aristocracy. Jesus describes it as the baseline experience of everyone who actually belongs to Him.

> *“The doorkeeper opens the door for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out… and the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice.”*
>
> **JOHN 10:3–4**

Not a name-brand prophet. Not a patriarch. A sheep — Jesus’ own metaphor for the most unremarkable member of the flock — recognizing a voice by nothing more sophisticated than familiarity built over time. Ananias, an otherwise unknown disciple in Damascus, is a case study in exactly that ordinariness.

> *“Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias,’ and he replied, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ Then the Lord told him, ‘Get up and go to the street called “Straight”… and at Judas’ house look for a man from Tarsus named Saul.’”*
>
> **ACTS 9:10–11**

WORD STUDY

שָׁמַע *shama* H8085

> **“listen” / “hear”** · Deuteronomy 6:4

Range. To hear — but rarely mere acoustic reception. *Shama* routinely carries the sense of hearing that produces attention, understanding, and obedience together. English has to split “hear,” “listen,” and “obey” into three separate words; Hebrew frequently holds all three inside this one.

The sense here. When Solomon is given anything he wants from God, he does not ask for wisdom in the abstract. “So give your servant a discerning mind” (1 Kings 3:9) — but the underlying Hebrew is more literally *lev shomea*, a

hearing heart — *shomea* being the same root as the Shema's opening command. Solomon's famous wisdom was not a separate gift. It was what a *shama*-shaped heart produces.

Why it carries the argument. *Shama* is the same word that opens the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4 and describes what the sheep do in John 10. Scripture does not have a special vocabulary reserved for prophets hearing God and a lesser vocabulary for ordinary believers doing the same. It is the same word, the same expectation, applied without a tier system.

Source. BDB, s.v. שָׁמַע.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Ananias got both his name called and a specific assignment in the same conversation. When has God given you clarity about *who you are* and *what to do* at the same time — even in a small decision?

Jesus As Role Model

If hearing God's voice required rare spiritual gifting, Jesus would be the one person who never had to learn it — He would simply already know. Scripture says otherwise, and it says so plainly enough that it changes what this session is actually asking of you.

> *"The sovereign Lord has given me the capacity to be his spokesman, so that I know how to help the weary. He wakes me up every morning; he makes me alert so I can listen attentively as disciples do. The sovereign Lord has spoken to me clearly; I have not rebelled, I have not turned back."*
>
> **ISAIAH 50:4–5**

Isaiah is describing the Messiah centuries before His birth, and the description is not of someone born already knowing everything the Father would say. It is someone whose ear is *awakened*, morning after morning, "as disciples do" — the same posture every disciple since has had to adopt. Session 2 already established why this had to be true: Jesus lived His earthly ministry entirely out of His humanity, setting aside the independent use of His divine attributes, or He could not have qualified as either your High Priest or your example (Philippians 2:6–8). A Messiah who never had to learn to listen would be a Messiah who cannot actually show you how.

ILLUSTRATION

The Gospels repeatedly note that Jesus withdrew alone to pray before major decisions and demands — "in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he spent time in prayer" (Mark 1:35), immediately before choosing His twelve disciples (Luke 6:12–13) and throughout the most pressured seasons of His ministry. That is not the behavior of someone with automatic, effortless access to the Father's mind. It is the deliberate, repeated discipline of someone who had learned that hearing clearly requires making room for it.

If the eternal Son of God, living as a man, built His schedule around solitude in order to hear the Father, the assumption that hearing God should require no effort from you does not survive contact with His own example.

> *"He takes away every branch that does not bear fruit in me. He prunes every branch that bears fruit so that it will bear more fruit. You are clean already because of the word that I have spoken to you… If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you."*

JOHN 15:2–3, 7

"Remain" is not a passive verb. It describes an ongoing, maintained condition — the same posture Jesus modeled in the wilderness before dawn. The reward attached to it is not abstract spiritual maturity. It is answered prayer, tied directly to His words actually remaining active inside you.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Jesus built solitude into His schedule specifically to hear the Father. What would you have to rearrange — not add, *rearrange* — to make room for the same thing?

WHAT ABOUT …

How do I know it's actually God?

This is the honest fear sitting underneath most of this session, and it deserves a direct answer rather than a dismissal: *What if I try this and can't tell the difference between God's voice, my own wishful thinking, and my own anxiety? What if I "hear" something and get it wrong?*

That fear is not a sign you are unqualified for this. It is a sign you are taking it seriously. Scripture never treats discernment as automatic — it treats it as a skill, one Paul describes in active, almost militant language.

> *"[We tear down] every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ."*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 10:5**

“Take captive” assumes thoughts arrive uninvited and unsorted — some from God, some from your own mind, some from the enemy — and that sorting them is your active responsibility, not something that happens automatically the moment you decide to start listening. Bill Johnson, pastor of Bethel Church, puts the discipline this way: “I can’t afford to have thoughts in my head about me that God doesn’t have in His.” That is not a claim that every thought is instantly identifiable. It is a claim that you are meant to hold thoughts up and test them rather than accept or reject them by default.

> **I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> - That every impression, feeling, or hunch is God speaking.
> - That getting it wrong occasionally means you have failed or are spiritually inadequate.
> - That discernment is optional once you start paying attention to your thoughts.
>
> **I AM SAYING**
>
> - That anything you believe you have heard gets tested against Scripture first — nothing that contradicts the Bible is from God, regardless of how convincing it feels.
> - That a second, trusted, spiritually mature voice is not optional caution — it is the ordinary means God uses to confirm or correct what you believe you heard.
> - That being wrong sometimes is the price of learning a skill, not evidence you should stop practicing it.

How to Hear God

Scripture does not describe one narrow channel. It describes an infinitely gifted God speaking through an unusually wide range of means — and the point is not to master all of them at once, but to recognize that you almost certainly already have more access than you think.

> *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart.”*
>
> **HEBREWS 4:12**

Scripture itself is the first and most reliable channel — not because God is limited to it, but because it is the fixed standard everything else gets tested against. Beyond the text, Scripture describes God speaking through circumstance and providence, often visible only in hindsight.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Esther had no audible voice from heaven telling her to risk her life before the Persian king. What she had was a chain of circumstances — an orphaned Jewish girl improbably elevated to queen, positioned in the palace at the exact moment her people faced annihilation — that her cousin Mordecai read as more than coincidence: “It may very well be that you have achieved royal status for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). God’s name never appears in the book of Esther. His fingerprints are on every page.
>
> Circumstantial hearing is the hardest kind to trust in the moment and the easiest to recognize looking backward. Esther could not have proven Mordecai’s reading in advance. She could only act on it in faith — which is exactly the position most believers are actually in most of the time. This is why testing what you believe you have heard matters as much for circumstance as for anything more dramatic: a string of coincidences pointing the same direction is worth taking seriously, but a single billboard is not a marriage proposal from God, and a single job opening is not automatically His will. Weigh the pattern, not the isolated moment.

God also speaks through the specific assignment He has already placed you inside — your literal circumstances, read not as accident but as address.

> *“But we will not boast beyond certain limits, but will confine our boasting according to the* ***limits*** **(μέτρον)** ***of the work to which God has appointed us****, that reaches even as far as you.”*

WORD STUDY

μέτρον *metron* G3358

> **“limits”** · 2 Corinthians 10:13

Range. A measure — literally a unit of measurement, and by extension a portion, degree, or bounded sphere assigned to someone. The English “metre” descends from it.

The sense here. The NET renders it “limits” here — not a limitation in the discouraging sense, but a defined territory: the specific scope of work God has actually appointed to Paul, no more and no less. Paul is not claiming universal authority. He is claiming exactly the ground God measured out for him, and refusing to boast about ground that isn’t his.

Why it carries the argument. Hearing God is not only about receiving isolated messages. It includes recognizing the *metron* — the workplace, the neighborhood, the family, the specific portion of the world — He has already measured out for you, and hearing His voice inside that territory rather than waiting for a different assignment to arrive.

Source. BDAG, s.v. μέτρον.

CAUTION

Scripture does describe God speaking in an audible voice on rare occasions (Exodus 6:2–7). It is not the ordinary channel, and it should not be treated as a goal to chase. Auditory experiences — hearing voices with no external source — are also a recognized symptom of certain mental health conditions and can be triggered or worsened by trauma, extreme stress, sleep deprivation, or substance abuse. If you or someone you love hears voices in a way that is distressing, disorienting, or accompanied by other changes in functioning, treat that as a medical and pastoral matter, not only a spiritual one. Seek a qualified mental health professional alongside trusted spiritual counsel. Taking a genuine mental health concern seriously is not a lack of faith — it is wisdom, and Scripture never asks you to choose between the two.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Which channel in this section have you experienced without realizing it was God speaking — Scripture stopping you mid-sentence, a circumstance that only made sense afterward, or the specific *metron* you already stand in?

The Turn

Every session up to this one has told you something true about who God is, who you are, and what you were made for. This one has told you something different: that the God who made you for a purpose stays in the room to help you carry it out — and that learning to recognize His voice is not a spiritual-elite skill but an ordinary discipline, modeled by Jesus Himself, available through more channels than you have probably been using.

That means the honest question is no longer *does God still speak*. It is *when did you last actually stop long enough to check*. Adam heard before there was a Bible. Ananias heard as an unknown disciple with no reputation to protect. Jesus, fully human, built His schedule around it. None of them had an advantage available to them that is not also available to you — which means the gap between where you are and where they were was never about access. It was about whether anyone had shown you how to listen.

The Experience · Conversation

Set a timer for ten minutes. Find a place with no phone, no music, and no task list in front of you.

Begin by asking God one honest question — not a test question, an actual one you want an answer to. It can be as specific as a decision you are facing or as simple as *"Father, what do You want me to know today?"* Then stop talking. Sit in silence for the full ten minutes. Do not fill the quiet.

Write down anything that comes — a phrase, an image, a verse, a memory, a name, even something that seems unrelated or unimpressive. Do not edit it or decide yet whether it counts. Just capture it exactly as it came. If nothing comes at all, write that down too — "nothing came" is real data, not failure, and it is worth naming honestly rather than manufacturing an answer to fill the silence.

Afterward, run it through the test this session already gave you: Does it contradict Scripture anywhere? If yes, discard it — it was not from God, however it felt. Does it line up with who God has already revealed Himself to be? Would a trusted, spiritually mature person you know affirm it, or at least not be alarmed by it? If it survives that testing, hold onto it loosely and watch for confirmation over the coming days rather than acting on it immediately.

BIG IDEAS

1. God is not a God who spoke once and stopped. He wants ongoing, two-way relationship, and the Bible itself says so — it trains you to recognize a voice still speaking, not to replace it.
2. Hearing God is the consistent testimony of Scripture from Genesis onward, extended by Jesus to “sheep” — ordinary believers — not reserved for patriarchs and prophets.
3. Jesus Himself had to learn to hear the Father, proving the skill is learnable rather than a rare spiritual gift some believers simply lack.
4. Discernment is an active, learnable skill — take every thought captive, test it against Scripture, and confirm it with trusted counsel — not an automatic ability or an excuse to stop trying.
5. God speaks through more ordinary channels than most believers use — e.g., Scripture, circumstance, and the specific *metron* already assigned to you — before He ever needs to raise His voice.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You were never meant to read about a relationship. You were meant to have one.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, forgive me for the seasons I decided You had gone quiet, when the truth was I had stopped listening. Thank You for a book that trains my ear rather than replacing Your voice, and for a Son who modeled the exact discipline You are asking of me now. Teach me to recognize You the way sheep

> *recognize a shepherd — not by lightning and thunder, but by familiarity built one conversation at a time. Give me patience with myself in the seasons I get it wrong, and courage to keep listening anyway. In Jesus' name, amen.*

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God* (1996).
A former cessationist seminary professor's own account of coming to believe God still speaks — written directly into the same conviction this session's opening testimony describes.

SUBSTANTIAL

Loren Cunningham, *Is That Really You, God?* (2001).
A practical, story-driven account of learning to distinguish God's voice from noise, written by the founder of Youth With A Mission.

ACADEMIC

Jon Ruthven, *What's Wrong with Protestant Theology?* (2022).
A direct theological engagement with cessationism — the position this session's opening testimony describes leaving — for readers who want the doctrinal argument in full.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and John 14:25–26 slowly. *Where have you been treating the Bible as the whole relationship*

rather than the training ground for an ongoing one?

DAY 2

Read Genesis 12:1–3 and Acts 9:10–11 together. *Abram was a stranger to God; Ananias was an unknown disciple. Neither had earned a hearing. What has convinced you that you need to earn yours?*

DAY 3

Read Isaiah 50:4–5 and Mark 1:35. *Jesus rearranged His schedule, not just His attitude, to hear the Father. What would you have to rearrange this week?*

DAY 4

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5 slowly, twice. *Name one thought you have been treating as true without ever holding it up and asking whether it lines up with what you know of God.*

DAY 5

Read Esther 4:14 and 2 Corinthians 10:13. *Look at your actual circumstances this week — your specific metron. What might God be saying through the place you already stand, rather than a place you're waiting to be sent?*

DAY 6

Find what you wrote for *Consider This* and what you wrote during *The Experience*. *Read both together. Has anything shifted in how confident you feel that God is actually speaking to you?*

Tell one other person this week what you wrote during The Experience — and ask them, honestly, whether it lines up with what they know of God.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Voice

“Is God still speaking to ordinary people right now — and can hearing Him actually be learned, or is it reserved for the spiritually gifted few?”

THE CONVERSATION

Israel’s oldest prayer opens not with a command to love but to listen — because loving God rightly starts with hearing Him first. Jesus promised His disciples an Advocate who would keep teaching them, not a longer book. Scripture was always meant to train your ear, not replace His voice.

Deuteronomy 6:4–5
John 14:25–26

THE SHEEP

Abram left everything on a voice with no book to verify it, centuries before Israel had a single verse. Jesus calls that same hearing the ordinary mark of His sheep, and an unknown disciple named Ananias proves it was never reserved for patriarchs and prophets.

Genesis 12:1–3
John 10:3–4
Acts 9:10–11

THE DISCIPLE

Isaiah says the Messiah’s ear was awakened every morning, listening the way any disciple has to learn to. Jesus withdrew before dawn to hear the Father, not because He had automatic access, but because He didn’t. If the Son had to build His schedule around it, so do you.

Isaiah 50:4–5
John 15:2–3, 7

THE CHANNELS

Scripture is the fixed standard everything else gets weighed against — but God also speaks through circumstance, read rightly only in hindsight, and through the specific metron, the actual assignment, you already stand inside. You almost certainly have more access to His voice than you’ve noticed.

Hebrews 4:12
Esther 4:14
2 Corinthians 10:13

THE TURN

Every session before this one told you something true about who God is and who you are. This one tells you He stays in the room to help you carry it out — which means the real question was never whether God speaks, but whether you’ve stopped long enough to check.

Genesis 2:16–17

SO NOW

TRAINED, NOT REPLACED

The Bible was never meant to be the whole relationship. It is the reliable record that trains you to recognize a voice that is still, actually, speaking.

John 14:25–26

LEARNED, NOT INNATE

Jesus Himself had to learn to hear the Father, waking morning by morning to listen like a disciple. If He needed the discipline, so do you.

Isaiah 50:4–5

TESTED, NOT ASSUMED

Not every thought that arrives is God’s. Take it captive, weigh it against Scripture, and confirm it with someone who knows Him well.

2 Corinthians 10:5

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You were never meant to read about a relationship. You were meant to have one.

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Next · Session 10, Kingdom Power. You are learning to recognize the Father’s voice. Session 10 introduces the Person who makes that possible — the Holy Spirit, and the baptism that changes what you are able to hear and do.

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10

KINGDOM POWER

Kingdom Essentials: The Power

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 The Person of the Holy Spirit

03 The Baptisms in Scripture

04 Baptism with the Holy Spirit

05 The Spirit’s Witness

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Baptism & Tongues

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Session 9 taught you to recognize God’s voice. That’s a relationship skill, and like every relationship skill, it assumes you have what it takes to act on what you hear. This session asks the harder question underneath that assumption.

Is there a Person — distinct from your own willpower, your Bible knowledge, and your church attendance — whose presence you actually need in order to live any of the last nine sessions out, and if so, how do you get Him?

Most believers already know the correct answer on a doctrinal quiz: the Holy Spirit lives in every believer from the moment of salvation. That answer is true. It is also, for a great many sincere Christians, not experienced as true — not because the doctrine is wrong, but because knowing a Person is in the room and knowing His empowering presence are not automatically the same thing. This session is about closing that gap.

CONSIDER THIS

Before you read further, answer honestly: if someone asked you to explain, in one sentence, the difference between having the Holy Spirit

and being empowered by the Holy Spirit, could you? Write down your best attempt.

Come back to it on Day 6.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I want everything You've planned and provided for me — not just the doctrine of it, but the reality. Whatever I lack, fill me. Whatever I don't yet understand, teach me. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Person of the Holy Spirit

Before you can seek the Holy Spirit's power, get His identity right — because Scripture is far more interested in who He is than in what He does, and the confusion runs deep. "The Holy Spirit" sounds like a title for a force or a phenomenon. He isn't one. He is a Person, fully God, equal in every way to the Father and the Son He is so often listed alongside.

> *When Jesus had been baptized, just as he was coming up out of the water, the heavens opened and he* ***saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove*** *and coming to rest on him.*
>
> **MATTHEW 3:16**

That single image — a dove — has done more to flatten people's picture of the Holy Spirit than almost any other verse in Scripture. He is not the bird. He is not the bumper sticker. The dove was a visible sign for the people standing on that riverbank that day, the way a wedding ring is a sign of a marriage — genuinely meaningful, and nothing at all like the reality it points to.

“In the Old Testament, the presence of God was many times manifested in the glory of God and in theophanies, and in the gospels Jesus himself manifested the presence of God among men. But after Jesus ascended into heaven, and continuing through the entire Church age, the Holy Spirit is now the primary manifestation of the presence of the Trinity among us. He is the one who is most prominently present with us now.”

Wayne Grudem · theologian · *Systematic Theology*, 1994

Grudem’s own survey of Scripture describes the Spirit’s ministry along four lines that are worth holding together rather than picking a favorite from: He **empowers** — He is the reason a shoot from Jesse’s line would carry “wisdom and understanding… counsel and might” (Isaiah 11:2), and the reason ordinary disciples spoke boldly at Pentecost (Acts 2:4). He **purifies** — the fruit of a Spirit-formed life is love, joy, peace, patience, and the rest (Galatians 5:22–23), not gritted-teeth willpower. He **reveals** — “no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; but men… spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). And He **unifies** — one Spirit, distributing gifts across many members so that one body actually functions as one (1 Corinthians 12:12–13, which the next section takes up in full). Four ministries, one Person, not four separate spirits doing four separate jobs.

He also has a name for what He does *for* you specifically, and the NET Bible’s translation choice is worth sitting with.

> *“Then I will ask the Father, and he will give you another* ***Advocate*** **(παράκλητος)** *to be with you forever.”*
>
> **JOHN 14:16**

WORD STUDY

παράκλητος *paraklētos* G3875

> **“Advocate”** · John 14:16

Range. Built from *para* (“alongside”) and *kaleō* (“to call”) — literally, one called to your side. Depending on context it carries a courtroom sense (legal counsel, an advocate who pleads your case), an intercessory sense, and a broader sense of a helper or comforter. English has never found one word that holds all three at once, which is why translations split the difference — Helper, Comforter, Counselor, Advocate all appear across different English Bibles for the same Greek word.

The sense here. The NET renders it **Advocate** — leaning into the legal sense rather than the softer “Comforter” older translations favored. That is not a small choice. A comforter sits with you in your pain. An advocate stands up and argues your case. Jesus is promising His disciples both are true of the Spirit, but the courtroom image is the one most modern readers miss entirely.

Why it carries the argument. If the Holy Spirit is merely a comforting presence, you might reasonably feel you can live without Him in a pinch — comfort is nice, not essential. If He is your *Advocate*, actively arguing your case and equipping you for a mission that is genuinely opposed, going without Him is not a matter of missing some comfort. It’s showing up to a trial with no one in your corner.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. παράκλητος; cf. BDAG.

ILLUSTRATION

When I was a kid, the NASA space program was in its infancy, and I remember sitting in front of the television mesmerized by the men and the machines. Watching those Saturn V rockets on the launch pad, beautifully

engineered and poised for flight, I marveled that people had built something so powerful.

For the first twenty-five years of my Christian life, I was exactly that rocket sitting on the pad. Beautifully engineered — I knew biblical principles. Perfectly constructed — I read the Bible every day. Poised for flight — I prayed, attended church, gave. But my fuel tanks were empty. I could explain the Holy Spirit's ministry accurately, the way you might describe a rocket's engineering from a textbook, without ever having been filled with what makes it fly. I couldn't do what I was designed and built to do — until January of 2015, when everything changed. What that month actually looked like is the illustration for the section this session is named after.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Before this section, which word would you have reached for first to describe the Holy Spirit — a Person, a presence, a power, or a symbol? What does your answer reveal about how you actually relate to Him day to day?

The Baptisms in Scripture

Scripture doesn't describe a single baptism. It describes several, and the author of Hebrews lists them among the *elementary* things a believer should already understand — not advanced material reserved for specialists.

> *Therefore we must progress beyond the elementary instructions about Christ and move on to maturity, not laying this foundation again: repentance from dead works and faith in God, teaching about* ***baptisms*** **(βαπτισμῶν)***, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.*

HEBREWS 6:1–2

WORD STUDY

βαπτισμός *baptismos* G909

> **“baptisms”** · Hebrews 6:2

Range. A washing or purification by water — used in the Gospels for ceremonial washings under Jewish law (Mark 7:4) and here, in Hebrews, for the washings that belong to the Christian foundation.

The sense here. The word in Hebrews 6:2 is grammatically plural — *baptismōn*, “of baptisms,” not “of baptism.” The author isn’t being careless. He’s naming a category with more than one member and expecting his readers to already know which ones he means.

Why it carries the argument. If Hebrews can casually pluralize “baptisms” as foundational, elementary knowledge, then whatever this session is about to unpack was never meant to be advanced or contested territory for ordinary believers — it was meant to be settled early, the way you’d expect basic arithmetic to be settled before algebra.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. βαπτισμός.

Here is where I land, and why. Scripture doesn’t hand you a numbered list of exactly three baptisms — the “1st, 2nd, 3rd” framework below is my own teaching device. The necessary shift in thinking is that baptism isn’t about getting wet, but about coming into *agreement*. The three-fold framework is built to help you see three distinct moments of *agreement* with each Person of the Trinity, not a technical New Testament taxonomy. Historic theology usually sorts this territory into two broad categories, water and Spirit, folding what Romans 6 describes into one or the other depending on the tradition. Hold my numbering loosely, as a

teaching frame. Hold what Scripture actually says happens at each moment tightly — that part isn't mine.

1st — Agreement with the Father. Before anything visible happens, you agree with the Father about what your sin cost and what Christ's blood accomplished (Hebrews 9:22; Acts 2:38).

> *Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into his death**? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life.*
>
> **ROMANS 6:3–4**

> *But to all who have received him — those who believe in his name — **he has given the right to become God's children**.*
>
> **JOHN 1:12**

That is the first agreement, and its result: you don't merely receive forgiveness, you receive sonship from a Father.

2nd — Agreement with the Son. Water baptism is the visible, public enactment of what has already happened spiritually — an outward yes to an inward reality.

> *When they heard this, **they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**.*
>
> **ACTS 19:5**

> *For in one Spirit **we were all baptized into one body** — whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of the one Spirit. For in fact the body is not a single member, but many.*

> **1 CORINTHIANS 12:13–14**

Paul names the spiritual reality water baptism physically enacts: one Spirit, one body, and you now visibly, publicly in it — brothers and sisters, not spectators.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> In the early 50s AD, on his third missionary journey, Paul arrived in Ephesus and found a small group of disciples there. His first question to them is worth noticing: not “have you been water baptized,” but “did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They hadn’t even heard there was a Holy Spirit to receive — they knew only John’s baptism, a baptism of repentance pointing forward to someone still to come.
>
> Paul explained who that someone was. “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” — the second agreement, made on the spot. And then, distinctly, in the very next clause: “when Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy” (Acts 19:1–6). Two real events, joined by the word “when,” not the same moment described twice.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Which of these first two agreements can you point to a specific moment for — believing, and being water baptized? If you can name both, what does that tell you about whether a third, distinct moment is even possible?

Baptism with the Holy Spirit

The third baptism is the one this session is named for, and the one you were least likely to have been taught clearly: a real, biblical, still-available experience of being filled with power for a task you cannot do on your own strength — the

same experience Jesus Himself received before He did anything recorded in His public ministry.

> *"I baptize you with water, for repentance, but the one coming after me is more powerful than I am… He will **baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire**."*
>
> **MATTHEW 3:11**

Mark, Luke, and John each record the same claim from John the Baptist in the same words — a fourfold witness, in every Gospel, to one baptism still to come (Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Jesus received it Himself before He did anything else.

> *Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized. And while he was praying, the heavens opened, and **the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove**.*
>
> **LUKE 3:21–22**

> *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, **because he has anointed me** to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed."*
>
> **LUKE 4:18**

Notice the word *because*. Jesus doesn't say the Spirit came upon Him as decoration on an already-complete ministry. He says the anointing is the reason He could do any of it. Fully God, fully human, and still — by His own account — dependent on this baptism before He faced the tempter in the desert or opened His mouth in Nazareth. If the eternal Son needed it, the case for you needing it argues itself.

Before His ascension, He passed the same promise on.

> *"For John baptized with water, but you will be **baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now."*
>
> **ACTS 1:5**

That promise arrived exactly as described, and Luke tells you what it looked like from the inside.

> *All of them **were filled with the Holy Spirit**, and they began to speak in **other languages** (ἑτέραις γλώσσαις) as the Spirit enabled them.*
>
> **ACTS 2:4**

WORD STUDY

γλῶσσα *glōssa* G1100

"other languages" · Acts 2:4

Range. Literally "tongue," the physical organ — and by natural extension, a language. Scripture uses the word two distinguishable ways: an actual human language unlearned by the speaker (as here), and, in Paul's letters to Corinth, an utterance offered to God that may or may not be a human language at all (1 Corinthians 14:2, 14).

The sense here. The NET translates *glōssais* as "languages" in Acts 2:4 rather than "tongues" — a deliberate choice, because the crowd outside understood every word: "each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6, 8). Whatever happened in that room, it was intelligible speech to someone.

Why it carries the argument. The same Greek word covers Pentecost's known foreign languages and the

private, unlearned utterance Paul describes later — "he is speaking mysteries by the Spirit… his spirit prays, but his mind is unproductive" (1 Corinthians 14:2, 14). These are related but not identical phenomena. Collapsing them into one thing is exactly the confusion the second *What About* below exists to untangle.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. γλῶσσα.

Who is this promise for? Not the spiritual elite.

> *"For the promise is for you and your children, and **for all** who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself."*
>
> **ACTS 2:39**

> *"If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the **heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit** to those who ask him!"*
>
> **LUKE 11:13**

There is no formula, no threshold of spiritual seniority, no application process. Jesus names asking, in faith, as sufficient.

ILLUSTRATION

The friend I called on January 1, 2015 — the one Session 9 described teaching me to hear God's voice — was part of a small group that invited me to a men's prayer meeting a few weeks later. I went hungry, having finally understood what I'd been missing for twenty-five years. As a friend prayed for me, I remember being overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit's presence, and falling as a result. A pastor I respect, Miles McPherson, once described that experience as "when every cell in your body falls to its knees in the presence of God." When I got back up, I knew to my core that something had actually changed — not a new fact I'd learned, but a new fuel in the tank.

WHAT ABOUT …

Doesn’t every believer already receive the Spirit at salvation?

This is the most serious objection this session raises, and it deserves its strongest form: many careful, Bible-believing scholars read 1 Corinthians 12:13 — “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” — as describing something that happens to *every* believer, once, the instant they trust Christ. On this reading, “baptism with the Holy Spirit” simply names what regeneration already is. The book of Acts, on this view, describes a unique, unrepeatable moment in redemptive history — the gospel crossing from Jews (Acts 2) to Samaritans (Acts 8) to Gentiles (Acts 10) to disciples of John (Acts 19), each transition marked with visible signs precisely because it was transitional, not because it’s a template for every believer’s private experience today.

That reading takes 1 Corinthians 12:13 seriously, and it should — every believer genuinely is united to Christ’s body by the Spirit the instant they believe. Scripture doesn’t leave room to doubt that. But it doesn’t account for Acts 19 as cleanly as it claims to. The Ephesian disciples were already trusting Christ, already water baptized, when Paul asked whether they’d received the Spirit — a question that only makes sense if something distinguishable could still be missing. What happened next wasn’t redescribed regeneration. It was something they visibly, audibly received in a separate moment, marked by the same word Luke uses everywhere else for this experience: *and when*.

Here is where I land, and why. I read Paul and Luke as describing two real, different things with overlapping vocabulary rather than two witnesses to the same fact. Paul’s “baptized into one body” names a positional reality, true of every believer the instant they believe — you are not more a member of Christ’s body after this session’s practice than you were before it. Luke’s baptism-with-the-Spirit language names a distinguishable experiential empowering, available to those same believers, that Scripture consistently portrays as something to wait for, ask for, and visibly receive — not something already accomplished the moment they’d have said yes to an altar call.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture never hands you a technical vocabulary that cleanly separates “positional” from “experiential” the way later systematic theology tried to. Faithful, careful readers of the same texts land in different places, and this is not a hill to divide over.

WHAT ABOUT …

Is speaking in tongues the necessary evidence?

Classical Pentecostal teaching holds that speaking in tongues is the required initial sign that someone has received this baptism — and the pattern across Acts is genuinely consistent enough to deserve a hearing: tongues (or something visibly like it) accompanies the experience at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), at Cornelius's household (Acts 10:46), and in Ephesus (Acts 19:6). Three for three isn't nothing.

It also isn't four for four. Samaria doesn't mention tongues at all (Acts 8:14–17) — only that Simon "saw" something happen when hands were laid on, which was compelling enough to make a professional magician want to buy the ability. And Jesus Himself, describing the promise in advance, names the evidence He expects: "you will receive power… and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8) — not a specific utterance. Paul is equally direct that the *gift* of tongues, exercised publicly in the church, is distributed selectively like every other gift: "Not all speak in tongues, do they?" (1 Corinthians 12:30) — a rhetorical question expecting no.

The tension resolves once you notice Paul is describing two different things with one word, exactly as the word study above showed. The *public gift* of tongues — requiring interpretation, exercised for the church's benefit — is not given to everyone, and Paul says so plainly. But Paul also describes a different, private use: "the one who speaks in a tongue… is speaking mysteries by the Spirit… his spirit prays" (1 Corinthians 14:2, 14) — a devotional language between a believer and God, building up the speaker rather than the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:4). *Here is where I land, and why.* I don't hold tongues as the mandatory evidence of this baptism, because Samaria and Acts 1:8 won't let me. I do hold it as a real, common, biblically attested expression of it — worth asking for, never worth manufacturing, and never a pass-fail test of whether God actually met you.

> **I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> - That you are a lesser or less-loved Christian if you have never spoken in tongues, or never experienced anything you could point to as this baptism.
> - That every believer's experience of the Spirit's empowering will look, sound, or feel the same.

- That failing to feel anything during prayer for this means you did something wrong or lack sufficient faith.

I AM SAYING

- That this is a real, biblical, seekable experience — not a private club's testimony, and not a threshold you must cross to be fully accepted by God, who already accepted you fully at your first agreement with Him.
- That if nothing happens when you ask, the honest response is to keep asking, not to conclude something is broken in you. Luke 11:13 doesn't attach a waiting period or a worthiness test.
- That the enemy uses both directions of this lie — convincing some they've had the experience when they haven't, and convincing others they're "less than" for not having had it yet. Don't take either bait.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If someone prayed for you today and nothing visible happened, what would you do with that — walk away discouraged, or ask again next week? What does your honest answer reveal about what you actually believe Luke 11:13 promises?

The Spirit's Witness

None of this was ever meant to end at your own experience. Every biblical account of this baptism produces outward motion — toward other people — not private religious feeling for its own sake.

> *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and* ***you will be my witnesses*** **(μάρτυρες)** *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth."*
>
> **ACTS 1:8**

WORD STUDY

μάρτυς *martys* G3144

"witnesses" · Acts 1:8

Range. A witness — someone judicially competent to testify to what they have personally seen, heard, or otherwise verified. It's the ordinary Greek word for a courtroom witness, with no religious connotation on its own.

The sense here. Jesus doesn't promise power so His disciples can feel something impressive. He promises it so they can *testify* — credibly, as eyewitnesses, to what they've actually seen God do.

Why it carries the argument. This word is where the English word "martyr" comes from — not because it originally meant someone who dies, but because enough of Jesus's early witnesses testified all the way to their deaths that the word itself absorbed the cost. Power for witness was never meant to stop at a private encounter. It was meant to hold up under whatever the testifying eventually costs.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. μάρτυς.

ILLUSTRATION

Stephen is the New Testament's clearest picture of where this baptism was always headed. Scripture introduces him already "full of the Holy Spirit" before his trial even begins, and at the moment his accusers turn violent, Luke tells you exactly what filled him still was: "full of the Holy Spirit, [he] looked intently toward heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). They stoned him for saying so. His last recorded words were not fear but forgiveness for the men killing him (Acts 7:59–60) — a young man named Saul standing at the edge of the crowd, holding the coats (Acts 7:58), watching a witness become, in the fullest sense the word would ever carry, a martyr.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn't this just emotionalism?

A fair and common concern, especially from believers who've watched this territory handled badly: isn't falling down, weeping, or speaking in an unlearned language just heightened emotion wearing spiritual language — manipulated by an emotionally charged room, or worse, manufactured for effect?

Sometimes, honestly, yes. Emotional manipulation dressed as spiritual encounter is real, and pretending otherwise would be dishonest. But the existence of counterfeits argues for discernment, not cessation — nobody stops using currency because counterfeit bills exist. The deeper problem this objection surfaces usually isn't theological. It's relational: believers who've genuinely experienced this baptism sometimes handle people who haven't with real carelessness — correct in what they say, and still doing harm by how and when they say it.

"You may be right, but you aren't helping."

Pastor Adam Kling's frequent response to well-meaning but ill-timed spiritual comments

Christians don't corner the market on emotional intelligence, and this territory is where its absence shows up most. The goal was never to be right in a room. It was

to lead people toward God — which means power without the emotional maturity to carry it well produces exactly the kind of clumsy, offputting encounter this objection is reacting to.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Have you personally witnessed this material handled badly — either by someone claiming too much, or by someone dismissing too much? Which experience has shaped your own caution more?

The Turn

You now know what this session set out to give you: a Person, not a force, whose identity you can name and whose presence you can actually seek. A pattern of agreement — with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit — that Scripture treats as elementary, not exotic. And a specific, biblical, still-available baptism that Jesus Himself needed before He could do anything recorded about His public ministry.

None of that was meant to stay theoretical. If Jesus, fully God, chose to wait for this before He acted, the honest question is no longer whether you need it. It's whether you've actually asked.

The Experience · Baptism & Tongues

Find a quiet place, and set aside real time — this isn't a two-minute exercise. If you can, ask someone you trust, who has themselves experienced this baptism, to pray with you rather than doing this entirely alone; Scripture's pattern is almost always someone praying *for* someone else, hands laid on, not solitary striving.

Begin honestly: tell God, in your own words, whether you believe you've already received this baptism, are unsure, or know you haven't. Ask specifically, using Luke 11:13's own confidence — not begging a reluctant God, but asking a Father who has already said yes in principle. Then stop talking, and stay in the stillness. If words come that aren't in a language you recognize, don't edit or suppress them out of self-consciousness; let them come, and don't panic if nothing does either.

Afterward, write down what happened, plainly, without inflating or minimizing it. Whatever you experienced or didn't, revisit the two *What About* sections above before you draw a conclusion about what it means.

BIG IDEAS

1. The Holy Spirit is a Person, fully God, not a force or a symbol — how you think of Him determines whether you actually seek Him or just seek His benefits.
2. Scripture describes several baptisms as elementary, foundational knowledge (Hebrews 6:1–2) — not advanced or contested material reserved for specialists.
3. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is a real, distinguishable, biblical experience of empowering — the same one Jesus received before He began His public ministry.
4. Tongues is a real, common, biblically attested expression of this baptism — never its mandatory evidence, and never a pass-fail test of whether God met you.
5. This baptism was always meant to produce outward witness, not private religious feeling — power for testimony that, for some, has cost everything.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

A rocket with perfect engineering and an empty fuel tank never leaves the ground.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I want everything You've planned and provided for me — not the doctrine of it, but the reality. Baptize me with Your Holy Spirit, however You choose to give it. Empower me to do what You've planned for me to do, and to be Your witness, whatever that costs. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Randy Clark, *Baptized in the Spirit* (2017).
The book that shaped my own understanding of this session's material — start here if this session's argument resonated and you want the fuller case in one accessible volume.

SUBSTANTIAL

Andrew Murray, *Experiencing the Holy Spirit*.
A classic, devotionally rich treatment from a 19th-century pastor writing decades before the modern Pentecostal movement gave this territory its current vocabulary — useful for seeing the experience apart from any one tradition's language for it.

ACADEMIC

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (1994).
Already quoted directly in this session — his fuller treatment of the Spirit's Person and work, and of the different views on subsequence, repays a full read rather than the two excerpts used here.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read John 14:16–17 slowly, aloud. *The NET calls Him "Advocate." Does that change how you'd ask Him for help this week, compared to just calling Him "Comforter"?*

DAY 2

Read Hebrews 6:1–2. *The author calls "baptisms" elementary knowledge. Where has this territory instead felt advanced, confusing, or off-limits to you?*

DAY 3

Read Luke 3:21–22 and Luke 4:18–19 together. *Jesus needed this baptism before His ministry began. What are you currently trying to do in your own strength that this session suggests you were never meant to?*

DAY 4

Read Acts 19:1–7 slowly. *Paul's first question to the Ephesian disciples was "did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" How would you answer that question if someone asked you today?*

DAY 5

Read Luke 11:10–13. *Is there an unanswered "ask" you've quietly given up on regarding the Holy Spirit's presence and power in your life? What would asking again, today, look like?*

DAY 6

Find what you wrote for *Consider This* at the start of this session. *Rewrite your answer now, in light of everything this session actually said. What's different?*

Practice the Experience again this week if nothing happened the first time — with someone else praying for you if you were alone the first time, or alone if you weren't.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Arc and timing (90 minutes). The Person of the Holy Spirit and The Baptisms in Scripture move quickly together — most groups don't argue much about the Spirit's personhood or about water baptism. Budget the real time for Baptism with the Holy Spirit and its two *What About* sections; that's where the room's actual theological history — Pentecostal, cessationist, cautiously undecided — will surface, often for the first time in front of each other.

Where the room stalls. Someone from a cessationist or reformed background may go quiet or visibly tense during the tongues discussion — don't rush past that silence, and don't let anyone else fill it for them. Someone who has spoken in tongues for years may be surprised to hear it isn't the required evidence; affirm their experience as real while holding the distinction the session makes. Expect at least one person to admit, during or after The Experience, that nothing happened for them. Say plainly, before anyone shares: nothing happening this time means nothing about their standing with God or the sincerity of their faith.

The ministry moment. If your group is comfortable with it, offer prayer in pairs or small clusters rather than as one large group encounter — this material goes better with someone's hand on a shoulder than with a stage and a spotlight. Model asking simply, the way Luke 11:13 does, rather than an elaborate or pressured invitation.

Discussion questions, if you need more than the Pause & Reflect prompts:

1. Before this session, what did you actually believe about whether “baptism with the Holy Spirit” was for you personally? Where did that belief come from?
2. Which of the two *What About* sections did you find yourself resisting more — and why might that be worth sitting with rather than resolving quickly?
3. Stephen’s witness cost him his life. What is the smallest, least dramatic version of that same kind of costly witness available to you this week?

What to cut if you’re behind. The Baptisms in Scripture section’s illustration (Acts 19) can be summarized in one sentence rather than narrated in full — the passage itself is quoted enough elsewhere in the session to carry the point. Do not cut either *What About* in Baptism with the Holy Spirit; they are this session’s actual risk-map budget, and the room needs both stated in full strength.

Kingdom Power

“Is there a Person — distinct from your own willpower, your Bible knowledge, and your church attendance — whose presence you actually need, and if so, how do you get Him?”

THE PERSON

The Holy Spirit is not a dove, a force, or a phenomenon — He is a Person, fully God, equal with the Father and the Son. He empowers, purifies, reveals, and unifies, and He stands beside you as Advocate, arguing your case rather than merely comforting you through it.

Matthew 3:16
John 14:16

THE AGREEMENTS

Scripture treats baptisms as elementary, foundational knowledge — not advanced territory reserved for specialists. Agreement with the Father settles what your sin cost and what Christ paid; agreement with the Son makes that inward reality a visible, public yes, lived out among brothers and sisters, not spectators.

Hebrews 6:1–2
Romans 6:3–4
Acts 19:5

THE FILLING

A third baptism is real and still available: being filled with power for a task you cannot do on your own strength — the same baptism Jesus Himself received before He did anything recorded of His public ministry. There is no formula and no spiritual elite; Jesus names simply asking as sufficient.

Luke 4:18
Acts 1:5
Luke 11:13

THE WITNESS

None of this was ever meant to end at private experience. Power was promised so ordinary disciples could testify credibly to what they had actually seen God do — testimony that, for Stephen, held up all the way to the stones that killed him.

Acts 1:8
Acts 7:55

THE TURN

You now know who the Spirit is, what agreement with each Person of the Trinity looks like, and that a real baptism of power is still available. If Jesus, fully God, chose to wait for it before He acted, the only honest question left is whether you’ve actually asked.

Luke 3:21–22

SO NOW

PERSON, NOT SYMBOL

The dove was a sign for the people on the riverbank that day. He is not the bird, and He is not a bumper sticker — He is a Person you can actually seek.

John 14:16

EMPOWERED, NOT MERELY INDWELT

Jesus, fully God, still waited for this baptism before He acted. You were never meant to run your assignment on willpower and Bible knowledge alone.

Acts 1:5

WITNESS, NOT FEELING

Power was never given so you could feel something impressive. It was given so you could testify, credibly, to what you have actually seen God do.

Acts 1:8

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

A rocket with perfect engineering and an empty fuel tank never leaves the ground.

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Next · Session 11, Kingdom Identity. You've been baptized with power. Session 11 answers whose you are, who you now are because of it, and where you actually sit.

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11

KINGDOM IDENTITY

Kingdom Essentials: The Power

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Whose You Are

03 Who You Are (Righteousness)

04 Where You Sit

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · New Name

07 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Most people answer “who are you” with their occupation, their relationships, or their achievements — the things that change, end, or can be taken away. Ask a room of men to introduce themselves and most will lead with a job title. Ask a room of women and most will lead with marriage and family. Neither answer is false, exactly. Neither one was ever meant to carry the weight you’ve put on it, either — a layoff, a divorce, an empty nest, and the identity built on top of it goes with it.

Who actually gets to decide who you are — and have you spent years letting the wrong voices answer a question that was never theirs to answer?

From the moment you were born, parents, siblings, classmates, teachers, and eventually strangers online have been assigning you labels based on how you look, what you do, and what you have. Because you were born into a fallen world full of fallen people, more of those labels than you’d like were negative — and what started as a careless joke or an offhand comment from someone who mattered to you can sit underneath your self-image for decades, resurfacing as reactions you don’t fully understand. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is one of the most confidently false and damaging things adults tell children.

Session 10 gave you power you didn’t have before. This session answers a question that power has to rest on: power exercised by someone who doesn’t

know who they are gets misused, borrowed, or buried out of fear. Identity comes first for a reason.

CONSIDER THIS

Describe yourself in one sentence — without naming your job, your relationships, or anything you've achieved. Write down what's left.

Come back to it on Day 6.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You tell me I am fearfully and wonderfully made, knit together by Your own hands. Show me where my thinking about myself doesn't match Yours, and give me the courage to believe You over every other voice I've listened to. In Jesus' name, amen.

Whose You Are

Before you can answer who you are, you have to answer a prior question: whose you are. Ownership comes before identity, in Scripture and in ordinary life — you don't get to define what belongs to someone else, and neither do you get to define yourself from scratch, as though you belonged to no one.

ILLUSTRATION

During Holy Week, religious leaders tried to trap Jesus with a tax question designed to have no safe answer: pay Rome's tax and alienate the Jewish crowds, or refuse it and become an enemy of the empire. Jesus asked for a coin.

"Whose image is this, and whose inscription?" he asked. "Caesar's," they said. "Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things

that are God's" (Matthew 22:20–21).

The coin belonged to Caesar because it bore his image. Jesus' logic doesn't stop at currency. Genesis 1:27 already told you whose image you bear. If Caesar's image on a coin settled whose the coin was, the image of God stamped on you settles a far larger question — one the religious leaders in that courtyard never thought to ask about themselves.

> *"I made the earth, I created the people who live on it. It was me — my hands stretched out the sky, I give orders to all the heavenly lights."*
>
> **ISAIAH 45:12**

> *The Lord **owns the earth and all it contains**, the world and all who live in it.*
>
> **PSALM 24:1**

God is not only your Creator. He is your rightful owner, in the plainest sense of that word — which means the authority to define you was never available for you, your culture, or anyone else to seize.

> *For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 6:20**

> *He answered, "Have you not read that **he who created them** from the beginning made them male and female?"*
>
> **MATTHEW 19:4**

Jesus doesn't cite Genesis as ancient history. He cites it as present-tense authority — the Creator who made you still holds the right to say what you are, a right no later editor of your story gets to overrule.

You were bought — not merely made. Scripture uses the language of a purchase, deliberately, twice (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). In a culture that prizes autonomy above nearly everything else, that claim sounds like a loss of freedom. Scripture presents it as the opposite: you belong to a good God rather than to yourself, to your circumstances, or to whatever bought you before He did. Jude, a half-brother of Jesus, opens his letter with exactly this posture: “a slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (Jude 1:1) — he had every reason to lead with the family relationship to Jesus. He leads with ownership instead.

But ownership was never the end of the transaction. What God does with what He owns is adopt it.

> *He did this by predestining us to **adoption** (υἱοθεσίαν) as his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will.*
>
> **EPHESIANS 1:5**

WORD STUDY

υἱοθεσία *huiothesia* G5206

> **“adoption”** · Ephesians 1:5

Range. Built from *huios* (“son”) and *tithēmi* (“to place”) — literally, the placing of someone as a son. In the Greco-Roman world this named a specific, formal legal act: an adopted son received full legal standing, the family name, and complete inheritance rights, with no distinction in law from a biological heir.

The sense here. Paul isn’t reaching for a vague metaphor about God’s love. He’s naming a legal category his first readers, living under Roman law, would have recognized immediately: God did not merely rescue you. He filed the paperwork, so to speak, that makes you a full legal heir with no asterisk attached.

Why it carries the argument. A rescued slave and an adopted son can live in the same house and eat at the same table, but only one of them inherits. Scripture doesn't call you a rescued slave who gets to stay. It calls you a *huios* by legal adoption — the ownership from 1 Corinthians 6:20 and the sonship here are not in tension. God bought what He then adopted.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. υἱοθεσία; cf. BDAG.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If ownership settles whose you are, whose voice have you actually been letting answer that question instead — your culture's, your family's, your own harshest self-talk?

Who You Are (Righteousness)

Whose you are settles the first question. Who you are is the second, and it isn't settled by what you've done, what's been done to you, or what anyone has ever called you. It's settled by what God says — and God has said quite a lot.

> *He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because* ***flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven****."*

> **MATTHEW 16:15–17**

Notice the pattern before you notice the content: Peter's identity of Jesus came from the Father, not from Peter's own reasoning. A few verses later, Jesus does the same thing in reverse, renaming Simon "Peter" in front of the other disciples. That's not incidental to the story. It's the oldest pattern in Scripture — God renaming Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel — and it continues past the resurrection: "you will be called by a new name that the Lord himself will give you" (Isaiah 62:2), a promise this session's Experience returns to directly.

"God insists on being the one who shapes our identity over all other influences. We are not who we think we are, nor are we who other people say we are. We are who God says we are. And His opinion is the one that matters."

Chris Tiegreen · devotional author · *The One Year Hearing His Voice Devotional*, 2014

Every human being carries hidden scars from labels someone else spoke over them, and lies believed as a result — about God, about themselves, or about other people. Those scars don't heal simply because you now know the right doctrine.

> *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also **lay aside every weight**, and the sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*
>
> **HEBREWS 12:1**

If a specific lie about who you are surfaced while you read that verse, this session isn't the place to fully untangle it — Sessions 18 and 19 exist for exactly that work, and are worth pursuing deliberately rather than white-knuckling past what this session has only named. Naming it here isn't meant to leave you diagnosing yourself for the rest of this session; it's meant to explain why a truth this settled in Scripture can still feel unsettled in you. That gap isn't evidence the doctrine is

wrong. It's usually evidence of exactly the kind of old, unexamined weight Hebrews 12:1 is describing. What this session can tell you now is where the true weight sits: not in the lie, and not in the labeling itself, but in whether you keep carrying a name someone else gave you after God has already given you a truer one.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Dr. Kevin Mannoia, in his study of leadership formation *The Integrity Factor* (1996), pictures a person as an iceberg. Everything visible above the waterline — what you do, achieve, and produce — is a small fraction of the whole. Beneath the surface, unseen and far larger, sits your actual identity: who you are before you do anything at all.
>
> Mannoia's point cuts against how most people actually operate. We watch what someone does and back into a guess about who they are. Scripture reverses the order: who you are, settled by God, is what your doing is supposed to flow *from* — not the other way around.

Nowhere does that reversal matter more than in the specific word Scripture uses for your righteousness.

> *Abraham believed God, and it was **credited** (ἐλογίσθη) to him as righteousness.*
>
> **ROMANS 4:3**

WORD STUDY

λογίζομαι *logizomai* G3049

> **"credited"** · Romans 4:3

Range. An accounting term — to reckon, calculate, or enter into a ledger. Built from *logos* ("word" or "account"). Outside of theology it's the ordinary word for balancing a set of books.

The sense here. Paul chooses deliberate financial language: Abraham's faith was *entered into his account* as

righteousness. Paul makes the accounting sense explicit two verses later — “to the one who does not work… his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:5) — the same word used for wages someone actually earned (v. 4), applied instead to someone who didn’t.

Why it carries the argument. *Logizomai* is not a word for a feeling or a status you slowly grow into. It’s a completed accounting entry — which means the righteousness Scripture credits you isn’t a project you’re still working on. It was already entered, the moment you believed, the same way it was for Abraham centuries before the cross existed to make it possible.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. λογίζομαι.

This is the same reality Session 2 named without fully unpacking it: “God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). You are not merely forgiven, the way a debt might be cancelled. You are credited — entered into the ledger as righteous, on the strength of Christ’s record rather than your own. And a credited entry produces a new kind of person, not just a clean slate: “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away — look, what is new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn’t focusing on my identity just self-focused Christianity?

A fair concern, especially from believers steeped in a different, older emphasis: doesn’t a whole session on who you are risk feeding exactly the self-focus Jesus told you to crucify? “If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23) isn’t a minor verse, and “I have been crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20) sounds like the opposite instruction from everything above.

It’s a real tension, and it dissolves once you notice what’s actually being denied in those verses. Self-denial in Scripture targets the self that insists on running its

own show — the self Paul says was crucified. It was never aimed at the self God says is His adopted child, credited righteous, seated with Christ. Denying that self isn't humility. It's disagreeing with God's own ledger entry. Paul, the same author who wrote "I have been crucified with Christ," is also the one who wrote Romans 4 and Ephesians 1 — he didn't experience these as contradictory truths, and neither should you.

Here is where I land, and why. I don't think Scripture asks you to deny who you are. I think it asks you to deny who you *used to be* — the version of you that ran on self-rule instead of on the identity God has already credited to you. Getting those two denials confused is exactly how sincere believers end up either proud of an identity they built themselves, or ashamed of an identity God already gave them. Neither is the target.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Which is harder for you to believe right now — that you're more sinful than you'd like to admit, or that you're more loved and more identified with Christ than you feel? What does that answer suggest about which lie you're more vulnerable to?

Where You Sit

Whose you are is settled by ownership. Who you are is settled by God's ledger. This session's most unexpected claim is positional: you are not only owned and credited — you are already seated, in a place of authority you didn't earn by anything you've done.

> *This power he exercised in Christ when he raised him from the dead and* ***seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above every rule and authority and power and dominion****.*

EPHESIANS 1:20–21

> *And he raised us up with him and **seated us with him (συνεκάθισεν)** in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.*
>
> **EPHESIANS 2:6**

WORD STUDY

συγκαθίζω *sugkathizō* G4776

Range. “To make to sit down together with” — a rare compound of *syn* (“with”) and *kathizō* (“to sit”). It occurs only twice in the New Testament: here, and in Luke 22:55, describing people literally sitting together around a fire.

The sense here. Paul takes an ordinary word for sharing a seat and applies it to the most extraordinary claim in the letter: believers are seated *with* the risen, ascended Christ — not near Him, beneath Him, or waiting on Him, but *with* Him, in the same position Ephesians 1:20–21 just described as “far above every rule and authority.”

Why it carries the argument. Every verb around this one is past tense — raised, seated — describing something already true, not something you’re working toward. Session 13 will unpack what you *do* with this position. This session only asks you to believe it’s yours before you try to use it.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. συγκαθίζω.

ILLUSTRATION

When Pharaoh elevated Joseph from prisoner to second-in-command of Egypt, he didn’t merely give Joseph a title. “Pharaoh took his signet ring from

his own hand and put it on Joseph's. He clothed him with fine linen clothes and put a gold chain around his neck," and had him ride in Egypt's second chariot while crowds knelt before him (Genesis 41:42–43). Joseph hadn't earned that position through years of Egyptian service — he'd been in prison the day before. The position was Pharaoh's to give, and Pharaoh gave all of it at once: the ring (authority to act in his name), the robe (a new identity visible to everyone), and the chariot (a public seat next to power he didn't campaign for).

That is the shape of Ephesians 2:6, told in advance. You did not earn the seat. It was given, completely, the moment you believed — and like Joseph, what you do with it starts the next morning, not years from now. Notice, too, what Joseph didn't do: he didn't spend his first day as second-in-command trying to prove to the palace staff that he deserved the ring. He simply started using it, because Pharaoh's word settled the matter before anyone else's opinion had a chance to.

Paul doesn't leave this as abstract theology. He turns it into daily instruction.

> *Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, **keep seeking the things above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God… for you have died and your **life is hidden with Christ in God**.*
>
> **COLOSSIANS 3:1, 3**

Paul's command is to *seek* what is already true, not to *achieve* it — the same pattern as the declarations you'll practice at the end of this session. Notice, too, what the position is explicitly not for: Ephesians 1:20–21 names "every rule and authority and power and dominion" as already under Christ's feet, which means it's already under yours by extension. Session 13 will show you what to actually do with that — how a seated position translates into standing, resisting, and praying with authority rather than staying purely positional. This session only asks you to settle the fact of the seat before you're handed instructions for using it. Skipping ahead to authority without first believing you're seated produces exactly the kind of striving Colossians 3 is trying to prevent — reaching for a position you already have.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn’t this just positive thinking wearing a Bible verse?

This session is about to ask you to speak identity declarations out loud — and a fair-minded skeptic, familiar with secular manifestation culture’s promise that speaking things “into existence” bends reality to your will, should ask what actually separates this from that.

The difference isn’t the practice of speaking things aloud. It’s the source of what’s being spoken. Secular manifestation asks you to declare something *true because you said it* — your words allegedly generate the reality. Scripture asks you to declare something *already true because God said it* — your words align you with a reality that existed before you spoke, and would remain true if you never said a word about it. Romans 10:9–10 doesn’t teach that confession creates salvation; it teaches that confession is how a true, prior reality gets voiced. Every declaration this session offers works the same way: not a spell, an echo.

Here is where I land, and why. I hold that the difference is real and matters — but I also think Christians should be honest that some declaration-heavy teaching genuinely has blurred this line, promising outcomes Scripture never attached to speaking, or treating the words themselves as a kind of spiritual currency that obligates God to respond. That’s a subtly different claim than the one this session is making, and it’s worth being able to tell them apart in your own practice, not just in theory. Test every declaration the way Session 5 asked you to test every gift: does Scripture actually say this is true of you, independent of your speaking it? If yes, speak it boldly — you’re not conjuring anything, only agreeing out loud with what was already settled. If you can’t find where God said it first, you’re not declaring — you’re manifesting, and the label matters more than it might seem.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Look at the declarations you’re about to practice. Which ones can you point to a specific verse for, and which ones would you have to search harder to find? What does that tell you about which ones to trust most this week?

The Turn

You now have what this session set out to give you: you belong to God, not to yourself, your culture, or your history. You are credited righteous, not on probation toward it. And you are already seated with Christ, not working your way toward a position that was given to you complete.

None of that was meant to stay theoretical. If your identity is already settled by ownership, ledger, and seat, then the gap between how you currently see yourself and what's actually true isn't a gap you close by trying harder. It's a gap you close by believing something you didn't invent.

That's a genuinely different project than most self-improvement advice offers. Self-improvement asks you to become something you currently aren't. Scripture asks you to start believing, and then living from, something God says you already are — ownership and ledger and seat, all settled before this session began. The rest of this course, starting with the very next one, assumes you've made that switch.

The Experience · New Name

Below is a short list, drawn from dozens of similar statements Scripture makes about who you are in Christ. Read through it slowly, once, before you do anything else.

> You are adopted (Ephesians 1:5) · You are credited righteous (Romans 4:5) · You are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) · You are seated with Christ (Ephesians 2:6) · You are hidden with Christ (Colossians 3:3) · You are chosen (1 Peter 2:4) · You are His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10) · You are an heir (Romans 8:17) · You are more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37) · You are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14)

Now go back through slowly a second time, out loud, changing every "You are" to "I am." Pause after each one. Notice which ones land easily and which ones catch in your throat — the ones that catch are usually the ones worth sitting with longest, not skipping past. If a specific old label surfaces while you speak — something someone else called you, years ago, that still fits better than any of these ten statements do — say the true one out loud anyway, even while the old one is still ringing. That's not denial. It's the same move Peter made when he answered "You are the Christ" out loud, in a room full of competing answers he could have given instead.

Close by asking God directly: is there a specific word — not necessarily a literal new name, but a specific identity truth — He wants you to carry out of this session, the way He gave Abram, Jacob, and Simon Peter theirs? Write down whatever comes, even if you're not fully sure. You're not manufacturing an answer; you're listening for one, the same discipline Session 9 already taught you. If you're doing this with your spouse, a close friend, or a small group, consider asking them the same question about you — sometimes the truest word God has for you arrives through someone who already sees it and has just never said it out loud.

BIG IDEAS

1. Ownership precedes identity — you belong to God, which means the authority to define you was never available for you, your culture, or anyone else to seize.
2. God doesn't rescue you and leave you a servant in the house; *huiothesia* — legal adoption — makes you a full heir, with no asterisk attached.
3. Your righteousness is *logizomai* — a completed ledger entry, credited the moment you believed, not a project you're still earning.
4. You are already seated with Christ, far above every rival authority — a position given complete, like Joseph's, not accumulated over years.
5. True declaration echoes what God already said is true. It doesn't manufacture truth by being spoken — testing which is which protects the practice from becoming something else.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don't get to write your own name. You only get to discover the one God already wrote.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You are the One who owns me, adopted me, credited me righteous, and seated me with Christ before I did anything to deserve any of it. Silence every other voice that has tried to tell me who I am. Teach me to live from what's already true rather than toward what I hope might become true. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Chris Tiegreen, *The One Year Hearing His Voice Devotional* (2014).
Already quoted in this session's theme — a short daily read on hearing God's opinion of you over every competing voice.

SUBSTANTIAL

Kevin Mannoia, *The Integrity Factor* (1996).
The iceberg illustration used in this session comes from here — the fuller book develops identity-before-performance into a complete framework for leadership formation.

ACADEMIC

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (1994).
Already cited in Session 10 — his treatment of adoption and justification as distinct acts of God's grace gives the huiothesia and logizomai word studies above their fuller doctrinal setting.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Psalm 139:13–14 slowly, aloud. *Do you actually believe you were exquisitely made, or does that feel true only for other people?*

DAY 2

Read Ephesians 1:5 and 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 together. *You are both bought and adopted. Which of those two truths do you find easier to accept, and why might that be?*

DAY 3

Read Romans 4:3–5 slowly. *"Credited" is an accounting term for a completed entry. Where have you been treating your righteousness as a project still in progress instead?*

DAY 4

Read Ephesians 2:6 and Genesis 41:41–43 together. *Joseph's position was given complete, the day after prison. What would change this week if you actually believed your position with Christ was that settled?*

DAY 5

Reread the declarations list from The Experience. *Pick the one that caught in your throat the most. Look up its verse. What does Scripture actually say, and where does your own belief fall short of it?*

DAY 6

Find what you wrote for *Consider This* at the start of this session. *Rewrite your answer now. What changed?*

Tell one other person this week which declaration was hardest for you to say — and ask them to remind you of it the next time

they see you struggling to believe it.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Identity

“Who actually gets to decide who you are — and have you spent years letting the wrong voices answer a question that was never theirs to answer?”

THE OWNER

The coin bore Caesar’s image, and Jesus said that settled whose it was. Genesis already told you whose image you bear. God made you, bought you at a price, and then adopted you as a full legal heir — ownership was never up for grabs by your culture, your family, or you.

Psalm 24:1
1 Corinthians 6:20
Ephesians 1:5

THE NAME

Peter’s identity of Jesus came from the Father, not his own reasoning — and Jesus renamed him in the same breath, continuing the oldest pattern in Scripture. Old labels leave real weight worth laying aside, but the truer name was always going to be the one God gave, not the one you inherited.

Matthew 16:15–17
Isaiah 62:2
Hebrews 12:1

THE LEDGER

Abraham’s faith was entered into God’s ledger as righteousness — a completed accounting entry, not a project still being earned. Christ became sin so you could become His righteousness, credited the moment you believed, which is why Scripture calls you a new creation rather than a debt merely canceled.

Romans 4:3
2 Corinthians 5:17
2 Corinthians 5:21

THE SEAT

Ephesians places Christ at the Father’s right hand, far above every rival power — and then says God seated you there with Him, before you had done anything to earn it. Like Joseph, robed and ringed the day after prison, you don’t grow into the seat. You simply start using what was already given.

Ephesians 2:6
Colossians 3:1
Genesis 41:42–43

THE TURN

You belong to God, not to yourself or your history. You are credited righteous, not on probation toward it. You are already seated with Christ, not working toward a position given complete — and the gap between how you see yourself and what’s true closes only by belief, not effort.

2 Corinthians 5:17

SO NOW

ADOPTED, NOT MERELY RESCUED

A rescued slave and an adopted son can share the same house, but only one of them inherits. God did not just save you — He filed the paperwork that makes you a full legal heir.

Ephesians 1:5

GIVEN, NOT EARNED

Joseph wore the ring and rode the second chariot the day after prison, not after years of proving himself. Your seat with Christ was given the same way.

Ephesians 2:6

ECHOED, NOT MANUFACTURED

True declaration does not create a reality by being spoken. It agrees out loud with something God already said was true before you ever said a word.

Romans 10:9–10

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don’t get to write your own name. You only get to discover the one God already wrote.

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Next · Session 12, Kingdom Warrior. You know whose you are, who you are, and where you sit. Session 12 is about building, guarding, and standing firm in that identity when everything around you argues against it.

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12

KINGDOM WARRIOR

Kingdom Essentials: The Power

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Building Your Identity

03 Guarding Your Identity

04 Standing in Your Identity

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · Affirmations

07 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Session 11 told you who you are: owned, credited righteous, and seated with Christ, all of it settled before you did anything to earn it. Here is what that session didn't tell you, because it wasn't yet time: the moment that identity becomes real to you is also the moment something will try to take it back.

If your identity is a settled fact, why does Scripture keep talking about it as something you have to build, guard, and stand in?

Look at the first recorded attack on a human identity, and notice what it targets. In the wilderness, the devil doesn't open with "turn these stones into food" as a hunger test. He opens with a challenge to sonship: **"If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread"** (Luke 4:3). Jesus had just heard His Father's own voice at the Jordan say the opposite — "this is my beloved Son" — and within days someone was already asking Him to prove it. If the enemy's first move against the sinless Son of God was a question mark over His identity, his first move against you was never going to be more original.

Most of us learned this the hard way, long before we had language for it. *You're stupid. You're a loser. You're too much. You're not enough.* Words like that don't have to be true to leave a mark, and they rarely arrive with a warning label attached. This session doesn't ask you to relitigate every label anyone has ever hung on you — Sessions 18 and 19 are built for that specific work. It asks a narrower, more urgent question: now that you know who God says you are, what

do you actually do the next time someone — or something — tries to say otherwise?

Notice something else about the wilderness scene: Jesus didn't argue with the devil about whether He *felt* like the Son of God after forty days without food. He answered from what was written, not from what He was feeling in the moment — "It is written, man does not live by bread alone" (Luke 4:4). That's the pattern this whole session is built around. Building, guarding, and standing are not about managing your feelings until they cooperate. They're about what you do with your identity while your feelings are doing whatever they're doing.

CONSIDER THIS

Name one label that has followed you longer than you'd like to admit — a word someone spoke over you, or one you've spoken over yourself. You don't have to write down where it came from. Just name it.

Come back to it at the end of this session.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You have already told me who I am. Teach me what to do with that truth the moment it's tested — how to build on it, guard it, and stand in it when everything around me argues otherwise. In Jesus' name, amen.

Building Your Identity

Your identity in Christ isn't a finished file God closed the moment you believed. Scripture keeps describing it as something still under construction — and the material it's built from is you.

> *"So as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but chosen and priceless in God's sight,* ***you yourselves, as living stones, are built up*** **(οἰκοδομεῖσθε)** ***as a spiritual house*** *to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*
>
> **1 PETER 2:4-5**

WORD STUDY

οἰκοδομέω *oikodomeō* G3618

"built up" · 1 Peter 2:5

Range. The ordinary verb for erecting a building — a mason's word before it was ever a theologian's. It ranges from the literal act of construction to the figurative sense of strengthening a person or community, and it appears 41 times across the New Testament.

The sense here. Peter picks the plainest possible construction word and applies it to people. You are not decoration on a finished building. You are stone being set — present tense, ongoing, not a one-time event that happened when you believed.

Why it carries the argument. A building under construction looks unfinished because it is. If you feel unfinished, contested, still being shaped, that isn't evidence the promise of Session 11 was wrong — it's exactly what *oikodomeō* predicts. Paul uses the same word family for the church at large: "you have been built [ἐποικοδομηθέντες] on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone… you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:20, 22). What's true of the church corporately

is true of you as one of its living stones — under construction, on a foundation that was fixed before you arrived.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. οἰκοδομέω; cf. BDAG.

ILLUSTRATION

Solomon's temple was one of the largest building projects in the ancient Near East, and it was built without the sound of a single hammer blow at the construction site: "As the temple was being built, only stones shaped at the quarry were used; the sound of hammers, pickaxes, or any other iron tool was not heard at the temple while it was being built" (1 Kings 6:7). Every stone was cut, measured, and fitted somewhere else, then carried to Jerusalem already finished for its exact place in the wall.

Notice where the shaping happened. Not at the temple site, under the pressure of the project — at the quarry, away from public view, before the stone was ever needed. The chisel work you can't see right now, the places God is currently shaping you where nobody is watching, are not a delay in your construction. They're the construction. A stone arriving at the site unshaped isn't ready for a holy house; it's a liability to the wall next to it.

Notice, too, what Peter says the finished house is *for*: "a holy priesthood… to offer spiritual sacrifices" (1 Peter 2:5), not a monument to admire. Paul names the same offering from the other direction: "present your bodies as a sacrifice — alive, holy, and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1). A stone being built into a house and a sacrifice being offered on an altar are two different images pointing at one act: you don't get to be a spectator at your own construction. You're material and priest at once, being shaped and doing the offering.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where in your life right now do you feel most like an unshaped stone — still under the chisel, not yet fitted to its place? What would change if you believed that discomfort was construction rather than neglect?

Building is not the same project as defending. You can't guard a wall that was never laid, and the next section is about exactly the moment the enemy tries to convince you otherwise — that the wall isn't there at all.

Guarding Your Identity

If you are being built, Scripture also tells you plainly where the attack lands: not the finished wall, but the source that feeds it.

> *"**Guard (נָצַר) your heart with all vigilance**, for from it are the sources of life."*
>
> **PROVERBS 4:23**

WORD STUDY

נָצַר *natsar* H5341

> **"guard"** · Proverbs 4:23

Range. A common Hebrew verb for guarding — used of a watchman posted at a city wall, a vineyard kept from thieves, and a covenant kept rather than broken. It carries force in both directions: to protect something valuable, or to conceal something dangerous.

The sense here. The proverb doesn't tell you to guard your reputation, your circumstances, or even your behavior first. It tells you to guard your *leb* — heart, in the Hebrew sense of the whole inner person: mind, will, and emotion together, not just feeling. Everything else in your life, the proverb says, flows out from what you let take root there.

Why it carries the argument. A watchman doesn't guard a wall that's already standing out of habit — he stays alert precisely because the wall is what the enemy is trying to get past. If your identity in Christ is the living stone being built (1 Peter 2:5), your heart is the gate the enemy will actually try. Solomon doesn't say guard your heart *because* attacks are unlikely. He says guard it *with all vigilance* because they aren't.

Source. BDB, s.v. נָצַר; cf. Thayer's for the LXX equivalent.

The label attacks named in this session's opening question aren't random. John names their real source in the plainest terms Scripture uses anywhere: **"You people are from your father the devil… he was a murderer from the beginning, and does not uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies"** (John 8:44). *You're stupid. You're a loser. You're not enough.* Somebody may have said it to you — a parent having a bad day, a classmate testing cruelty for the first time, your own voice at 2 a.m. — but Scripture is clear about where a lie's authorship ultimately traces, whatever mouth carried it to you.

Naming that source isn't the same as assigning blame for who spoke it, and it's worth being careful about the difference. Most people who have handed you a damaging label weren't consciously serving the enemy's agenda — they were tired, or hurt themselves, or simply repeating something that had been said to them first. Guarding your heart doesn't require you to sort out anyone's motives. It only requires you to stop treating the label itself as trustworthy just because it arrived early, or often, or from someone whose opinion mattered to you.

ILLUSTRATION

For a full season on *Saturday Night Live* (1984–85), Billy Crystal played "Fernando," a parody talk-show host with one signature line delivered to every guest, no matter how they actually looked: *"You look mahvelous."* It was funny precisely because it was so obviously untethered from the facts — Fernando said it to everyone, in every condition, because the line was never actually about evidence.

Here's the uncomfortable parallel: most of us extend more suspicion to *"you look marvelous"* than we do to *"you're not enough."* The negative label gets

> treated as self-evidently true and the positive one as flattery to be doubted — and neither reaction has anything to do with which one is actually backed by evidence. Guarding your heart means applying the same scrutiny to both directions: test the label, whichever way it points, against what God has actually said rather than how instinctively you believe it.

John's own prayer for a friend names what a well-guarded heart actually produces: **"Dear friend, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul"** (3 John 1:2). John ties outward wellbeing to inward health almost in passing, as if the connection barely needed arguing. What this session's later *What About* will unpack is that plenty of modern research agrees with him — spoken words, believed and repeated, measurably shape the brain that produces them. That correlation isn't the point *3 John* is making, but it isn't nothing either: guarding your heart was never only a spiritual metaphor.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Which lands more easily in you without a fight — a criticism or a compliment? What does that tell you about which direction your guard has actually been facing?

Standing in Your Identity

Building and guarding both lead to the same moment: a test, where the identity you've been building either holds or doesn't. Scripture has a specific word for what you do in that moment, and it isn't attack. It's *stand*.

> *"Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God so that you may be able to **stand** against the schemes of the*

> *devil… For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to **stand your ground** on the evil day, and having done everything, **to stand**."*
>
> **EPHESIANS 6:10–11, 13**

Paul names the goal of the entire armor passage three times in four verses, and it's the same word every time: stand. Not advance, not attack, not win — stand. The armor he lists is built for holding a position that already belongs to you, not for conquering new ground. That matches exactly what Session 11 already established: you are seated with Christ, "far above every rule and authority" (Ephesians 1:20–21), which means the fight was never about gaining territory. It's about holding the ground you were already given.

> *"…by taking up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take **the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**."*
>
> **EPHESIANS 6:16–17**

Six pieces of armor, and only one of them is offensive — the sword, "the word of God." Everything else Paul names is for standing: a belt to hold the rest together, a breastplate to protect what's vital, boots for footing, a shield to absorb what's thrown, a helmet to guard the mind. The imbalance is the point. This isn't a session about going looking for a fight. It's a session about being dressed and ready for the one that finds you — which, per this session's opening, it already has.

> *"Do not be conformed to this present world, but be **transformed (ἀνακαινώσει) by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God."*
>
> **ROMANS 12:2**

WORD STUDY

ἀνακαίνωσις *anakainōsis* G342

> **“renewing”** · Romans 12:2

Range. A renewal, a renovation, a complete change for the better — built from *ana* (“again”) and *kainos* (“new,” in the sense of new in kind, not merely new in time). The word occurs only twice in the New Testament: here, and in Titus 3:5, describing “the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.”

The sense here. Paul doesn’t ask for a mood adjustment or a fresh coat of positive thinking. *Anakainōsis* names an ongoing renovation of the mind itself — the same instrument you use to evaluate every label this session has named, being remade so it stops taking the enemy’s word for what’s true.

Why it carries the argument. Standing firm in Ephesians 6 and renewing your mind in Romans 12 are the same fight described two ways. You don’t stand against a lie with willpower alone; you stand by letting your mind actually be remade by what’s true, so the lie has less and less surface to land on. That’s also why this isn’t a one-time event — *anakainōsis* is a present, continuing renewal, not a switch flipped once.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. ἀνακαίνωσις.

ILLUSTRATION

The Jewish historian Josephus, writing about the army that would eventually destroy Jerusalem in AD 70, explained why Roman legions so rarely broke formation under pressure. It wasn’t superior numbers or superior weapons. It was drilling repeated until it became instinct: **“Their exercises are unbloody battles, and their battles bloody exercises”** (*The Jewish War*, Book 3, c. AD 75). A Roman soldier standing his ground in an actual battle wasn’t relying on courage he’d summoned for the occasion. He was relying on a body and mind trained, thousands of times over in practice, to do under pressure exactly what it had already done ten thousand times when nothing was at stake.

> Renewing your mind works the same way. Nobody stands firm against a lie for the first time in the moment the lie is spoken. You stand because the truth was already drilled in, long before the test — which is exactly what this session's Experience below asks you to start doing.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn't "renewing your mind" just neuroscience with Bible verses attached?

It's a fair question, and it only gets sharper once you notice how often Christian teaching on this topic reaches for brain science to make its case. Dr. Caroline Leaf, a neuroscientist, has argued in books like *Switch on Your Brain* (2015) that spoken words — positive or negative — measurably reshape neural pathways, citing research on neuroplasticity. If that's true, a skeptic might reasonably ask whether "renewing your mind" is just a spiritual-sounding label for a psychological technique that would work exactly the same for someone who didn't believe a word of Romans 12.

I don't think the answer is to retreat from the neuroscience, and I don't think it's to lean on it as proof, either. *Here is where I land, and why.* Neuroplasticity research is genuinely interesting, and I hold it loosely — it's an active, evolving field, and popular treatments of it (including some Christian ones) have at times overstated what the studies actually show. But even in its strongest, most careful form, neuroscience can only ever describe *that* renewed thinking changes the brain, never explain *why* what you believe about your own worth and identity should be tethered to truth rather than whatever felt true first. That's a theological claim, not a scientific one, and Romans 12:2 made it two thousand years before an MRI existed. The mechanism God may be using to renew a mind and the reason He's doing it are two different questions — this session cares about the second one, and it would still be true if the first one turned out to be more complicated than any book claims.

Where this stays unresolved: Scripture doesn't specify the mechanism by which believing something true changes you — only that it does. I'd rather leave that gap honestly open than borrow more certainty from neuroscience than the field itself currently offers. If a future study overturned every current claim about neuroplasticity tomorrow, Romans 12:2 would still be true the day after, because it was never actually resting on the study to begin with.

I AM NOT SAYING

— that speaking truth over yourself is a formula that guarantees a felt result, or that if a declaration doesn't "work" your faith was somehow deficient, or that renewing your mind is a substitute for the deeper healing work Sessions 18–19 exist for.

I AM SAYING

— that Scripture commands renewal of the mind as an ongoing discipline regardless of how it feels on a given day, the same way Ephesians 6:13 commands standing "having done everything" — not having felt everything, or having seen every result you hoped for.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Think of a lie you've believed about yourself for years. What would it actually cost you, this week, to renew your mind against it even once — whether or not it feels different by Friday?

The Turn

You've now seen the same identity from three angles Session 11 didn't have room for. It's being built — you're a living stone, still under construction, on a foundation already fixed. It has to be guarded — your heart is the gate the enemy actually tries, not your résumé or your reputation. And it has to be stood in — held under pressure, the way Ephesians 6 describes, not won like new territory.

None of that was meant to stay theoretical past this page. A soldier who understands the armor perfectly but never puts it on isn't armed. He's informed. The difference between the two is a daily habit, not a single decision — which is exactly what the McPherson prayer this session's closing draws from was written to put into words, and exactly what this session's Experience below asks you to start practicing today.

Here's what makes this different from raw willpower, which is where a lot of well-meaning teaching on "standing firm" quietly lands: you aren't gritting your teeth against a lie using strength you generate yourself. You're putting on armor somebody else made, wielding a sword somebody else forged, standing on ground somebody else already secured. Ephesians 6:10 says it before it says anything else: "be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of *his* power." Building, guarding, and standing are all things you do — but none of them are things you do alone.

That distinction matters practically, not just theologically. A soldier trying to generate his own courage from nothing burns out; a soldier trusting armor that was actually built for the fight doesn't have to. The difference between the two isn't how hard either one tries. It's what — or who — they're actually standing on.

The Experience · Affirmations

Session 11 asked you to listen for a name God wanted to give you. This practice is different — it's not receptive, it's active, and it's meant to become a daily habit rather than a one-time exercise.

Call it **Catch it. Cut it. Crown it.**

Catch it. Once today, notice a specific negative label running in your head — about your worth, your capability, your future, or your standing with God. Name it in a single sentence, the way you'd name it out loud to a friend: *"I'm telling myself I'm a disappointment."*

Cut it. Find the specific place Scripture says otherwise — not a vague feeling of hope, an actual verse. Paul calls this "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17) for a reason: a sword is a cutting weapon, not a comforting one. It doesn't soften the lie. It severs it.

Crown it. Speak the true statement out loud, in first person, the way the closing declaration below models. Not because the words themselves carry power apart from what they name — Romans 10:17 says "faith comes from what is heard… through the preached word of Christ," not through the sound of your own voice

— but because saying a true thing aloud, deliberately, in your own voice, is how *anakainōsis* actually gets practiced rather than merely believed.

Do this once a day for the six days ahead. It will feel small the first time. That's what a drill is supposed to feel like — see this session's illustration on Roman training. You are not trying to win the war today. You're trying to be the kind of soldier who's already won it a thousand times in practice before the day it matters.

Here's what it looks like worked through once, so you know what you're aiming for. *Catch it:* "I'm telling myself nobody would miss me if I disappeared." *Cut it:* "So do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31) — Jesus said it to people worried about being forgotten by God, which is a different and deeper worry than being forgotten by people. *Crown it, spoken aloud:* "I am valuable to God whether or not anyone around me notices it today." Three sentences, maybe ninety seconds, done once. That's the whole drill — small enough to actually repeat, which is the entire point.

BIG IDEAS

1. The enemy's first move against Jesus was a challenge to identity, not a temptation to sin — expect the same order of attack against yours.
2. Your identity in Christ is *oikodomeō* — under construction, like a living stone, shaped mostly in the places nobody's watching before it's ever placed in the wall.
3. Guard your heart (*natsar*) like a watchman, not because attack is unlikely but because it's the one gate the enemy actually tries.
4. Every command in Ephesians 6's armor passage points at the same verb: stand. The fight was never about gaining ground you didn't already have.
5. *Anakainōsis* — renewing your mind — is a drill practiced daily, not a single decision made once and left behind.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don’t earn the ground you’re standing on. You only guard it, and stand.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Adapted from Pastor Miles McPherson’s “Kingdom Warrior” sermon series.

Father, as Your child, I demonstrate the Kingdom of God with my life. My identity in Christ — not my performance, not what’s been said over me — dictates the authority and power You’ve given me. Renew my mind so I take every thought captive, dwelling only on what’s actually true. Holy Spirit, thank You for equipping me to stand. Today, and every day after it, I declare these things in Jesus’ name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Miles McPherson, “Kingdom Warrior” sermon series, San Diego Rock Church.
The prayer this session’s closing draws from, delivered in full — worth hearing preached, not only read.

SUBSTANTIAL

Caroline Leaf, *Switch on Your Brain* (2015).

The neuroscience claim this session's What About engages directly — read it alongside the caution above about what the research does and doesn't establish.

ACADEMIC

D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (1996).
The standard short treatment of the root fallacy and illegitimate totality transfer this session's word studies were written to avoid — useful background for testing any word study, not only these three.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read 1 Peter 2:4–5 slowly, aloud. *What part of your life currently feels most "under construction" rather than finished? Does that unsettle you, or does today's session change how you read it?*

DAY 2

Read Proverbs 4:23 and John 8:44 together. *Name one label you've been treating as self-evidently true. Whose voice does it actually trace back to?*

DAY 3

Read Ephesians 6:10–14 slowly. *Practice Catch it, Cut it, Crown it once today. Write down all three lines.*

DAY 4

Read Romans 12:2 and Josephus's line about drills and battles (this session's Standing illustration). *What's one "drill" — a*

small, repeated practice — that would actually renew your mind if you did it daily rather than once?

DAY 5

Practice Catch it, Cut it, Crown it again, without rereading yesterday's answer first. *Was it easier or harder the second time? What does that tell you about how renewal actually works?*

DAY 6

Return to what you wrote for *Consider This* at the start of this session. *Write the true statement that answers that label directly — your own Crown it, aimed at the exact thing you named on Day 1.*

Tell one other person this week which label you're working against, and ask them to remind you of the true statement the next time they hear you repeating the old one.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Warrior

“If your identity is a settled fact, why does Scripture keep talking about it as something you have to build, guard, and stand in?”

THE STONE

Your identity in Christ isn’t a finished file closed the moment you believed. Peter calls you a living stone still under construction, shaped mostly in the places nobody’s watching — the way Solomon’s temple stones were cut and fitted at the quarry, then carried in already finished for their place in the wall.

1 Peter 2:4–5
1 Kings 6:7

THE GATE

Solomon’s proverb doesn’t tell you to guard your reputation first — it tells you to guard your heart, because everything else flows from what takes root there. Every damaging label you’ve believed traces back to the same source John names: a liar with no truth in him, whatever mouth carried it to you.

Proverbs 4:23
John 8:44

THE STAND

Paul names the goal of the entire armor passage three times in four verses, and it’s always the same word: stand. Not advance, not attack, not win — the fight was never about gaining new ground. It’s about holding, dressed and ready, the ground you were already given.

Ephesians 6:10–11, 13
Ephesians 6:16–17

THE RENEWAL

Standing under pressure isn’t willpower generated in the moment — it’s a mind actually being remade by what’s true, so a lie has less and less surface to land on. That renewal is a drill practiced daily, not a switch flipped once, and it would still be true even if science never fully explained the mechanism.

Romans 12:2

THE TURN

None of this was meant to stay theoretical. A soldier who understands the armor perfectly but never puts it on isn’t armed, only informed. Building, guarding, and standing are all things you do — but Paul says it before anything else: strengthened not in yourself, but in the Lord.

Ephesians 6:10

SO NOW

CONTESTED, NOT CASUAL

The enemy’s first move against Jesus was a challenge to identity, not a temptation to sin. Expect the same order of attack against yours — and don’t mistake it for a footnote.

Luke 4:3

GUARDED, NOT GIVEN

Your heart isn’t protected by default. It’s the one gate the enemy actually tries, which is exactly why Scripture tells you to guard it with all vigilance.

Proverbs 4:23

PRACTICED, NOT PERFECTED

Renewing your mind is a drill, repeated daily, not a decision made once and left behind. Nobody stands firm the first time a lie is spoken — they stand because the truth was already drilled in.

Romans 12:2

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don’t earn the ground you’re standing on. You only guard it, and stand.

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Next · Session 13, Kingdom Authority. You know who you are, and now how to build, guard, and stand in it. Session 13 is about what that settled, defended identity actually authorizes you to do.

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13

KINGDOM AUTHORITY

Kingdom Essentials: The Power

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Characteristics of Authority

03 Carriers of Authority

04 Using Your Authority

05 Spiritual Power

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Warfare Prayer

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

You've been given authority over all the power of the enemy. Jesus said so in the plainest language the gospels record: **"Look, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and on the full force of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you"** (Luke 10:19). Not some of the enemy's schemes. Not the manageable ones. All of them.

So why does the enemy keep winning?

Here's a picture worth sitting with. Imagine standing in the middle of the busiest intersection you know, in street clothes, holding up your hand to stop traffic. Best case, a few cars slow down. Now imagine the same intersection, the same hand, except this time you're wearing a badge. Every car stops. Nothing about you physically changed — your strength, your speed, your voice are identical in both scenes. What changed is whether the authority you already carried was actually being exercised, visibly, rather than left sitting in your back pocket.

That gap — between the authority you've been given and the authority you actually use — is what this session is about. Session 12 built, guarded, and helped you stand in an identity that's already settled. This session asks a harder question: now that you know who you are, do you know what you're authorized to do about it?

CONSIDER THIS

Think of the last time you felt genuinely powerless against something — a besetting sin, a fear, a circumstance that wouldn't move no matter how much you prayed about it. Did you pray *about* it, or did you ever speak *to* it? This session will ask you to notice the difference.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I confess there are times I feel defenseless against the enemy's schemes, even though You've told me otherwise. Holy Spirit, teach me to know, understand, and actually use the authority Jesus died to give me — not folded away, but exercised. In Jesus' name, amen.

Characteristics of Authority

Authority is not a feeling you work up. It's a legal right, granted by someone with the standing to grant it — which means the first thing to understand about your authority is what kind of thing it actually is.

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no ***authority*** **(ἐξουσία)** *except by God's appointment, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God."*

ROMANS 13:1

WORD STUDY

ἐξουσία *exousia* G1849

> **“authority”** · Romans 13:1 · Matthew 28:18 · Luke 10:19

Range. Thayer’s defines it as “power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases” and, distinctly, “the power of authority… and of right” — the legal standing to act, as opposed to the raw capacity to act. Paul uses the same word for civil government here that Jesus uses for Himself in Matthew 28:18 and for what He hands to His disciples in Luke 10:19.

The sense here. Paul isn’t describing power in the sense of strength or force. He’s describing a chain of legitimate standing — every governing authority, all the way up, ultimately answers to God’s own authorization. It’s a legal word before it’s ever a strength word.

Why it carries the argument. This is the single most important distinction in this session: *exousia* is about the right to act, not the ability to act. A badge and a fist are different things. Your authority in Christ is the badge — legally granted, not physically summoned — and this session’s fourth section will show you what backs it up.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. ἐξουσία; cf. BDAG.

ILLUSTRATION

A Roman centurion once approached Jesus about a paralyzed servant, and what he said next stopped Jesus in His tracks. Rather than asking Jesus to make a house call, he said: “just say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to this one, ‘Go’ and he goes, and to another ‘Come’ and he comes” (Matthew 8:8–9). Jesus’ response is recorded plainly: “he was amazed” (Matthew 8:10) — the

> only two times in the Gospels Jesus is described as amazed, and both times it's at faith, not unbelief.
>
> The centurion understood something most modern readers miss on first read: he wasn't claiming Jesus had *power* the way a stronger man has more muscle. He was recognizing that Jesus operated inside a chain of legitimate authority the same way he did — and that a word spoken from that position doesn't need physical proximity to take effect. He'd spent his career giving and obeying orders. He recognized the structure the moment he saw it, even in someone from outside his own chain of command.

Authority also has to be conferred before it can be recognized — nobody carries it by default, not even a child in their own household. My own son learned this the hard way as a boy. His grandmother once corrected him for something he wasn't supposed to be doing, and he shot back, "You're not the boss of me!" He wasn't entirely wrong about the facts — she wasn't his parent — but he was badly wrong about how authority actually gets transferred. His mother and I had already conferred it to her for the weekend, whether he'd been informed of the transaction or not. Grandma settled the matter in short order. The point isn't the discipline. It's that authority can be delegated by someone who holds it to someone who didn't previously have it, and the person on the receiving end of that delegation doesn't get a vote on whether it's real.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where in your life have you been waiting to *feel* authorized before you act — when Scripture says the authorization already happened? What would change if you treated it as a legal fact rather than a felt sense?

Carriers of Authority

Authority over the earth hasn't always belonged to the same party. Scripture traces a specific, traceable handoff — and knowing the chain of custody is what tells you how you actually got yours.

> *"Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may **rule** (רָדָה) **over** the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth…' God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground.'"*
>
> **GENESIS 1:26, 28**

WORD STUDY

רָדָה *radah* H7287

"rule" · Genesis 1:26

Range. BDB's core sense is "to have dominion, to rule" — a word whose range runs from legitimate governance to harsh subjugation, with the surrounding context deciding which. It's paired in verse 28 with *kabash* (H3533), "to subdue," which BDB glosses similarly — bring under control, cultivate, order.

The sense here. Context settles the sense immediately: this rule is handed out *in the same breath* as the blessing, to creatures God just called "very good," over a world with no thorns, no death, and no enemy yet in view. This is stewardship-rule — cultivating and ordering what God made — not conquest-rule over something hostile.

Why it carries the argument. Authority didn't originate with you, or with the enemy. It originated as a gift, from God to humanity, at creation, before anything had gone wrong. Whatever ground was lost after Genesis 3 was lost *from* something that was rightfully yours to begin with — which is exactly why it could be, and was, given back.

Source. BDB, s.v. רָדָה.

ILLUSTRATION

Scripture records exactly how quickly a legitimate right can be traded away for something that feels urgent in the moment. Esau, exhausted from the field, told his brother Jacob, “I’m about to die! What use is the birthright to me?” — and sold it, permanently, for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:32–34). The text’s own verdict is blunt: “Esau despised his birthright” (v. 34). He didn’t lose it to a stronger enemy. He handed it away, freely, because a smaller and more immediate appetite outbid a right he couldn’t feel the value of yet.

Adam and Eve’s fall in Genesis 3 isn’t identical to Esau’s story, but the shape rhymes: authority that was rightfully held changed hands not because the enemy overpowered its owners, but because its owners treated an immediate appetite as worth more than a standing right. When the devil later tells Jesus “all this will be yours” over the kingdoms of the world, claiming they’d been “relinquished to me” (Luke 4:6), Jesus doesn’t dispute the claim. He simply refuses the same trade Adam, Eve, and Esau all made.

Between the loss and the restoration stands the one person who never lost His footing. As a sinless man, Jesus carried the Father’s authority without interruption: “just as the Father has life in himself, thus he has granted the Son to have life in himself, and he has granted the Son authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:26–27). Ordinary people noticed the difference immediately, even before they had theology to explain it: “The people there were amazed by his teaching, because he taught them like one who had authority… A new teaching with authority! He even commands the unclean spirits and they obey him” (Mark 1:22, 27). Jesus never had to argue for His authority the way a usurper would. Demons recognized it faster than the religious experts of His own day did.

What Genesis 3 lost, Matthew 28 gives back — deliberately, and to everyone who follows Jesus, not to a select few.

> *“Then Jesus came up and said to them, ‘All* ***authority*** **(ἐξουσία)** *in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations… And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*
>
> **MATTHEW 28:18–20**

Notice the sequence, because it's the whole argument of this section compressed into two sentences. Jesus doesn't say "go" first and "I have authority" second, as though the disciples were being sent out to go earn or discover something. He states the authority as an already-settled fact, and *then* sends them to act from it. Adam and Eve started with authority and lost it through unbelief. You start with authority restored, and the only question left is whether you'll exercise it or leave it exactly where Adam and Eve's mistake left the enemy still operating — unchallenged, by default, simply because nobody exercised the greater claim.

Using Your Authority

A legal right nobody exercises might as well not exist. That's true of an unused badge, an unclaimed inheritance, and — Scripture is direct about this — an unused spiritual authority.

> *"Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **has blessed us** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ."*
>
> **EPHESIANS 1:3**

Notice the tense. Not "will bless" — *has* blessed, past tense, already complete. Paul isn't describing a future hope. He's describing a possession you already hold and may not have learned to access — the same "already, not yet" tension Session 1 introduced, applied here to authority specifically rather than to the Kingdom broadly.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> On January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation declared enslaved people in Confederate territory legally free. In Galveston, Texas, that legal reality didn't reach the people it freed for another two and a half years — until Union General Gordon Granger arrived on June 19, 1865, and issued General Order No. 3, announcing what had already been true in law for over two years. The freedom wasn't granted that day. It was *finally exercised* that day — recognized, acted on, and lived out, after a long and unconscionable delay in the news reaching the people whose whole lives it changed.
>
> That gap between a right that legally exists and a right that's actually lived out is precisely the gap Paul is naming in Ephesians 1:3. You are not waiting for God to grant you something. The grant already happened. The only open

question — the one this session keeps returning to — is whether you've heard the news yet, and whether you're living like it's true.

> *"He told them, 'It was because of your little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, **you will say** to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; nothing will be impossible for you.'"*
>
> **MATTHEW 17:20**

Jesus doesn't tell the disciples to ask harder or believe more intensely in private. He tells them to *say* something to the mountain. That's the same pattern Luke 10:20 describes when the disciples come back from ministry: **"the spirits submit (ὑποτάσσεται) to you"** — not because the disciples out-willed them, but because they spoke from a position the spirits were obligated to recognize.

WORD STUDY

ὑποτάσσω *hypotassō* G5293

> **"submit"** · Luke 10:20

Range. A military and legal term — literally "to arrange under." Thayer's gives both an active sense (to subordinate something) and a middle/passive sense (to be subordinated, to submit). The word appears throughout the New Testament for how citizens relate to government (Romans 13:1, the very verse this session opened with), how believers relate to one another, and — here — how spirits relate to disciples.

The sense here. Luke uses the middle/passive form: the spirits *are being subjected*, not subjecting themselves out of respect or fear. It's the language of rank, not the language of persuasion.

Why it carries the argument. You don't win an argument with a demon. You don't out-negotiate one. *Hypotassō* describes something closer to a soldier obeying a superior officer's order whether or not he personally agrees with it — which means your authority doesn't depend on the enemy being convinced, impressed, or willing. It depends entirely on rank, and your rank was settled at Matthew 28:18, not by anything you do in the moment.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. ὑποτάσσω.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What's one specific "mountain" in your life right now that you've only ever prayed *about*? What would it look like this week to actually speak to it instead?

Spiritual Power

Luke 10:19 uses two different Greek words in the same sentence, and the difference between them is the whole point of this session's final claim: **"I have given you authority (ἐξουσίαν) to tread on snakes and scorpions and on the full force (δύναμιν) of the enemy."**

WORD STUDY

δύναμις *dynamis* G1411

> **“force”** · Luke 10:19
>
> **Range.** Thayer’s defines it as “inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature” — raw capacity, strength, might. It’s the same word Acts 1:8 uses for what the Holy Spirit gives believers: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” English gets the word “dynamite” from this root, which is a helpful, if slightly overused, way to remember that *dynamis* names force, not standing.
>
> **The sense here.** In Luke 10:19, *dynamis* belongs to the enemy — “the full force *of the enemy*” — while *exousia*, authority, belongs to the disciple. Read carefully, the verse isn’t promising you more raw force than the enemy has. It’s telling you that a smaller legal authority overrides a larger raw force, the same way a police officer’s badge overrides a criminal’s greater physical strength. The officer doesn’t win by being stronger. He wins because the criminal’s strength doesn’t carry any standing.
>
> **Why it carries the argument.** This is why the fight was never a fair contest of strength, and was never supposed to be. If Scripture promised you more raw *dynamis* than the enemy, you’d have grounds to worry every time he seemed stronger than you felt. It doesn’t. It promises you a rank — *exousia* — that the enemy’s *dynamis* has to yield to, the same way Session 12’s Standing section already described: you were never asked to out-muscle him. You were asked to stand on a rank that was never his to contest.
>
> **Source.** Thayer’s, s.v. δύναμις.

You already met this word once before, without the label. Session 10 spent an entire session on the baptism with the Holy Spirit as the source of *dynamis* for mission — “you will receive power,” Acts 1:8 promised, tied there to witness rather than warfare. This session isn’t repeating that ground. It’s naming the other half of the same picture: Session 10 gave you the *power*. This session gives you

the *authority* that tells that power where — and against what — it's authorized to act.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Picture the badge from this session's opening again, but notice what's actually backing it. A police officer's authority to stop traffic doesn't come from his own physical strength — plenty of drivers he stops could out-wrestle him. It comes from the department, the law, and the government standing behind the badge. His *dynamis*, if he has any use for the word at all, is beside the point. What stops the car is the *exousia* the badge represents, and everyone on the road already knows to recognize it.
>
> That's the relationship this session has been building toward. You were never issued more raw force than the enemy. You were issued a badge he's obligated to recognize — and the moment you actually pin it on and step into the intersection, this session's opening question stops being a mystery.

WHAT ABOUT …

If I have authority over all the power of the enemy, why do bad things still happen to me?

This is the question Luke 10:19 provokes the instant anyone reads it honestly: *"nothing shall hurt you."* Believers get sick. Believers lose jobs, marriages, children. Faithful missionaries have been martyred holding exactly the authority this session describes. If the promise is real, why doesn't it read that way in most believers' actual lives — including, at times, mine?

I don't think the answer is that the promise was never really meant literally, and I don't think it's that every unhealed believer secretly lacked enough faith or authority — that reasoning turns a promise into a weapon against the very people it should comfort, and Scripture never asks you to interrogate a suffering believer's faith as the explanation for their suffering. *Here is where I land, and why.* Luke 10:19's "nothing shall hurt you" was spoken to disciples returning from a specific, bounded ministry assignment — casting out demons and healing the sick in a particular mission — not as a blanket promise that authority eliminates every category of hardship a believer will ever face in a fallen world. Paul, who wrote more about spiritual authority than almost anyone else in the New Testament, was also shipwrecked three times, imprisoned repeatedly, and eventually executed. He never treated either fact as canceling the other.

What I do think Luke 10:19 promises, without qualification, is exactly what this session has already unpacked: real, legal, standing authority over the enemy's *dynamis* — his schemes, his lies, his direct spiritual attacks — that you are authorized to resist and does yield when you do. It was never a promise that every hardship in a fallen world traces back to a spiritual attack you failed to resist correctly. Some hardship is just what it looks like to live in bodies and a world still waiting for full restoration (Romans 8:22–23), and Session 12's Building illustration already told you that — a house still under construction.

Where this stays unresolved: Scripture doesn't hand you a reliable test for sorting every hardship into "spiritual attack you're authorized to resist" versus "the ordinary grief of a not-yet-restored world." I'd rather say plainly that both categories are real and that telling them apart isn't always obvious, than pretend there's a formula that removes the mystery.

> **I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> — that speaking authority over a situation guarantees the outcome you're hoping for, or that an unhealed illness or an unresolved struggle means you didn't do the resisting correctly, or that authority is a technique that works automatically once you know the right words.
>
> **I AM SAYING**
>
> — that the authority Luke 10:19 describes is real and legal regardless of whether a given prayer produces the visible result you wanted this week, the same way Matthew 17:20's mustard seed is a statement about what faith is capable of, not a guarantee of the timing or form any specific answer takes.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Think of a hardship you're currently facing. Which category does it honestly seem to fall into — something to resist with authority, or something to carry with

endurance while this world finishes being restored? Is it possible it's genuinely both?

The Turn

You now carry the full argument this session set out to make. Your authority is a legal right, not a felt sense — granted by God, traceable across Scripture from Adam to Jesus to you. It has to be used to mean anything; an unexercised right changes nothing, the way Galveston's enslaved population didn't experience freedom on the day it became legally true, but on the day someone finally acted on it. And it isn't a raw-strength contest — your *exousia* outranks the enemy's *dynamis*, which is why Session 12 could already tell you the fight was about standing, not winning ground you didn't have.

None of that changes anything if it stays theoretical. A badge that never leaves your pocket protects no one. The next section asks you to actually pin it on.

The Experience · Warfare Prayer

This isn't a prayer you recite once and file away. It's a pattern you practice until speaking to a problem feels as natural as praying about one.

Start with whatever you named at the top of this session — the thing you've only ever prayed *about*. Then pray something shaped like this, in your own words, out loud:

> *In the name of Jesus, I speak directly to [name the specific attack — anxiety, sickness, fear, the specific lie]. You have no authority here. I am seated with Christ, far above every rule and power (Ephesians 1:20–21), and I carry the authority Jesus gave His disciples in Luke 10:19. I command you to stop, in Jesus' name. I receive God's peace in place of what you tried to take. Amen.*

Notice what this prayer is not doing. It isn't asking God to intervene on your behalf, as though the authority belonged to Him alone and you were only a bystander. It's exercising the authority Matthew 28:18–20 already gave you, out

loud, specifically, the way Jesus modeled when He spoke directly to a fever (Luke 4:39) and to a storm (Mark 4:39) rather than only praying about either one.

Say it aloud, not silently — the enemy isn't omniscient, and speech is how Scripture consistently pictures authority being exercised, from Genesis 1's "let there be light" onward. It won't feel natural the first time. Practice it anyway, once a day, for the six days ahead — badge in hand, stepping into the intersection on purpose.

BIG IDEAS

1. Authority (*exousia*) is a legal right, not a felt sense — granted by someone with the standing to grant it, recognized rather than generated.
2. Authority has a traceable chain of custody: God to humanity at creation, relinquished at the Fall, held by the enemy, carried by Jesus, given back to every believer at the cross.
3. An unexercised right changes nothing. Freedom that's legally true but never acted on isn't yet freedom that's lived.
4. Your authority (*exousia*) outranks the enemy's raw force (*dynamis*) — this was never a contest of strength, only ever a question of rank.
5. Not every hardship is a spiritual attack to resist; some is the ordinary ache of a world still being restored. Telling the two apart takes discernment, not a formula.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Pin on your badge of authority, and use it.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

> *Holy Spirit, teach me to pray with the authority Jesus died to give me. Help me fully believe it, not just recite it. Give me discernment to know when I'm facing an attack to resist and when I'm facing a hardship to carry with endurance. Strengthen my faith to speak even when it feels unnatural, until exercising this authority becomes as ordinary as breathing. In Jesus' name, amen.*

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Charles Kraft, *I Give You Authority* (1997).
A widely read, practical treatment of exactly this session's theme — written for believers who've never been taught the difference between praying about a problem and speaking to it.

SUBSTANTIAL

Neil T. Anderson, *Victory Over the Darkness* (1990, rev. 2000).
Develops identity-and-authority together at length — a natural next read after Sessions 11–13, from a different angle than this corpus takes.

ACADEMIC

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (1994), ch. on the exercise of spiritual authority.
Already cited in Sessions 10–11 — his treatment of the believer's authority in Christ gives the exousia/dynamis distinction above its fuller doctrinal setting.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Meditate on Genesis 1:26, 28. *Why do you think God's very first instruction to humanity was about authority rather than, say, worship or obedience? What does that ordering suggest?*

DAY 2

Read Romans 13:1 slowly. *If all legitimate authority — including the authority you carry — ultimately traces back to God, what changes about how you think of your own?*

DAY 3

Read Matthew 8:8–10, the centurion's words, aloud. *What's one area where you've been asking Jesus to "come under your roof" and personally intervene, when what the moment actually called for was a spoken word from your own authority?*

DAY 4

Practice this session's warfare prayer once, using today's actual circumstances. *What did you notice — resistance, relief, nothing at all? Write it down honestly.*

DAY 5

Review the Carriers of Authority sequence — God to humanity, lost at the Fall, held by Jesus, given back to you. *What does this sequence reveal about God's plan of redemption that a single verse couldn't show you alone?*

DAY 6

Reread Luke 10:19 one more time, slowly. *If this is as literally true as this session has argued, what's one specific thing that changes about how you'll live this coming week?*

Tell one other person this week which “mountain” you spoke to instead of only praying about — and ask them to check in with you on it.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I’d genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Authority

“So why does the enemy keep winning?”

THE BADGE

Authority isn’t a feeling you work up — it’s a legal right, granted by someone with the standing to grant it. A Roman centurion recognized this faster than the disciples ever did: Jesus didn’t need to be physically present, because a word spoken from real authority doesn’t need proximity to take effect.

Romans 13:1
Matthew 8:8–9

THE HANDOFF

Authority over the earth was a gift from God to humanity at creation, traded away at the Fall the way Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of stew, and carried without interruption by Jesus alone. What was lost from something rightfully yours to begin with is exactly why it could be, and was, given back.

Genesis 1:26, 28
Matthew 28:18–20

THE VOICE

Jesus doesn’t tell His disciples to believe harder in private — He tells them to say something to the mountain. A legal right nobody exercises might as well not exist, the same way freedom that was already legally true in Galveston still waited two and a half years for someone to actually announce it.

Matthew 17:20
Luke 10:20

THE RANK

Luke 10:19 uses two different words in one sentence: the enemy has dynamis, raw force; you have exousia, legal authority. A smaller rank overrides a larger force, the same way a badge overrides a criminal’s greater strength — this was never a fair fight, and it was never supposed to be.

Luke 10:19

THE TURN

Your authority is a legal right, not a felt sense, traceable across Scripture from Adam to Jesus to you — and it has to be used to mean anything. A badge that never leaves your pocket protects no one, because the fight was never about winning ground you didn’t already have.

Matthew 28:18

SO NOW

GRANTED, NOT GENERATED

Authority is a legal right recognized, not a feeling you work up. It was granted by someone with the standing to grant it, long before you ever needed to use it.

Romans 13:1

EXERCISED, NOT JUST HELD

A blessing already given but never accessed changes nothing you can feel. Freedom that’s legally true still has to be lived, not just possessed.

Ephesians 1:3

RANK, NOT RAW FORCE

Your exousia outranks the enemy’s dynamis. This was never a contest of strength — only ever a question of whose claim actually carries weight.

Luke 10:19

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Pin on your badge of authority, and use it.

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Next · Session 14, Kingdom Prayer. You now carry authority and know how to exercise it. Session 14 turns to the practice that keeps that authority tethered to relationship rather than becoming a technique — prayer, as Jesus modeled it.

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14

KINGDOM PRAYER

Kingdom Essentials: The Power

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 The Purpose of Prayer

03 The Position of Prayer

04 The Privilege of Prayer

05 Praying Like Jesus

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Small Group Prayer

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Most believers pray, and most believers are quietly dissatisfied with the results. Not because prayer doesn't work, but because most of us were never actually taught how it works — so it becomes a habit like saying grace before a meal: something a Christian does, said the same way every time, expected to accomplish nothing in particular. James names the alternative bluntly: **"The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness"** (James 5:16). If some prayer is effective, the uncomfortable flip side is also true — some prayer isn't.

If prayer has power, why does so much of it feel like it doesn't?

You now carry legal authority (Session 13) inside an identity that's settled (Sessions 11–12). This session asks what that authority is actually *for*. Authority you never exercise changes nothing — and the primary place Scripture shows you exercising it isn't a warfare prayer against a specific attack. It's the ordinary, daily conversation this whole session is about.

CONSIDER THIS

Rate your own prayer life, honestly, from 1 to 10. Don't rate it lower than it deserves — name specifically what's working, not just what isn't. You'll come back to this at the end of the session.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I want to pray powerfully, effectively, faithfully — not out of duty, but out of relationship. Teach me today. Remove any limits I've placed on what I think prayer can do, and help me listen without taking offense at what I hear. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Purpose of Prayer

Prayer isn't primarily a request system. Scripture gives it at least three purposes that have nothing to do with whether you get what you asked for — and the first one might be the most surprising claim in this entire session.

> *"Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored, may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'"*
>
> **MATTHEW 6:9–10**

God did not need help running the universe. He is, as Session 10 already established, entirely self-sufficient. And yet, from the very first command He gave humanity — the authority Session 13 traced all the way back to Genesis 1 — He chose to accomplish His purposes *through* people who agree with Him, rather than around them. Prayer is where that agreement gets voiced. You're not informing God of anything He doesn't know. You're co-laboring with Him, by choice, on purpose, because He designed it that way.

ILLUSTRATION

The prophet Elijah prayed a specific, bold prayer — that it would not rain — and Scripture records the plain result: “it did not rain on the land for three years and six months” (James 5:17). Then he prayed again, and “the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:18). James doesn’t introduce Elijah as a spiritual superhero. He introduces him as a corrective to that exact assumption: Elijah “was a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17) — ordinary, not extraordinary — whose prayer accomplished something extraordinary anyway.

The point isn’t that anyone who prays hard enough can stop rain for three years. It’s that God chose, deliberately, to run part of the weather of an entire region through the prayer of one ordinary, willing man rather than doing it unilaterally. That’s what co-laboring actually looks like when Scripture shows it happening rather than just describing it.

Prayer also does something Scripture ties directly to your own joy, not just to outcomes:

> *“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive it, so that **your joy may be complete**.”*
>
> **JOHN 16:24**

That joy isn’t a byproduct of prayer working like a vending machine. It’s tied to a relationship Jesus describes in agricultural terms just one chapter earlier.

> *“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who **remains (μένων) in me** – and I in him – bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing… If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you.”*
>
> **JOHN 15:5, 7**

WORD STUDY

μένω *menō* G3306

“remains” · John 15:5

Range. The ordinary verb for staying somewhere — to remain, to abide, to stay put rather than leave. It’s used for a guest remaining overnight, a fact remaining true, and — here — a branch remaining attached to a vine.

The sense here. Jesus isn’t describing a technique for getting prayers answered. He’s describing a location: prayers get answered out of a *remaining*, an ongoing attachment, not an isolated request fired off from a distance. The grammar makes the connection explicit — remain in Him, let His words remain in you, *then* ask.

Why it carries the argument. Effective prayer, in this passage, isn’t primarily about wording your request correctly. It’s about where the request comes from. A branch doesn’t produce fruit by trying harder to be fruitful; it produces fruit by staying attached to the vine. Prayer works the same way — not a formula, a location.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. μένω.

Prayer has a second purpose, easy to miss because it sounds almost circular: answered prayer glorifies God specifically *because* it demonstrates He’s real, present, and active — not distant or theoretical.

> *“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that **the Father may be glorified in the Son**.”*
>
> **JOHN 14:13**

Notice what’s tied together in that single sentence: your asking, His doing, and His glory — not as three separate transactions, but as one movement. And that movement has a destination beyond the answer itself: “You make known to me

the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). God isn't glorified by answered prayer the way a vending machine is validated by dispensing a snack. He's glorified because the answer proves the relationship was real all along — which circles back to why joy, not just outcome, is built into the purpose of prayer from the start.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Which of these three purposes — co-laboring, glorifying God, or building intimacy — is most missing from how you currently think about prayer? What would change if you prayed toward that purpose specifically this week?

The Position of Prayer

Where you pray *from* matters as much as what you pray *for* — and Scripture is specific about where that actually is, which is not where most people assume.

> *"Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We have such a high priest, one who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven… Christ is the one who died (and more than that, he was raised), who is at the right hand of God, and who also is interceding for us."*
>
> **HEBREWS 8:1, ROMANS 8:34**

Jesus isn't standing at a distance, waiting for prayers to arrive. He's seated, and He's already interceding — the same positional truth Session 11 unpacked at length: "he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). Session 11 called this a positional fact you believe before you use it. This session is where you actually use it.

Notice, too, what Romans 8:34 pairs together in a single sentence: Christ died, was raised, is at God's right hand, *and* is interceding for you — four facts stacked as though they're one continuous thought, because they are. Intercession isn't something Jesus does separately from His finished work on the cross. It's the ongoing shape that finished work takes in the present tense. Every prayer you pray joins a conversation that was already happening before you opened your mouth.

> *"Because of Christ in me, I'm never far from the glory of Heaven, and all of Heaven is attracted to the Jesus in me, and never again will anything be impossible for me."*
>
> Graham Cooke · pastor, teacher, and author

Here's the practical shift that follows from taking your position seriously: you don't pray *toward* heaven, straining to reach a God who's far away. You pray *from* heaven, toward earth — because that's spiritually, positionally, where you already are. You lean over and speak to the Son, who is already leaning over, speaking to the Father on your behalf. It's intimate before it's ever effective, because it was never actually a long-distance call to begin with.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Does your own prayer life feel more like shouting toward a distant God, or like a conversation from a position you already hold? What's one prayer this week you could pray differently if you actually believed Hebrews 8:1 and Ephesians 2:6 together?

The Privilege of Prayer

Access like this was not always available. What changed, and when, is worth remembering every time prayer starts to feel routine.

> *"Just then the temple curtain was torn in two, from top to bottom."*
>
> **MATTHEW 27:51**

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> The curtain torn at Jesus' death wasn't a decorative drape. It was a massive, load-bearing barrier — by some ancient accounts as thick as a hand's width — that separated the temple's Most Holy Place from everyone except the high priest, who was permitted through it exactly once a year, and only with sacrificial blood. Matthew records that it tore "from top to bottom" (27:51) — not bottom to top, the way a human hand tearing fabric would work, but from the top, where only God could have started the tear.
>
> That single detail is the entire theology of this session's title in miniature. The privilege of prayer didn't open because humanity finally earned better access. It opened because God tore down, from His side, the one barrier that had ever kept it closed.

That access is meant to be used constantly, not rationed for emergencies:

> *"Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*
>
> **1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–18**

> *"Therefore let us **confidently** (παρρησίᾳ) **approach** the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help."*
>
> **HEBREWS 4:16**

WORD STUDY

παρρησία *parrēsia* G3954

> **“confidently”** · Hebrews 4:16

Range. Originally a political word — the right of a citizen to speak freely and publicly in the assembly, without fear of reprisal. Thayer’s extends it to “free and fearless confidence, boldness, assurance,” including boldness before God.

The sense here. The writer of Hebrews isn’t describing a nervous, apologetic approach to prayer — the way you might tiptoe into asking a favor of someone you’re not sure wants to be bothered. *Parrēsia* is the confidence of someone who has every legal right to be in the room and knows it.

Why it carries the argument. This is Session 13’s *exousia* applied specifically to prayer. You don’t have to build a case for why God should listen to you, or apologize your way into His presence. The curtain is already torn. The confidence Hebrews 4:16 describes isn’t arrogance — it’s simply taking the access seriously that God Himself already opened.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. παρρησία; cf. BDAG.

Most of us default to a quieter version of prayer than any of this actually describes. Notice the pattern in each of these pairs — what prayer tends to feel like by default, against what Scripture actually describes:

Prayer isn’t one-way communication; it’s a two-way conversation. It isn’t imposing on God; it’s enjoying Him. It isn’t an urgent distress call; it’s patient alignment. It isn’t striving for a resolution; it’s resting in a solution already found. It isn’t searching for a formula; it’s knowing One who already has the answer.

That’s not a minor tone adjustment. It’s the difference between prayer as an obligation and prayer as the relationship it was always meant to be — and every item on the right side of that list depends entirely on the access this section just described. None of it is available to someone still standing outside a torn curtain, unsure whether they’re welcome.

Praying Like Jesus

If prayer is a relationship rather than a formula, the fastest way to learn it is the way every disciple learned anything from a rabbi in Jesus’ day: not by memorizing a script, but by watching closely and doing what they saw.

> *“So Jesus answered them, ‘I tell you the solemn truth, the Son can do nothing on his own initiative, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.’”*
>
> **JOHN 5:19**

ILLUSTRATION

The apostle Paul once described his own theological education in a single sentence: “brought up in this city, educated with strictness under Gamaliel according to the law of our ancestors” (Acts 22:3) — Gamaliel being one of the most respected rabbis of the first century. In that world, being a disciple meant something more physical than sitting in a lecture hall. Students followed their rabbi through daily life, watching how he prayed, how he treated people, how he handled Scripture — and were expected to reproduce it, not merely repeat his sayings from memory.

That’s the background behind Jesus’ repeated phrase “in my name.” It was never a magic formula, the way “abracadabra” pretends to be a formula. It meant praying the way Jesus prayed — aligned with what the Father was already doing, the same posture John 5:19 describes Jesus Himself holding toward the Father.

> *“The sovereign Lord has given me the capacity to be his spokesman, so that I know how to help the weary. He wakes*

> *me up every morning; he makes me alert so I can listen attentively* ***as disciples do (לִמּוּדִים).*** *”*
>
> ISAIAH 50:4

WORD STUDY

לִמּוּד *limmud* H3928

> **“as disciples do”** · Isaiah 50:4

Range. An adjective describing someone taught, instructed, or habituated to a practice through repetition. BDB notes it can describe devoted attention to good instruction or, in other contexts, entrenchment in a bad habit — the word itself is neutral about direction; only the object of the training determines whether the pattern formed is healthy.

The sense here. Isaiah’s servant doesn’t wake up already knowing what to say. He wakes up, morning by morning, and listens *like a disciple listens* — attentively, expectantly, as a practiced habit rather than an occasional inspiration.

Why it carries the argument. This is the missing ingredient in most frustrated prayer lives: not more effort in the asking, but a practiced habit of listening first. Jesus only said what He heard the Father say (Isaiah 50:4–5 read messianically) and only did what He saw the Father do (John 5:19). Both verses put listening before speaking — the exact reverse order of how most believers, including this session’s own opening confession, actually approach prayer.

Source. BDB, s.v. לִמּוּד.

Put those two postures together — remaining in the vine (this session's first word study) and listening like a disciple before speaking (this one) — and a simple, repeatable pattern emerges for how to actually pray, rather than just what to say:

1. **Settle it.** God's will for your situation is already perfect (2 Samuel 22:31; Jeremiah 29:11) — you're not negotiating Him toward a good outcome He's reluctant to give.
2. **Align with it.** Test what you want against what He's already said, and wait to hear His answer rather than rushing past it (Romans 12:2; Psalm 37:7).
3. **Pray it back.** Give thanks and ask specifically, in Jesus' name, for what you now know rather than what you merely hope (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18; John 14:13–14; 1 John 5:14–15).

Romans 8:26–27 covers exactly the moment this pattern breaks down — when you genuinely don't know what God's will is in a given situation:

> *"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how we should pray, but* ***the Spirit himself intercedes for us*** *with inexpressible groanings. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes on behalf of the saints according to God's will."*
>
> **ROMANS 8:26–27**

Even step one — settling that God's will is already good — isn't something you have to generate entirely on your own strength. When you genuinely can't see the shape of a situation clearly enough to settle anything, the Spirit doesn't wait for you to figure it out before He starts interceding. He's already praying the part you can't yet put into words, and He's praying it correctly, "according to God's will," even when your own prayer is just a groan with no sentence attached to it. That's worth remembering the next time silence in prayer feels like failure rather than what it usually is: the Spirit doing the praying you can't yet do yourself.

WHAT ABOUT …

Doesn't "ask without doubting" mean my unanswered prayers are my own fault?

James 1:6 and Mark 11:23–24 both tie answered prayer to undoubting faith, and a careful reader will notice the trap that creates immediately: if unwavering faith produces results, doesn't an unanswered prayer prove the faith wasn't unwavering enough? That reasoning turns every disappointment into evidence of a personal spiritual failure — exactly the kind of self-audit Session 12 already warned against building.

I don't think that's what these passages are actually claiming, and here's why. James's warning about doubt is about a specific posture — asking God for wisdom while simultaneously hedging your bets between trusting Him and trusting yourself, "like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed around by the wind" (James 1:6) — not a psychological state you have to achieve with zero measurable uncertainty before God will act. Even the man in Mark 9:24 who prayed "I believe; help my unbelief" received the healing he asked for, doubt and all, in the very same breath. If undivided certainty were the actual precondition, that story wouldn't be in the Bible.

Here is where I land, and why. I hold that these passages describe a general posture — trusting God's character rather than hedging toward other sources of security — not a performance test you either pass or fail on any individual prayer. Applying them as a strict formula turns Scripture written to encourage faith into a tool for interrogating grief, and I don't think that's a use these passages were ever meant to serve.

Where this stays unresolved: Scripture doesn't give a clean explanation for every specific unanswered prayer prayed in genuine faith by a genuine believer. Naming that honestly matters more than manufacturing an answer Scripture itself doesn't supply. Job's friends tried to supply one anyway — confident that his suffering had to trace back to some specific failure — and God's verdict on their reasoning, at the end of that book, was not gentle (Job 42:7). That's worth remembering before offering, or accepting, a tidy explanation for someone else's unanswered prayer.

> **I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> **I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> — that an unanswered prayer means you didn't believe hard enough, or that unconfessed sin is the default explanation for every prayer that doesn't get the answer you wanted, or that "praying it back" from this session's model is a formula that removes the mystery of God's timing.

I AM SAYING

— that James 5:16's link between a righteous life and effective prayer is real and worth taking seriously as an invitation to examine your own walk with God, while refusing to turn it into a diagnostic tool for auditing someone else's — or your own — unanswered prayers after the fact.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Think of a prayer that genuinely wasn't answered the way you hoped. Have you quietly treated that as evidence against your own faith? What would it look like to hold that disappointment honestly, without needing an explanation Scripture doesn't actually give you?

The Turn

Purpose, position, privilege, and pattern — you now have all four pieces this session set out to give you. Prayer isn't a request system you're hoping works; it's co-laboring with a God who chose to work through you. It isn't shouted toward a distant throne; it's spoken from a position you already hold, seated with Christ. It isn't rationed for emergencies; the curtain that once blocked it is already torn. And it isn't a script to memorize; it's a pattern of listening before speaking, learned the way every disciple has ever learned from a rabbi worth following.

Here's the line worth carrying out of this session, because it reorders almost everything: God doesn't want to answer *your* prayers. He wants to answer *His* prayers — the ones that align with what He's already declared, already planned, already put in motion. Prayer stops being a negotiation the moment you stop trying to get God to want what you want, and start wanting what He already wants enough to pray it back to Him.

The Experience · Small Group Prayer

Practice this session's three-step pattern once today, using one real, specific situation from your own life — not a hypothetical, and not someone else's.

Settle it. Write one sentence: *God's will for [this situation] is already good, even if I can't yet see the shape of it.* Don't move to the next step until you've actually written the sentence — thinking it isn't the same discipline as putting it in your own words on paper.

Align with it. Sit in silence for two full minutes — longer than feels comfortable — and ask the Holy Spirit what He already knows about this situation that you don't. Write down anything that surfaces, without editing it. If nothing comes, that's not a failed attempt; write that down too, and bring it back to this practice tomorrow rather than forcing an answer today.

Pray it back. Speak your prayer aloud, in Jesus' name, shaped by whatever you wrote — not as a request you're hoping gets noticed, but as agreement with something already true.

If you're doing this with a spouse, a friend, or a small group, resist a very common instinct: someone will want to fill the silence immediately rather than sit in it, because silence in a group feels like a gap that needs covering rather than a discipline worth protecting. It might look like leadership or boldness or faith to be the first voice heard. Usually it just means nobody paused long enough to actually listen for what the Spirit wanted prayed before words started filling the space.

Build the two minutes of silence into your time together on purpose, out loud, before anyone prays — *"let's listen together for two minutes before anyone speaks"* — and then let whoever the Spirit prompts pray first, rather than defaulting to whoever's most comfortable leading. It will feel unnatural at first, the same way every new spiritual discipline does before it becomes ordinary. Give it more than one try before deciding whether it works.

BIG IDEAS

1. Prayer isn't primarily about getting what you ask for — it's co-laboring, glorifying God, and building intimacy, three purposes that hold even when the specific request doesn't land the way you hoped.
2. You pray from a position, not toward a distance — seated with Christ, already interceding, the same positional truth Session 11 established.

3. The privilege of constant access opened because God tore the barrier from His side, not because anyone finally earned better access.
4. Effective prayer listens before it speaks — a practiced habit (*limmud*), not a burst of inspiration.
5. God doesn't want to answer your prayers. He wants to answer His prayers — the ones already aligned with what He's declared.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God doesn't want to answer your prayers. He wants to answer His prayers.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Holy Spirit, teach me to pray. Help me fully believe the access I already have rather than approaching You like a stranger asking a favor. Give me the patience to listen before I speak, and the honesty to hold unanswered prayers without turning them into evidence against my own faith. Make prayer a consistent, ordinary part of my life — not a discipline I perform, but a relationship I return to. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (1895).
A short, classic treatment of prayer as relationship rather than technique, and a natural next read after this session.

SUBSTANTIAL

Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (1992).
Surveys many forms of prayer in depth — useful for readers who want more texture than this session's single simple model provides.

ACADEMIC

Andrew Murray, *The Ministry of Intercession* (1897).
A more developed theological treatment of the intercessory pattern this session's Romans 8:26–27 material only introduces.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Rate your prayer life 1–10, as this session's opening asked. Read Matthew 6:9–10 slowly. *Why didn't you rate it lower? What's genuinely working, even a little?*

DAY 2

Read Hebrews 8:1 and Ephesians 2:6 together. *Describe, in your own words, what it looks and feels like to pray from a seat you already hold rather than toward a distance.*

DAY 3

Read Matthew 27:51 and Hebrews 4:16. *Why do you think believers so easily slip back into treating prayer as a discipline that may or may not bear fruit, rather than an already-open door?*

DAY 4

Read John 5:19 and Isaiah 50:4 together. *What would it look like this week to listen for two full minutes before you pray about something, the way this session's Experience practiced?*

DAY 5

Practice the three-step model (Settle it, Align with it, Pray it back) on a second situation, different from the one you used in the Experience. *What was different the second time?*

DAY 6

Return to Day 1's rating. *Would you rate it differently now? What specifically changed your answer — or didn't?*

Tell one other person this week which of the four sections — Purpose, Position, Privilege, or Pattern — changed how you actually prayed, not just how you think about prayer.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Prayer

“If prayer has power, why does so much of it feel like it doesn’t?”

THE PURPOSE

Prayer was never primarily a request system you’re hoping works. God didn’t need help running the universe, yet He chose to accomplish His purposes through people who agree with Him — which is exactly what Elijah’s prayer for rain, and then for rain again, actually demonstrates.

Matthew 6:9–10
James 5:17–18

THE POSITION

Jesus isn’t standing at a distance waiting for prayers to arrive — He’s already seated, and already interceding. You don’t pray toward a far-off God straining to be heard. You pray from the position you already hold, seated with Him.

Hebrews 8:1
Romans 8:34

THE PRIVILEGE

The temple curtain tore from the top down — from God’s side, not because anyone finally earned better access. That access was never meant to be rationed for emergencies. It’s meant to be used constantly, approached with confidence rather than apology.

Matthew 27:51
Hebrews 4:16

THE PATTERN

Every disciple in Jesus’ day learned by watching, not by memorizing a script — Jesus only said what He heard the Father say. Settle that His will is already good, align with it by listening before speaking, then pray it back; and when you can’t find the words, the Spirit already knows how to pray them for you.

John 5:19
Romans 8:26–27

THE TURN

God doesn’t want to answer your prayers. He wants to answer His prayers — the ones that already align with what He’s declared, already planned, already put in motion. Prayer stops being a negotiation the moment you start wanting what He already wants enough to pray it back to Him.

John 15:7

SO NOW

CO-LABORING, NOT REQUESTING

God doesn’t need your prayers to run the universe. He chose to work through people who agree with Him, on purpose, because He designed it that way.

Matthew 6:9–10

ALREADY TORN, NOT EARNED

The barrier that once sealed off God’s presence tore from His side, not because anyone finally became good enough to get through it.

Matthew 27:51

LISTENING, NOT JUST ASKING

Effective prayer listens before it speaks — a practiced habit, not a burst of inspiration you either have or don’t.

Isaiah 50:4

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God doesn’t want to answer your prayers. He wants to answer His prayers.

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Next · Session 15, Power of the Tongue. You've learned to listen before you speak in prayer. Session 15 turns to what your words do the rest of the day — in blessing, and in harm.

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15

POWER OF THE TONGUE

Kingdom Essentials: The Power

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Destructive Words

03 Constructive Words

04 Declarations & Affirmations

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · Declarations

07 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Trash talk has become an art form in our culture — in politics, in sports, in the comment section of anything you post online. It's clever, it's provocative, and it draws us in even when we know better, because someone else is finally saying what we were thinking but too careful to say ourselves. We call it harmless. Scripture calls it something else entirely.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love its use will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:21). Not "words can hurt feelings." Death and life — the two most extreme realities that exist, both located, Scripture says, in the same three-inch muscle sitting behind your teeth.

If your words really carry that kind of weight, why do most of us spend all day speaking as though they carry none?

You were made in the image of a God who spoke the universe into being. That doesn't mean your words work the exact same way His do — this session spends real time on exactly where that comparison holds and where it breaks down. But it does mean your words were never designed to be neutral. Every sentence you speak today will build something or tear something down. This session is about learning to tell the difference before you speak, not after.

CONSIDER THIS

On a scale from 1 (mostly destructive) to 10 (mostly constructive), how would you honestly rate the words you've spoken in the last 24 hours? Don't average it — think about the actual content, not just the tone.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, teach me the power of my own tongue — to produce life, not death. Holy Spirit, I want only words in my mouth that were first in Yours. Make me sensitive to what I say before I say it, not just sorry for it after. In Jesus' name, amen.

Destructive Words

Scripture doesn't treat careless speech as a minor character flaw. It reaches for some of its most violent images to describe what a destructive word actually does.

> *"Death and life are in the power of the **tongue** (לָשׁוֹן), and those who love its use will eat its fruit."*
>
> **PROVERBS 18:21**

WORD STUDY

לָשׁוֹן *lashon* H3956

> **"tongue"** · Proverbs 18:21

Range. BDB's range runs from the literal organ — the physical tongue — to figurative speech, language, and even, in a few places, a tongue-shaped object like a wedge of metal or a flame's tip. It's the ordinary Hebrew word for the thing you speak with, not a specialized theological term.

The sense here. Proverbs is wisdom literature, which means it deals in observed patterns and general truths about how life tends to work under God's moral order — not universal, mechanical guarantees the way a law of physics operates. "Death and life… in the power of the tongue" is Proverbs' most extreme statement of a pattern this entire book returns to constantly: what you say shapes what happens, to you and to the people around you, far more reliably than casual speech assumes.

Why it carries the argument. This word study exists to do one specific job before the rest of this session unfolds: to keep Proverbs 18:21 anchored in what it actually is — a proverb, God's wisdom about how speech generally functions in a moral universe — rather than letting it get stretched, later in this session, into a claim the genre was never making. Both directions matter equally. The verse is not hyperbole to be softened. It is also not a scientific formula to be mechanized. Genre discipline protects both halves of that sentence.

Source. BDB, s.v. לָשׁוֹן.

ILLUSTRATION

Miriam and Aaron once spoke against their brother Moses — gossip, really, framed as a legitimate grievance: "Has the Lord only spoken through Moses? Has he not also spoken through us?" (Numbers 12:2). It reads like an ordinary sibling complaint. Scripture's response to it is not ordinary. "The anger of the Lord burned against them… Miriam became leprous as snow" (Numbers 12:9–10). Miriam — not Aaron, though both spoke — was struck with a

visible, physical disease for words spoken about someone else, in what probably felt to her like a private, justified conversation.

The point isn't that every critical word produces leprosy. It's that Scripture takes the *category* of destructive speech more seriously than the speaker usually does in the moment. Miriam almost certainly didn't feel like she was doing something dangerous. She felt like she was pointing out something true. Scripture's verdict on the danger of what she said didn't depend on how justified it felt to her while she was saying it.

Paul names the mechanism, and the specific victim, with startling directness:

> *"You must let no **unwholesome** (σαπρός) word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."*
>
> **EPHESIANS 4:29-30**

WORD STUDY

σαπρός *sapros* G4550

"unwholesome" · Ephesians 4:29

Range. Thayer's gives the picture directly: "rotten, putrid… corrupted by age and no longer fit for use." It's the word for spoiled fruit, decayed meat — organic matter that has gone bad and is no longer safe to consume. Jesus uses the same word for a diseased tree that can't produce good fruit (Matthew 7:17–18).

The sense here. Paul isn't describing merely rude or unkind words. He's describing speech that has *decayed* — the verbal equivalent of food gone bad, still capable of being swallowed but no longer capable of nourishing anyone who receives it.

Why it carries the argument. Verse 30 names who's actually grieved by *sapros* speech, and it's a specific claim worth sitting with: not just the listener, but the Holy Spirit Himself — the same Spirit who sealed you "for the day of redemption." That's an enormous claim about the stakes of ordinary conversation. Your words don't only land on the people around you. Paul says they register somewhere you can't see, in a way that actually grieves God.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. σαπρός.

The Greek word for "grieve" here, *lypeō*, is the ordinary word for sorrow — the same word used for how the disciples felt at the Last Supper when Jesus predicted His betrayal (Matthew 26:22). It's not a technical theological term for divine displeasure at a distance. It's the word for an actual wound to actual affection. Whatever else this session covers about the tongue's power, verse 30 alone is reason enough to take it seriously.

Jesus goes further still, tying careless speech directly to final accounting rather than only present consequence:

> *"I tell you that on the day of judgment, people will give an account for every worthless word they speak. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."*
>
> **MATTHEW 12:36–37**

That's not a threat aimed at deliberate cruelty alone. "Worthless" — careless, thrown-away, unconsidered — is a lower bar than most of us assume applies to us. Jesus isn't describing a special category of villain speech. He's describing the sentences that slip out because we weren't paying attention, and naming them as significant enough to matter on the day everything else does.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Think of the last genuinely destructive thing you said. In the moment, did it feel justified — the way it likely felt to Miriam? What does that suggest about how reliable "it felt right to say" actually is as a filter?

Constructive Words

The same tongue capable of gangrene, fire, and grief is designed to do the opposite. Scripture's picture of constructive speech is just as vivid as its warnings.

> *"Speaking recklessly is like the thrusts of a sword, but the words of the wise **bring healing**."*
>
> **PROVERBS 12:18**

That single proverb holds both halves of this session in one sentence: the same category of thing — a spoken word — can wound like a blade or heal like medicine, depending entirely on which one you reach for. Nowhere is that constructive power on fuller display than in the oldest recorded blessing in Scripture, still spoken today exactly as it was given more than three thousand years ago:

> *"The Lord **bless** (יְבָרֶכְךָ) **you** and protect you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."*
>
> **NUMBERS 6:24–26**

WORD STUDY

בָּרַךְ *barak* H1288

> **“bless”** · Numbers 6:24

Range. BDB traces the word’s root sense to kneeling — a posture word before it became a speech word. From there it extends to blessing God in adoration, and to God or people blessing others with real, active benefit. By a striking euphemism, the same root is occasionally used in the opposite direction — a way of naming a curse without saying the harsher word aloud, a reminder that ancient Hebrew treated blessing and cursing as close enough in kind to share a term.

The sense here. This is God instructing Israel’s priests in exactly how to speak blessing over His people — a scripted, repeatable formula, not a spontaneous feeling. The blessing doesn’t originate with the priest speaking it; it originates with God, and the priest’s mouth is simply where it’s released into the room.

Why it carries the argument. This is Proverbs 12:18’s “words of the wise bring healing” given its fullest possible form — an entire spoken blessing whose sole content is God’s face, God’s favor, and God’s peace, aimed deliberately at another person. Jewish families still speak a form of this blessing over their children at the start of every Sabbath, an unbroken practice stretching back well over three thousand years — which means this is not an ancient curiosity. It’s a living demonstration that a culture can build an entire practice of faith around the conviction that a spoken blessing does something real.

Source. BDB, s.v. בָּרַךְ.

ILLUSTRATION

> That Sabbath practice is worth pausing on directly. In observant Jewish homes around the world, every Friday at sundown, parents place their hands on their children's heads and speak a version of this same Numbers 6 blessing over them — a weekly discipline maintained across dozens of generations, through exile, persecution, and dispersion across every continent. Nobody kept that practice alive because it felt like an empty gesture. Families that have done almost nothing else religiously in common for three thousand years have kept doing *that* — speaking blessing, out loud, over their own children, on purpose, every single week.
>
> Whatever you conclude about the more provocative claims later in this session, that alone is worth noticing: an ancient, still-living culture built a weekly rhythm entirely around the conviction that a spoken blessing changes something. The theology of *why* it works differs by tradition and era. The practice of *doing* it has outlasted empires.

Your own words carry the same two-directional capacity, at a smaller scale, every day. Genesis 17:5 records God renaming Abram — "Abraham," father of many nations — and speaking a new identity into being with a word, the same pattern Session 11 traced through Scripture's other renamings.

> *"Look at ships too: Though they are so large and driven by harsh winds, they are steered by a tiny rudder wherever the pilot's inclination directs. So too the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it has great pretensions. Think how small a flame sets a huge forest ablaze."*
>
> **JAMES 3:4–5**

A rudder doesn't look like it belongs on the same scale as the ship it steers. A spark doesn't look like it belongs on the same scale as a forest. James's whole point is exactly that mismatch: the tongue's size has nothing to do with what it's capable of setting in motion, for good or for ruin. Proverbs 4:23, which Session 12 already gave a full word study, named the heart as the source; this session names the tongue as the outlet the heart's condition ultimately reaches the world through.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Who is one person in your life who would benefit from hearing an actual, specific spoken blessing from you this week — not a vague compliment, but words shaped

the way Numbers 6:24–26 is shaped? What's stopped you from saying it already?

Declarations & Affirmations

Scripture doesn't only describe words as consequential. In a few specific places, it describes spoken words as participating directly in what actually happens — which is where this session has to slow down and be exact, because this is also where good biblical teaching and seriously overreaching teaching become hardest to tell apart.

> *"…if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness, and with the mouth one* ***confesses*** **(ὁμολογεῖται)** ***and thus has salvation****."*
>
> **ROMANS 10:9–10**

WORD STUDY

ὁμολογέω *homologeō* G3670

"confesses" · Romans 10:10

Range. Built from *homos* ("same") and *legō* ("to say") — literally, to say the same thing. Thayer's gives the core sense as "to say the same thing as another, to agree with, assent," extending to public confession or admission. It's

the word for agreeing out loud with a fact that's already established, not the word for originating a new one.

The sense here. Paul doesn't say your mouth generates your salvation. He says your mouth *agrees, out loud*, with what your heart already believes and what God has already done — Christ's resurrection is the settled fact; the confession is your spoken agreement with it, not a separate cause alongside it.

Why it carries the argument. This is the single most important lexical fact in this entire session. *Homologeō* means agreement, not creation. Whatever else Scripture says about the power of speaking faith, this particular word — the one Word of Faith teaching leans on most heavily — etymologically and contextually describes saying the same thing God has already said, not manufacturing a reality that didn't exist until your mouth produced it. That distinction is about to matter a great deal.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. ὁμολογέω.

That distinction — agreement versus creation — is exactly where this session has to engage a real, live, and genuinely provocative theological tradition head-on, rather than tiptoe around it the way Session 3 deliberately did.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn't this basically what Word-of-Faith teachers say — that the right confession guarantees the result?

E. W. Kenyon, a twentieth-century Bible teacher whose writing (*New Creation Realities*, *The Wonderful Name of Jesus*, and others) shaped much of what became the modern Word of Faith movement, taught something considerably stronger

than “words matter.” His position, stated at its strongest and most serious: believers are recreated in the image of a Creator who speaks reality into being, and that same creative capacity — amplified by the new birth and the indwelling Spirit — genuinely operates through a believer’s spoken confession. On this view, sickness, poverty, and defeat have no *legal* standing against a believer who consistently confesses what God’s Word already says; the reason many believers don’t experience healing or breakthrough isn’t that God withheld it, but that their own mixed, doubt-laced speech kept nullifying it. “You will never rise above your confession” is close to a summary sentence of the whole system.

That’s a serious position, held by serious people, built on real biblical texts — Genesis 1’s spoken creation, Mark 11:23’s “whatever he says,” Romans 10:9–10’s confession, Proverbs 18:21’s death and life. It deserves better than a caricature, and I don’t think the church’s overwhelmingly negative reaction to prosperity-gospel excess has always given it one.

> *“I tell you the truth, if someone says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.”*
>
> **MARK 11:23**

Here is where I land, and why. I think this system is right that mainstream discipleship culture has drifted too far toward treating speech as inert — as though what you say out loud carries no more weight than what you merely think, when Scripture consistently treats the two differently (Romans 10:9–10 itself insists on both). I don’t think it’s right about the mechanism it builds on top of that true observation. Four specific places where I think the reasoning overreaches what the text supports:

First, *homologeō* in Romans 10:9–10 — the central verse this whole system leans on — lexically means agreement with an existing fact, not causation of a new one, as this session’s word study above just established. Building a general theory of reality-generating speech on a word that specifically means “saying the same thing” is close to the illegitimate totality transfer this project’s own Writer’s Guide warns against: taking one word’s specific, contextual sense and stretching it to carry a much larger argument than its actual meaning supports.

Second, Mark 11:23 itself — the verse most often quoted alone, stripped of its own qualifier — ties the mountain’s actual movement not to the words alone but to a condition Jesus names *before* the words are ever mentioned: “does not doubt in his heart but believes.” The operative reality here is the heart’s settled trust, with speech as trust’s natural overflow, not a separate mechanical trigger that a

doubting heart could somehow still fire correctly by getting the sentence right. Read carefully, this is the same agreement pattern *homologeō* already established, in a different text.

Third, Genesis 1's creative speech belongs to God alone in that chapter — nothing in the text extends the *same kind* of speech-act to Adam and Eve, only the image-bearing that Session 1 and Session 11 already carefully distinguished from identity of nature. Being made in God's image has never meant sharing God's uncreated power; it means reflecting Him as a creature, not operating as one.

Fourth, and most seriously: 2 Corinthians 12:7 names Paul's affliction "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me" — in Greek, literally *angelos Satana*, an agent sent to harass. The phrase echoes an Old Testament idiom (Numbers 33:55, Judges 2:3) that consistently names hostile people, not illness, and it fits the letter's own argument: 2 Corinthians spends its first eleven chapters defending Paul's apostolic authority against rival teachers who had trailed him into Corinth undermining it. The "thorn" is almost certainly that sustained opposition, not a physical ailment. Paul — the same apostle who wrote Romans 10:9–10 — asked God three separate times, presumably in full faith, for that opposition to be removed, and was told no. Not "your confession was mixed." Not "you didn't hold fast long enough." God's actual answer was "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." If unwavering confession reliably produced the requested result, Paul's own unrelenting opposition is very hard to explain — and I don't think the honest move is to explain it away.

Where this stays unresolved: I don't think Scripture gives a complete account of exactly how spoken faith interacts with what God does — only that it does, genuinely, in ways Mark 11:23 and Romans 10:9–10 describe with more confidence than most modern discipleship teaching is comfortable with. I hold the reality of that connection with real conviction. I hold any confident, detailed account of its exact mechanics much more loosely — including Kenyon's.

> **I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> **I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> — that an illness, a financial hardship, or an unanswered prayer means your confession was insufficiently pure, or that a mature believer with real faith should expect Word-of-Faith-style guarantees Scripture doesn't actually make, or that Paul's thorn proves speaking faith accomplishes nothing.

I AM SAYING

— that your words are never neutral, that Scripture takes destructive and constructive speech with total seriousness (this session's first two sections), and that speaking Scripture's own promises out loud in agreement with what God has said is a real, biblical practice — this session's Experience below — worth doing precisely *because* it's agreement with truth, not because it functions as a formula that obligates a specific outcome.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Before reading this section, where would you have placed yourself on the spectrum between "words don't really matter much" and "words determine everything"? Has this session moved you, and in which direction?

The Turn

You now have the full shape of what this session set out to give you. The same tongue that can spread like gangrene and grieve the Holy Spirit is designed to bless like the oldest prayer in Scripture and heal like medicine. And the words you speak in agreement with what God has already said are not empty air — Romans 10:9–10 built an entire doctrine of salvation on exactly that conviction — even though the mechanics of that connection go further than any teacher, including Kenyon, can fully map.

None of that stays theoretical if it doesn't change what comes out of your mouth in the next twenty-four hours. Ephesians 4:29 gives you the simplest test

available: before you speak, ask whether what you're about to say is *sapros* — decayed, unfit to nourish — or whether it's "beneficial for the building up of the one in need." That single question, asked honestly and often, would change more conversations than any theory of how words work ever could.

You won't get this perfect. Matthew 12:36–37's "every worthless word" isn't a bar any of us has cleared, and it was never meant to produce shame-driven silence — a mouth too afraid to speak is not the goal any more than a mouth too careless to filter is. The goal is a tongue that's paying attention: aware, moment to moment, that what comes out of it is never actually neutral, and choosing on that basis rather than by default.

The Experience · Declarations

This is a practice in *homologeō* — agreeing out loud with what God has already said — not a formula for producing an outcome.

Choose three declarations from the list below, or write your own directly from Scripture. Speak them aloud, once, slowly, before you do anything else today:

> *"No weapon that is formed against me shall prosper" (Isaiah 54:17). "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). "My God will supply every need of mine according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). "I am the righteousness of God in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:21).*

Before you speak each one, run it through Ephesians 4:29's test one more time: is this something God's Word has actually said, or is it something you're hoping saying out loud will make true? If you can point to the verse, speak it with confidence — you're agreeing with a settled fact, the same posture Romans 10:9–10 describes. If you can't point to the verse, that's worth noticing rather than speaking anyway.

Then carry the same filter through the rest of your day. When you catch yourself about to say something *sapros* — a complaint, a criticism, a "that's just how I am" — pause. You don't have to pretend the circumstance is different than it is. You only have to ask whether the sentence you're about to speak builds up or tears down, agrees with fear or agrees with God, and choose accordingly.

BIG IDEAS

1. Proverbs 18:21 is not hyperbole — Scripture treats destructive speech with the same seriousness it gives cancer, fire, and grief, up to and including grieving the Holy Spirit Himself.
2. The same tongue is designed for the opposite: Numbers 6:24–26's blessing has been spoken over God's people, unbroken, for over three thousand years.
3. *Homologeō* — biblical confession — means agreement with what God has already said, not creation of a new reality your mouth originates.
4. Word-of-Faith teaching is right that speech is never neutral and wrong to promise guarantees Scripture itself doesn't make — Paul's own thorn, the hostile opposition God chose not to remove despite three separate prayers, is the clearest biblical evidence of the difference.
5. Ephesians 4:29's test — does this build up or tear down — is simple enough to actually use in the next conversation you have.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Your words don't create your reality.
They agree with one.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, teach me to guard my mouth the way I'd guard anything else I knew carried real power. Forgive me for the decayed words I've spoken without noticing their weight, and for the times I've wanted a formula more than I wanted You. Let my confession be agreement with what You've already

said — nothing less, and nothing more than that. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Joseph M. Stowell, *The Power of Encouragement* (2004), or any solid treatment of Ephesians 4:29 in a devotional commentary.
A grounded, non-mechanistic look at constructive speech as a daily discipline.

SUBSTANTIAL

D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (1988, rev. 1995).
A serious, sympathetic-but-critical historical and theological analysis of E. W. Kenyon's influence on the Word of Faith movement — the standard scholarly starting point for understanding both what Kenyon actually taught and where it diverges from historic Christian teaching.

ACADEMIC

E. W. Kenyon, *New Creation Realities* (1945).
Read this session's What About before this book, not after — Kenyon is worth reading directly rather than only through summaries, but read him the way this session modeled: with real engagement, and with Romans 10:9–10's actual lexical meaning firmly in hand.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Proverbs 18:21 slowly, aloud. Return to Day 1's 1–10 self-rating from the top of this session. *What's one specific*

pattern of speech — not a single incident, a pattern — driving that number?

DAY 2

Read Ephesians 4:29–31. *Run today's conversations through the "does this build up" test as they happen. What did you notice?*

DAY 3

Read Numbers 6:24–26 aloud, slowly, as if speaking it over someone specific. *Who did you picture? Have you actually said anything like this to them recently?*

DAY 4

Read Romans 10:9–10 and this session's *homologeō* word study again. *Where in your own thinking had "confession" quietly drifted from agreement toward something more like a formula?*

DAY 5

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–9. Paul names his affliction "a messenger of Satan to torment me" — most likely the opposition that trailed his ministry, not an illness. *Have you ever concluded — about yourself or someone else — that unanswered prayer meant insufficient faith? Revisit that conclusion honestly in light of Paul's own thorn.*

DAY 6

Practice this session's Experience again, with three different declarations than the ones you chose the first time. *What changed the second time through?*

Tell one person this week about one destructive pattern of speech you're actively working to replace — and ask them to

point it out, gently, the next time they hear it.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Power of the Tongue

“If your words really carry that kind of weight, why do most of us spend all day speaking as though they carry none?”

THE WOUND

Proverbs calls it death and life, not hurt feelings — the same three-inch muscle capable of gangrene, spoiled fruit, and grieving the Holy Spirit Himself. Miriam’s leprosy followed a private, seemingly justified complaint, and Jesus says even careless, worthless words get an accounting on judgment day.

Proverbs 18:21
Ephesians 4:29–30
Matthew 12:36–37

THE BLESSING

The same tongue capable of wounding is designed to heal, Proverbs says, like medicine rather than a blade. Numbers 6’s priestly blessing has been spoken over God’s people for three thousand years, and James’s rudder-and-spark images show how disproportionate that small, ordinary power actually is.

Proverbs 12:18
Numbers 6:24–26
James 3:4–5

THE AGREEMENT

Homologeō — the word Paul uses for confession — literally means to say the same thing, agreement with an already-settled fact, not the mouth generating a new one. Romans 10 built an entire doctrine of salvation on exactly that: your mouth agreeing out loud with what your heart already believes and God has already done.

Romans 10:9–10

THE LIMIT

Word-of-Faith teaching rightly insists speech is never neutral, but stretches homologeō past its plain meaning and skips Mark 11:23’s own faith-of-the-heart qualifier. Paul’s own thorn — real opposition God refused to remove despite three faith-filled prayers — is the clearest evidence confession doesn’t guarantee outcomes.

Mark 11:23
2 Corinthians 12:7

THE TURN

The tongue that can spread like gangrene is designed to bless like the oldest blessing in Scripture — and words spoken in agreement with what God has said are never empty air. The test is simple: before you speak, ask whether this builds up or tears down, and choose on that basis rather than by default.

Ephesians 4:29

SO NOW

SERIOUS, NOT HYPERBOLE

Death and life in the tongue isn’t poetic exaggeration. Scripture gives destructive speech the same seriousness it gives cancer, fire, and grieving the Holy Spirit Himself.

Proverbs 18:21

AGREEMENT, NOT CREATION

Homologeō means saying the same thing as an already-settled fact, not manufacturing a new one. Your confession joins what God has already said; it doesn’t originate it.

Romans 10:10

RIGHT, NOT GUARANTEED

Word-of-Faith teaching is correct that speech is never neutral — and wrong that a pure enough confession guarantees the outcome you’re asking for.

2 Corinthians 12:7

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Your words don’t create your reality. They agree with one.

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Next · Session 16, Kingdom Faith. You've learned to guard and direct your words. Session 16 turns to the faith those words are meant to agree with — what it is, and what it isn't.

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KINGDOM FAITH

Kingdom Essentials: The Preparation

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 What Is Faith?

03 Why Is Faith Important?

04 How Do I Build My Faith?

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · Faith Step

07 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Every believer has heard some version of the phrase “just have faith” — said as though faith were a switch you flip, a feeling that either shows up or doesn’t, or an achievement you either pull off or fail at. Session 15 asked you to speak words that agree with what God has already said. This session asks the harder question sitting underneath that one: agree with *whom*, exactly, and why should you trust Him enough to stake anything real on it?

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). Not a feeling. Not a technique. A settled conviction about a Person whose character doesn’t change even when your circumstances do.

If your faith depends entirely on the reliability of whatever you’ve placed it in, what exactly have you placed yours in — and has it ever actually held?

Picture a toddler standing at the edge of a pool, a parent a few feet out in the water, arms open. “Jump — I’ll catch you.” The child hesitates, calculates, and finally jumps — not because the water got any less deep, but because the parent’s arms have been there before. That’s the whole shape of biblical faith in miniature: not the absence of hesitation, but trust built on a track record. This session is about the God whose arms have been there before, and about that the faith is aimed at Him — nothing else and no one else.

CONSIDER THIS

Think of one specific place in your life right now where you're being asked to trust God rather than your own ability to control the outcome. What, honestly, is stopping you?

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I want faith that actually moves something — not a feeling I manufacture, but trust rooted in who You've proven Yourself to be. Teach me what real faith is, and grow it in me through the knowing, not around it. In Jesus' name, amen.

What Is Faith?

> *"Now **faith** (πίστις) is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see."*
>
> **HEBREWS 11:1**

WORD STUDY

πίστις *pistis* G4102

> **"faith"** · Hebrews 11:1

Range. Thayer's gives a wide range running from simple conviction of a fact's truth, through the specific conviction

that Jesus is the Messiah, to fidelity and faithfulness — "the character of one who can be relied on." Across the whole range, Thayer's is explicit that *pistis* "always involves personal trust and conviction, not merely intellectual acknowledgment." It's a relationship word wearing a noun's clothing.

The sense here. The author of Hebrews doesn't define faith as a feeling or as blind assertion. "Being sure" and "being convinced" are conviction words — the settled confidence a person has after weighing evidence, not the manufactured certainty of talking yourself into something. Hebrews 11 goes on to prove the point by narrating the specific, dated, verifiable-in-Scripture track record of the people this kind of faith produced.

Why it carries the argument. *Pistis* being a trust-and-fidelity word rather than a pure belief-word is the single fact this whole session leans on. Biblical faith was never "believing something regardless of the evidence." It was always trust in a Person whose fidelity had already been demonstrated — which is exactly the shape this session's *What About* below has to defend against the culture's caricature of what faith means.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. πίστις.

That distinction — a noun naming a state versus a verb naming an act — turns out to be more than a grammatical curiosity. One New Testament writer built his entire Gospel around exactly this choice.

> *"Jesus performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are recorded so that you may* ***believe*** **(πιστεύω)** *that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

WORD STUDY

πιστεύω *pisteuō* G4100

> **“believe”** · John 20:31

Range. BDAG’s range runs from simple intellectual assent — considering something true — to full personal entrustment: to entrust oneself to. Grammatically, it is a verb, an action performed, not a noun naming a possession held.

The sense here. John chose this word on purpose, and chose it constantly. *Pisteuō* occurs roughly 98 times across his Gospel, by a standard concordance count — more than in Matthew, Mark, and Luke combined. Its noun form, *pistis* — the very word this session’s opening word study just built on — never appears in John’s Gospel. Not once. John had the noun available. He never reached for it.

Why it carries the argument. A noun is something you can have and set on a shelf. A verb is something you do, right now, or you do not. When the risen Jesus tells a doubting Thomas, “Do not be unbelieving, but believing” (John 20:27), He isn’t asking for a corrected opinion. He’s telling Thomas to do something with his body and his will — step forward, reach out his hand, trust — in that moment, not in general. John built an entire Gospel to produce exactly that: not a settled belief filed away, but an ongoing, present-tense leaning of your weight on Christ, renewed moment by moment. *Pistis* names the relationship; *pisteuō* is what that relationship looks like while it’s actually happening.

Source. BDAG, s.v. πιστεύω. The verb-not-noun pattern in John’s Gospel per *Deep Made Simple*, “John’s Gospel”

(YouTube).

ILLUSTRATION

On the last day of November 2023, my wife and I set out on a rim-to-river-and-back hike into the Grand Canyon — the South Kaibab Trail, about thirteen miles round trip with roughly 4,800 feet of elevation change. By no means our first hike in the canyon, but easily our most ambitious. We'd trained for the better part of a year and felt physically ready. That wasn't the problem. For long stretches, the trail narrows to five feet wide, with solid rock on one side and a sheer drop of hundreds of feet on the other. My wife has no trouble with that kind of exposure. I do — I get vertigo, and it's genuinely unnerving.

The morning of the hike it was snowing in northern Arizona for the first time that season, and the pre-dawn drive to the trailhead was slow and icy. The whole way there, I rehearsed how treacherous the narrow sections would be with fresh snow on them, and I wanted badly to turn around. I prayed instead — repeatedly, and not eloquently: "Father, calm my nerves for this."

On previous hikes my wife had always led, setting the pace so I wouldn't get too far ahead of her, and this hike was no different. I didn't tell her at the time, but keeping my eyes fixed on her footsteps — not looking right or left toward the drop-off — was what actually got me down that trail. Step by step, one foot after another, for nine hours, until we stood back on the rim, exhausted and satisfied. My faith that morning wasn't in my own steady nerves. It was in her steady footsteps ahead of me, and in a God who'd calmed worse fears than that one before.

Voices

"One obvious Greek term for 'loyalty' is one of Paul's favorite words, pistis, regularly translated 'faith,' but often carrying the overtones of 'faithfulness,' 'reliability,' and, yes, 'loyalty.'… [It] could also point to the personal commitment that accompanies any genuine belief… Hence the term means 'loyalty' or 'allegiance.'"

— N. T. Wright, Paul: A Biography (2018)

But *pistis* isn't only trust-and-loyalty. It also has to be distinguished from something that can look almost identical from the outside: correct information about God, held at arm's length.

> *"So also **faith**, if it does not have works, is dead being by itself… You believe that God is one; well and good. **Even the demons believe that — and tremble with fear**."*
>
> **JAMES 2:17, 19**

James, writing to believers who already knew their theology was sound, isn't attacking faith. He's attacking a counterfeit wearing faith's name — correct belief that never moves the person who holds it. Demons have flawless theology. They know exactly who God is, and it produces terror in them, not trust. That's the line James draws: real faith isn't measured by how accurate your beliefs are, but by whether those beliefs actually move you toward God rather than only informing you about Him.

Theologian Wayne Grudem frames the same distinction as a four-part test (from *Systematic Theology*, 1994): faith requires more than knowledge (demons have that), more than approving of what you know (Nicodemus managed that at arm's length — "we know that you are a teacher who has come from God," he told Jesus, carefully, at night, John 3:1–2 — and it wasn't yet saving faith), a personal decision to trust — not a belief anyone else can make for you — and, notably, faith that's expected to *grow* as knowledge grows rather than staying fixed at a decision made once. Faith and evidence were never rivals in Scripture's own account of it. They were always meant to grow together.

That's also where N. T. Wright's "loyalty" and "allegiance" language above earns its keep. A Roman citizen's *pistis* to Caesar wasn't a private mental state; it was a public, practical allegiance that showed up in what that citizen actually did when it cost something. Paul reaches for the same word to describe a believer's relationship to Jesus precisely because he wants something with the same weight — not private religious sentiment, but allegiance to a King, the same King whose authority Session 13 already spent an entire session unpacking. Faith and authority turn out to be two sides of the same coin: you can't meaningfully submit to an authority you don't trust, and you can't meaningfully trust an authority you refuse to submit to.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where is your own faith closer to James's counterfeit — correct information held at arm's length — than to trust that's actually changed how you live?

Why Is Faith Important?

> *"Now without faith it is impossible to please him, for the one who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he* ***rewards those who seek him****."*
>
> **HEBREWS 11:6**

Notice what this verse doesn't say. It doesn't say faith is impossible to please God without also being nice, or generous, or theologically correct. It says faith itself is the thing God is after — because faith is what a relationship actually runs on.

> *"Look! The residence of God is among human beings. He will live among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will not exist any more — or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the former things have ceased to exist."*
>
> **REVELATION 21:3–4**

That's where the whole story ends — not a disembodied afterthought, but God's own dwelling place among His people, tears wiped away one at a time. Session 2 already established that a Kingdom Life is fundamentally about relationship with the King, not merely a transaction that gets you into heaven. Relationship of any kind cannot survive without trust on both sides. God isn't asking for faith because He's insecure about being believed. He's asking for it because trust is the only medium a real relationship can be built in — and Revelation 21 is what that relationship looks like once it's fully realized.

Paul makes the same point from a different angle — not the destination, but the confidence available along the way there:

> *"And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."*
>
> **ROMANS 8:28**

That's not a promise that every individual event is good in itself — Paul knew better than almost anyone what real suffering costs; his own thorn, already discussed in Session 15, never went away. It's a promise about the direction everything is being worked toward, for the specific people who trust Him. Faith is what lets a person hold both of those truths at once: this is genuinely hard, and it is being worked toward good, without either one canceling out the other.

This isn't a New Testament innovation. The Old Testament's own foundational statement about how a person stands right with God turns on the same root:

> *"Look, the one whose desires are not upright will faint from exhaustion, but the person of integrity* ***will live because of his faithfulness*** **(אֱמוּנָה)**.*"*
>
> **HABAKKUK 2:4**

WORD STUDY

אֱמוּנָה *emunah* H530

“faithfulness” · Habakkuk 2:4

Range. BDB traces *emunah* to a root meaning firmness or steadiness — the same root behind the word “amen,” which is really just this word’s family used as a one-word declaration: *this is solid, this is reliable.* From that root sense of firmness, BDB extends the range to figurative security and, morally, to fidelity — the trustworthy, steady character of someone who keeps their word.

The sense here. Habakkuk wrote this line to a nation staring down a Babylonian invasion it had no ability to stop. “The person of integrity will live because of his *emunah*” isn’t a promise that faith prevents hardship — the hardship was already coming and Habakkuk knew it. It’s a statement about what keeps a person standing steady through it: not their own strength, but a settled, amen-like reliability placed in God.

Why it carries the argument. Paul quotes this exact verse twice — Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11 — to build the entire New Testament doctrine of justification by faith. That means the doctrine’s Old Testament root isn’t a word about believing correct facts. It’s a word about settled, firm, “amen”-style trust, carried by a prophet standing in front of an army he couldn’t stop. Session 11 already gave a full word study on how that trust gets *credited* as righteousness (*logizomai*, Romans 4:3–5) — this is the word underneath the word, the raw trust Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4 are describing when they say Abraham “believed.”

Source. BDB, s.v. אֱמוּנָה.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Habakkuk’s *emunah* was tested by an army he couldn’t stop. What’s the specific, real-world version of that in your life right now — the thing you can’t control,

where steady trust is the only thing actually available to you?

How Do I Build My Faith?

> *"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith excellence, to excellence, knowledge; to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness; to godliness, brotherly affection; to brotherly affection, unselfish love."*
>
> **2 PETER 1:5–7**

Peter doesn't picture faith as a static possession you either have or don't. He pictures it as the starting link in a chain you're actively responsible to build, one link added deliberately to the next. Faith that isn't growing isn't neutral — Scripture doesn't leave room for faith to simply sit still.

That growth has a specific, ordinary starting point, easy to miss because it's so unglamorous:

> *"Consequently faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the preached word of Christ."*
>
> **ROMANS 10:17**

Not a mystical download. Hearing — the same ordinary sense you're using reading this sentence. Grudem's fourth mark of true faith, named above, was that faith grows as knowledge grows. Romans 10:17 names the mechanism: faith comes from exposure to what God has actually said, repeated, absorbed, returned to. That's why this entire curriculum keeps circling back to Scripture itself rather

than only to techniques or feelings — the growth Peter describes in 2 Peter 1 and the growth Paul describes in Romans 10 are the same growth, arrived at by the same ordinary means.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Peter's own faith grew exactly the way 2 Peter 1 describes — through action, not through waiting for certainty to arrive first. "Lord, if it is you, order me to come to you on the water," he called out from the boat, and Jesus said one word back: "Come" (Matthew 14:28–29). Peter got out. He walked on water — actually walked, actual water — until he "saw the strong wind" and fear displaced his focus. He began to sink, cried out, and Jesus caught him immediately, asking only, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:30–31).
>
> Notice what Peter's faith was never in. It was never in his own ability to defy physics. It was in one specific word from Jesus — "Come" — and it held exactly as long as his attention stayed on the One who spoke it. The moment his focus shifted to the wind, the faith didn't disappear; his *attention* did. This session's own opening illustration works the same way: my faith on that canyon trail wasn't in my own steady legs. It was in keeping my eyes on the one leading the way and trusting the God who'd proven Himself before.

Session 13 already gave you another version of this same pattern in the Roman centurion, whose faith rested not in his own worthiness but in his sharp recognition of a chain of delegated authority he understood from his own life — "only say the word" (Matthew 8:8). That's worth carrying forward rather than repeating here: growing faith consistently attaches itself to *recognizing who Jesus actually is*, not to manufacturing confidence in yourself.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn't faith just believing something without evidence?

Our culture has a working definition of faith it rarely states out loud but constantly assumes: "an almost irrational commitment to something in spite of strong evidence to the contrary." On this definition, faith is precisely what a reasonable person does *less* of as evidence improves — the intellectual equivalent of covering your eyes.

That's not the definition this session's own word study just established. *Pistis* is a trust-and-fidelity word, not a make-yourself-believe-it word. Hebrews 11:1's "being sure" and "being convinced" are the language of settled conviction

reached through weighing something, not the language of manufactured certainty in spite of the evidence. And the entire logic of Hebrews 11 — a long, specific, historically anchored list of named people and what they actually did — only makes sense if faith is the kind of thing a track record can be built on. You don't build a track record for something that has to ignore evidence to survive.

Here's the test that actually separates biblical faith from the culture's caricature, and it comes straight from this session's own material: the object of your faith is what makes it reasonable or unreasonable — never the intensity of the feeling. Faith in a chair depends on the chair's construction, not on how hard you believe it will hold you. Faith in God depends on whether He has actually proven reliable, which is a claim about His track record, open to real examination — Israel's history, Christ's resurrection, your own life and the lives of people you actually know — not a claim that gets stronger the less you look at it.

James 2:19 is the sharpest evidence this isn't naive credulity dressed up in Bible language. Demons hold entirely *correct* beliefs about God — more accurate, doctrinally, than most believers' — and it produces terror, not saving faith. If faith were simply believing true things, demons would already have it. What they lack isn't accurate information. It's trust that reorients how they live in response to what they know. Correct belief and biblical faith are not the same thing, and the culture's caricature and James's counterfeit turn out to be attacking the exact same target from opposite directions — one calling it too gullible, the other calling it too thin.

There's a version of this objection worth taking seriously rather than dismissing: doesn't examining the evidence at all undercut faith — turn it into something earned by argument rather than received by trust? Hebrews 11 itself answers that. The chapter doesn't ask its readers to ignore evidence; it *is* evidence, a documented, historically anchored record of what this kind of trust actually produced in real people's lives — Abraham, Moses, Rahab, named individuals doing specific, verifiable things. Faith examines evidence and then goes further than evidence alone could carry a person, the way trusting a specific person's character lets you act on a promise before you've seen the outcome. That's not opposed to evidence. It's evidence, extended by relationship, the same way trusting a friend's promise isn't irrational just because you can't yet see the promise kept.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What's the actual evidence — not the feeling, the evidence — that the God you're placing your faith in has proven reliable? Could you write it down if asked to?

I AM NOT SAYING

I AM NOT SAYING

— that doubt disqualifies you, that a strong believer never feels fear or hesitation the way I did on that canyon trail, or that sufficiently strong faith functions as a formula guaranteeing a specific outcome — Session 15 already gave that claim the full, careful treatment it deserves, and this session isn't reopening it.

I AM SAYING

— that the father in Mark 9 gives every doubting believer the honest, biblical prayer:
"I BELIEVE; HELP MY UNBELIEF!"
(Mark 9:24). Jesus didn't rebuke him for the doubt riding alongside the faith. He healed the man's son anyway. Faith and residual doubt were never mutually exclusive in Scripture's own account of what faith looks like in an actual human being. If Peter's own faith could falter mid-miracle — actually walking on actual water — while Jesus was standing right in front of him, no reasonable standard exists that would ask more certainty of you than Scripture asked of him.

The Turn

You now have what this session set out to give you: a definition of faith that's neither blind assertion nor mere correct information, but settled trust in a Person

whose track record can actually be examined — the God who caught the toddler at the pool's edge before, who led a hesitant hiker down a snow-dusted trail, who caught Peter the instant he cried out, who told a doubting father his prayer was enough. Every thread in this session lands on the same point from a different direction: *pistis*'s trust-not-mere-belief range, *emunah*'s amen-solid steadiness under a threat Habakkuk couldn't stop, James's demons who have the facts but not the trust, Peter's eyes staying fixed on the One who called him rather than on the wind. Faith doesn't sustain you. The One you place it in does.

None of that stays theoretical unless it produces an actual next step. Session 17 turns to what happens when that trust starts reshaping how you think — Kingdom Transformation. But trust has to move before it can transform anything, which is exactly why this session's Experience below asks for one concrete, dated action rather than a renewed feeling.

The Experience · Faith Step

Faith that only sits in your head hasn't done what 2 Peter 1:5–7 describes. This is a practice in taking one small, specific, concrete step — not a leap into the void, but a Peter-at-the-boat-edge step, in response to something you actually believe God has already said.

Name one specific place, right now, where you already know what faithful obedience looks like, but fear or self-reliance has kept you from taking the step. Not a vague resolution — a specific action, a specific day, a specific person. It doesn't need to be dramatic. Peter's step was one foot over the edge of a boat. Mine was keeping my eyes on my wife's footsteps instead of the drop-off. Faithful obedience is almost always smaller and more ordinary than the version of it you've been picturing, which is usually exactly why it keeps getting postponed.

Write it down:

> *This week, I will*
>
> _____
>
> *— trusting God's proven character, not my own certainty about the outcome.*

Before you act on it, ask the same question this session's *What About* asked: what's the actual evidence that the God you're trusting here has proven reliable? Write that down too, briefly. Then take the step — expecting, like Peter, that your eyes will need to stay fixed on the One who called you rather than on the wind.

BIG IDEAS

1. *Pistis* is a trust-and-fidelity word, not a belief-word — Hebrews 11:1's "being sure" and "being convinced" describe settled conviction, not manufactured certainty.
2. Correct belief and saving faith are not the same thing — James 2:19's demons prove that decisively.
3. *Emunah*, the Old Testament root behind "amen," is the word underneath Paul's entire doctrine of justification by faith (Habakkuk 2:4, quoted in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11).
4. Faith is only as reliable as its object — which means it's reasonable or unreasonable based on God's actual track record, not the intensity of the feeling.
5. Faith grows through action, the way Peter's did on the water and 2 Peter 1:5–7 describes — not through waiting for certainty to arrive first.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Faith doesn't sustain you. The One you place it in does.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for a track record I can actually examine rather than a feeling I have to manufacture. Where I've settled for correct belief instead of real trust, change that. Where doubt rides alongside my faith, meet me the way You met the father in Mark 9 — not with rejection, but with help. Grow my faith

> *the way Peter's grew: one step, with my eyes on You. In Jesus' name, amen.*

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God* (2000).
An honest, unflinching look at faith that includes real doubt rather than pretending it away — a useful companion to this session's Mark 9:24 material.

SUBSTANTIAL

N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (2018).
The book behind this session's Voices quote — Wright's case that pistis carries "loyalty" and "allegiance" alongside "belief," developed at full length.

ACADEMIC

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (1994).
Grudem's four-part definition of saving faith, engaged in this session's What Is Faith section, developed in full technical detail.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Hebrews 11:1–2 slowly, aloud. *Where has your own definition of faith drifted closer to "a feeling" than to "settled trust in a proven Person"?*

DAY 2

Read James 2:14–19. *Where is your own faith closer to the demons' correct-but-inert belief than to trust that's actually changed how you live?*

DAY 3

Read Habakkuk 2:4 and this session's *emunah* word study again. *What's the "army you can't stop" in your own life right now — the place where steady trust is the only thing actually available to you?*

DAY 4

Read Matthew 14:28–31. *When has your own attention shifted from "the One who called you" to "the wind"? What happened next?*

DAY 5

Read Mark 9:23–24 aloud, slowly — especially verse 24. *Where do you need to pray that exact prayer honestly this week: "I believe; help my unbelief"?*

DAY 6

Revisit the Faith Step you wrote down in this session's Experience. *Did you take it? If not yet, what specifically is stopping you — and is that reason, or is it fear?*

Tell one other person this week what specific step of faith you're taking, and ask them to check back with you on it in seven days.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Faith

“If your faith depends entirely on the reliability of whatever you’ve placed it in, what exactly have you placed yours in — and has it ever actually held?”

THE TRUST

Pistis means trust-and-fidelity, not mental assent — Hebrews 11 calls it a settled conviction, not a feeling or a technique. Demons hold flawless theology and tremble instead of trusting, which is exactly the line James draws: real faith moves a person toward God, correct information about Him never has to.

Hebrews 11:1
James 2:17, 19

THE STEADINESS

Faith is what a real relationship runs on — trust is the only medium relationship can be built in, which is why Hebrews says it’s what God is after. Habakkuk’s emunah, the root behind “amen,” named the steady trust holding a prophet firm before an army he couldn’t stop — the same word Paul later built justification on.

Hebrews 11:6
Habakkuk 2:4
Romans 8:28

THE STEP

Faith isn’t a static possession — Peter pictures it as a chain built one link at a time, growing through hearing what God has said, repeated. Peter’s own faith grew by getting out of the boat, not by waiting for certainty, and it held only as long as his eyes stayed on the One who called him.

2 Peter 1:5–7
Romans 10:17
Matthew 14:28–31

THE EVIDENCE

Faith isn’t belief in spite of evidence — it’s trust that’s reasonable or unreasonable based entirely on its object’s track record, examined rather than assumed. Hebrews 11 doesn’t ask you to ignore evidence; it is evidence, a documented record of what this trust actually produced in real, named people’s lives.

James 2:19
Hebrews 11:1

THE TURN

Every thread in this session points the same direction: pistis’s trust over mere belief, emunah’s steady firmness under a threat that couldn’t be stopped, Peter’s eyes fixed on the One who called him rather than the wind. Faith was never the thing doing the holding — it only ever pointed to who does.

Matthew 14:28–31

SO NOW

INFORMED, NOT SAVED

Demons hold flawless theology about God and tremble instead of trusting Him. Correct belief and saving faith are not the same thing — one only ever informs you, the other has to move you.

James 2:19

OBJECT, NOT INTENSITY

Faith is reasonable or unreasonable based on what it’s placed in, never on how hard you believe it. A chair holds you because of its construction, not your confidence in it.

Hebrews 11:1

ACTION, NOT CERTAINTY

Faith grows the way Peter’s did — by getting out of the boat, not by waiting for fear to fully disappear first.

Matthew 14:29

VERB, NOT NOUN

John’s Gospel uses the verb “believe” (pisteuo) roughly 98 times and never once uses the noun “faith” (pistis). Faith was never meant to be a possession set on a shelf — it’s something you do, right now, or you don’t.

John 20:31

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Faith doesn’t sustain you. The One you place it in does.

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Next · Session 17, Kingdom Transformation.
You've learned what faith actually is and what it's aimed at. Session 17 turns to what happens next: how trust like that actually reshapes the way you think.

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17

KINGDOM TRANSFORMATION

Kingdom Essentials: The Preparation

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Renewal of the Mind

03 Meditations

04 Declarations & Confessions

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · Confessions

07 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Session 16 closed on a deliberate cliffhanger: trust has to move before it can transform anything. This session is where it moves — not first into your circumstances, but into the actual machinery of how you think.

> *"Do not be conformed to this present world, but be **transformed (μεταμορφόω) by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God — what is good and well-pleasing and perfect."*
>
> ROMANS 12:2

If your mind hasn't actually changed, has anything else you've done in this curriculum so far actually changed anything?

Identity without a renewed mind reverts to old patterns. Authority without a renewed mind gets used the way old thinking would use it. Faith without a renewed mind stays a Sunday-morning feeling that evaporates by Tuesday. This session gives you the mechanism — not a slogan about "thinking positive," but the actual biblical process for how a mind gets rebuilt.

CONSIDER THIS

Name one thought pattern that runs in the background of most of your days — a default assumption, worry, or self-talk loop you didn't consciously choose but that shapes how you respond to almost everything. Where do you think it came from?

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I don't want to just manage my old thinking — I want it actually rebuilt. Show me where my mind still runs on patterns that don't belong to who You say I am. Teach me to fill it with truth rather than simply trying to empty it of lies. In Jesus' name, amen.

Renewal of the Mind

Session 12 already gave you a full word study on *anakainōsis* — the "renewing" in Romans 12:2's own sentence, an ongoing, ordinary-word picture of a mind being made new again and again rather than fixed once. Worth returning to that study rather than repeating it here. This session's own word — sitting right next to it in the same verse — is where the real weight falls: *metamorphoō*, "transformed."

WORD STUDY

μεταμορφόω *metamorphoō* G3339

> **"transformed"** · Romans 12:2

Range. Thayer's is unusually direct about this word: it describes a change that "proceeds from an inward reality, never a mere external disguise." The English word "metamorphosis" is a direct transliteration — the same root behind the change from caterpillar to butterfly, a change in actual form, not costume.

The sense here. *Metamorphoō* occurs only four times in the entire New Testament, and the other three occurrences are worth knowing, because they tell you what kind of change Paul has in mind when he uses the word for your mind. Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2 both use it for the Transfiguration — Jesus's appearance changed before three of His disciples on a mountain, His face shining like the sun. 2 Corinthians 3:18 uses it for believers, present tense, ongoing: "being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." Paul reaches for the exact word used for Jesus visibly glowing with divine glory on a mountaintop to describe what happens, ordinarily and repeatedly, to a mind being renewed.

Why it carries the argument. This is not a small claim. Paul isn't asking you to modify a few opinions. He's telling you that the same category of change that lit up Jesus's face on the mountain is available to your mind — from the inside, not staged for an audience, and by the same means 2 Corinthians 3:18 names: beholding, not straining.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. μεταμορφόω.

ILLUSTRATION

"Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John… and led them privately up a high mountain. And he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light" (Matthew 17:1–2). Notice what didn't happen: Jesus didn't perform a brighter version of Himself for an audience. He went up a mountain privately with three friends, and what was already true about Him on the inside simply became visible. That's the pattern *metamorphoō* describes every time it's used — an inward reality

breaking the surface, not a surface applied over an unchanged inside. Romans 12:2 promises your mind the same kind of change: not performance, but an inward reality that eventually can't stay hidden.

> *"And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, which is from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 3:18**

The mechanism this verse names for ongoing transformation is deceptively simple: "beholding… the glory of the Lord." Not straining, not white-knuckling your thoughts into submission by force of will — beholding, the way attention naturally shapes a person over time whether they're trying to be shaped or not. Notice the tense, too: "being transformed," present and continuous, the same ongoing shape Session 12's *anakainōsis* study already established for "renewing." This was never going to be a one-time event for either word.

There's an everyday version of this principle that has nothing to do with Scripture and proves the same point: a person who spends years around someone they admire starts picking up that person's phrases, posture, and habits without deciding to. Attention shapes a person passively, by default, whether the object of that attention deserves the shaping or not. Paul's claim in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is that the same passive mechanism — sustained, unveiled attention — works in the other direction too, toward the glory of the Lord specifically, if that's actually where the attention goes. Which raises the obvious next question: beholding *how*, exactly, in the actual texture of an ordinary week?

PAUSE & REFLECT

Whatever you give your steady, repeated attention to shapes you, whether or not you intend it to. What has had your steadiest attention this year — and does it match what you'd actually choose if you were choosing on purpose?

Paul makes almost the identical point in a different letter, with different imagery:

> *"You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man who has been created in God's image — in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth."*
>
> **EPHESIANS 4:22-24**

Notice the clothing imagery running alongside the mind imagery: lay aside, put on. Ephesians 4:23 uses a different Greek verb than Romans 12:2's *anakainōsis* — a related but distinct word for renewal — which is itself worth noticing: the New Testament doesn't have one technical term it deploys mechanically every time it discusses a renewed mind. It has a cluster of overlapping images — transformed, renewed, put on like clothing — circling the same reality from different angles because no single metaphor exhausts what's actually happening. The consistent thread across all of them is that the change is real, not cosmetic, and that it requires something deliberately laid aside and something deliberately put on — not renewal by subtraction alone.

Meditations

> *"Instead he finds pleasure in obeying the Lord's commands; he **meditates (יֶהְגֶּה) on his commands day and night**."*
>
> **PSALM 1:2**

WORD STUDY

הָגָה *hagah* H1897

> **“meditates”** · Psalm 1:2

Range. BDB’s range is startlingly physical: growl or moan, as a lion growls low over its prey; utter or speak, often with the tongue named as the word’s subject; and, from there, ponder or muse — mental engagement with something. BDB notes the word is onomatopoetic, meaning it sounds like what it means. This is not a silent word. What the lips utter and what the mind turns over are, in *hagah*, treated as one continuous activity.

The sense here. The NET translators render this same Hebrew root two different ways in two different places — “meditates” here in Psalm 1:2, and “you must memorize it… day and night” for the identical word in Joshua 1:8, describing the same law-scroll practice. That’s not the translators disagreeing with each other. It’s the word’s actual range showing through: *hagah* meditation was never picture a mind going blank. It was a mouth moving, low and repeated, turning content over until it became part of how a person thought without having to think about it.

Why it carries the argument. This is the single most important lexical fact standing between biblical meditation and the version of “meditation” our culture most often means by the word. *Hagah* fills the mind with specific content, repeated until it’s internalized. It doesn’t empty the mind of content. That distinction is about to matter directly.

Source. BDB, s.v. הָגָה.

Picture what BDB’s own definition pictures: a lion, low over its kill, growling — not silent, not passive, fully engaged with what’s directly in front of it. That’s the register *hagah* meditation lives in. Joshua 1:8 promises success and prosperity tied to this exact practice — not as a magic formula (Session 15 already fenced that danger carefully), but because a mind continuously filled with God’s actual

words has less and less room left for the thought patterns Session 12's *anakainōsis* study already named as needing renewal.

Practically, that means *hagah* looks less like reading a chapter once and moving on, and more like taking one verse — sometimes just one phrase — and turning it over out loud, in the car, at the sink, before you fall asleep, until you could say it without looking. That's not a technique this curriculum invented. It's simply what the word already meant three thousand years before anyone needed to distinguish it from an app. Repetition of specific, chosen content is not a lesser form of engaging Scripture than fresh reading. It's the form the word "meditate" was actually describing all along.

Paul gives the New Testament's own version of a content checklist for exactly this kind of filling:

> *"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy,* ***think about these things****."*
>
> **PHILIPPIANS 4:8**

That's not a vague call to positivity. It's a deliberately specific list — true, honorable, just, pure — functioning almost like a filter a thought has to pass before it earns the kind of sustained attention *hagah* describes. Not every thought that occurs to you deserves to be meditated on. Philippians 4:8 gives you a test for which ones do.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn't "meditation" a New Age practice Christians should avoid?

The word "meditation" carries real baggage. For a lot of people, it calls up guided apps promising to empty the mind, dissolve the self, or achieve a thoughtless, content-free stillness — practices with roots in traditions that don't share Christianity's view of God, self, or truth. Avoiding the word entirely is a defensible instinct. But this session's own word study just established something

worth sitting with: the Bible got to the word “meditate” first, and it means something close to the opposite of emptying the mind.

Hagah is a filling word, not an emptying one. Biblical meditation fixes attention on specific, external, revealed content — God’s actual words — and turns it over, repeatedly, until it becomes structural rather than occasional. That’s a categorically different activity from techniques aimed at dissolving thought altogether, whatever those techniques are called. The overlap is surface-level: both involve sustained, quiet attention. The content and the goal are opposite. One empties toward nothing in particular. The other fills toward a Person.

Take a popular mindfulness app’s guided session as a concrete comparison rather than an abstraction. Many are built explicitly around “non-judgmental awareness” — noticing a thought and letting it pass without engaging its content, on the theory that the content itself isn’t what matters, only your relationship to it. That’s a coherent practice on its own terms, and plenty of people find it genuinely calming. It is nonetheless a different activity from *hagah*, not a Christian version of the same thing with different branding. *Hagah* wants you to engage the content — to chew on it, repeat it, let it change what you actually believe. Letting thoughts pass without engaging them is nearly the opposite move.

That said, the *technique* of quieting your body and slowing your breathing to focus attention isn’t itself spiritually loaded — it’s a neutral tool, the same way sitting down is a neutral posture whether you’re praying or worrying. What makes meditation biblical or not isn’t whether your body gets still. It’s what’s occupying your mind once it does.

This matters because the instinct to avoid the word “meditation” entirely, out of caution, often produces exactly the outcome Scripture warns against: a mind that defaults to whatever occupies it by accident — worry, comparison, replaying a conflict — because nothing chosen was ever put there on purpose. Avoiding a counterfeit doesn’t fill the space the counterfeit was trying to fill. Only the real practice does that, and Psalm 1 already told you what fills it: not silence for its own sake, but God’s own words, repeated until they’re structural.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where has “I don’t have time to meditate on Scripture” actually meant “I don’t have a practice for it,” rather than “it isn’t valuable”? What would *hagah* — repeated, out-loud, chewed-on engagement with a specific passage — look like in your actual week?

Declarations & Confessions

Renewed thinking doesn't stay theoretical. Paul gives the mechanism its sharpest edge in a passage about spiritual warfare — not warfare against people or circumstances, but against thought patterns themselves:

> *"For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every* ***thought*** **(νόημα)** ***captive*** *to make it obey Christ."*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 10:3–5**

WORD STUDY

νόημα *noēma* G3540

"thought" · 2 Corinthians 10:5

Range. Thayer's gives a range from mental perception or thought in general to a specific plan or purpose — sometimes, in Paul's own usage elsewhere, an *evil* purpose. It can mean a single thought or the mind itself, the faculty doing the thinking.

The sense here. Paul's military language is deliberate — "weapons," "strongholds," "arguments," "captive," "obey." He's picturing a mind under active assault by thought-patterns that have fortified themselves like an occupying

army, and he's naming the response required: not passive defense, but active, ongoing capture. A *noēma* doesn't get out-waited. It gets taken.

Why it carries the argument. This is the actual mechanism this whole session has been building toward. Renewal (*anakainōsis*, Session 12) names the change. Transformation (*metamorphoō*, above) names its depth. *Hagah* meditation names what fills the space. This verse names the fight required to clear that space in the first place — a specific thought, identified, and actively taken captive rather than simply hoped away.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. νόημα.

ILLUSTRATION

Navy pilot James Stockdale was shot down over North Vietnam in 1965 and spent more than seven years as a prisoner of war, including extended periods of torture and isolation at the camp POWs called the Hanoi Hilton. Stockdale later credited his survival partly to a discipline he'd trained deliberately, years before capture, from Stoic philosophy — actively refusing to let uncontrolled thoughts about his circumstances, or false hope about a quick release, run unchecked in his mind. He didn't wait for better circumstances to think more clearly. He disciplined specific thoughts, on purpose, under some of the worst conditions a human mind has ever had to survive.

Stockdale wasn't practicing 2 Corinthians 10:5 — his discipline came from Epictetus, not Scripture, and it's worth being honest about that rather than claiming him as something he wasn't. But the general principle he demonstrated under extraordinary duress is exactly Paul's principle under ordinary duress: an unexamined thought runs the person who won't examine it. A specific, actively contested one doesn't get to.

Notice, too, that Paul's own military language names two separate moves, not one. Verse 4 tears down "strongholds" — the fortified, entrenched patterns that took years to build, the ones this session's *Consider This* asked you to name at the very start. Verse 5 takes "every thought" captive one at a time — the individual instances a stronghold produces on a given Tuesday. A stronghold isn't dismantled by winning one argument with one thought. It's dismantled the way *hagah* meditation works: the same specific truth, returned to and spoken, until the fortified pattern has nothing left to stand on.

> Demolition and renewal, in this passage, are the same slow process viewed from two directions.

Contesting a thought is only half the mechanism. The other half is what replaces it — and that's where Session 15's word study becomes directly relevant again, applied to a new target. *Homologeō* — "agreement, not creation," as that session established — doesn't only apply to speaking promises over your circumstances. It applies just as directly to what you say about your own thinking:

> *"But if we **confess our sins**, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness."*
>
> **1 JOHN 1:9**

The same Greek word Session 15 studied at length in Romans 10:9–10 — *homologeō*, agreement with an already-established fact — is the word behind "confess" here. Confessing a sin, and confessing a distorted thought pattern the same way, isn't manufacturing a new reality any more than declaring a promise was. It's agreeing, out loud, with what's actually true — that a specific thought is a *noēma* that doesn't belong, that it needs to be taken captive rather than indulged, and that what God has already said is true whether or not the thought currently feels true. That agreement is the same act Session 15 already gave a full lexical treatment to. This session just aims it inward.

I AM NOT SAYING

I AM NOT SAYING

— that noticing your breath or sitting quietly is spiritually dangerous, that every negative or anxious thought is demonic and needs "warfare" rather than ordinary self-compassion and, where appropriate, real counsel and treatment, or that renewal happens in one dramatic confession rather than the repeated, ordinary practice this session describes.

I AM SAYING

— that your mind is not a neutral, passive container. What repeatedly occupies it shapes you, the way *hagah* meditation shapes a person over years rather than minutes, and taking specific, identifiable thoughts captive (2 Corinthians 10:5) is something Scripture asks you to actually do, not merely hope happens on its own.

Worth adding explicitly, given how much spiritual-warfare language this section uses: a persistent, distressing thought pattern is not automatically evidence of demonic activity, and treating every anxious or intrusive thought as an enemy attack requiring "warfare" can itself become a source of shame and exhaustion rather than freedom. Some thought patterns respond to Scripture and confession. Some also need a wise counselor, a doctor, or both — and seeking that help is not a failure of faith. Session 21 will address demonization directly and specifically; this session is not that session.

The Turn

You now have the actual mechanism this session set out to give you: a mind renewed (Session 12's *anakainōsis*) through transformation from the inside out (*metamorphoō*, the same word used for Jesus's own transfigured face), filled deliberately through *hagah*-style meditation rather than emptied, and actively defended by identifying specific thoughts, taking them captive, and confessing — agreeing out loud — with what's actually true instead. None of Sessions 11 through 16's material holds under pressure without this. Identity, authority, prayer, words, faith — all of it runs through the mind this session just gave you the tools to actually rebuild.

This session's opening question is worth returning to directly: if your mind hasn't actually changed, has anything else changed? The honest answer for most believers, most of the time, is that transformation stalls not for lack of information — this curriculum alone has given you sixteen sessions of it — but for lack of the ordinary, unglamorous practice this session just described. Nobody transfigures

by accident. Nobody's stronghold falls because they meant to get around to it eventually. The mechanism is available. What's left is the practicing of it.

The Experience · Confessions

This is a practice in *noēma*-capture and *homologeō*-confession, aimed at one specific thought pattern rather than your thinking in general.

Name one recurring thought — the one you identified in this session's opening *Consider This* is a good place to start. Write it down honestly, exactly as it actually sounds in your head, not a cleaned-up version of it.

> *The thought I keep having is:*
>
> _____

Now take it captive — name specifically what makes it a *noēma* that doesn't belong, rather than simply true:

> *What's actually true instead is:*
>
> _____
>
> *(Scripture reference: _____)*

Speak the second line aloud, once, slowly, as a confession rather than a wish — agreement with what God has said, the same *homologeō* posture Session 15 already practiced. Then practice *hagah*: return to that same verse at least once a day this week, out loud, until it's occupying the space the old thought used to run in unchallenged.

For example, if the thought you named was some version of "I'll never actually change," the *noēma*-capture might read: "That thought is fear disguised as realism — it treats my past as a life sentence rather than as something God is actively transforming, and it ignores every session this curriculum has already walked through." The confession that replaces it might be 2 Corinthians 3:18 itself, spoken as agreement rather than aspiration: "I am being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another — that is happening to me right now, whether I feel it happening or not." The specificity is what makes this different from a vague, feel-better affirmation. You are naming an actual lie and answering it with an actual verse, out loud, more than once.

BIG IDEAS

1. *Metamorphoō* — the word for your renewed mind — is the same word used for Jesus's Transfiguration: an inward reality

becoming visible, not a performance staged for an audience.

2. Biblical meditation (*hagah*) fills the mind with specific content, repeated aloud — it does not empty the mind the way many secular meditation techniques aim to.
3. 2 Corinthians 10:5 gives the actual mechanism: identify the thought, take it captive, make it obey Christ — not passive waiting.
4. Confession (*homologeō*) applies to your thought patterns exactly the way Session 15 applied it to your words — agreement with truth, not creation of a new reality.
5. None of this works as one dramatic moment. It's a repeated practice, the same as Session 16's faith and Session 12's identity.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don't clear your mind. You fill it with truth until the lie can't fit.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, transform me from the inside the way You transfigured Jesus on the mountain — not a performance, just what's already true becoming visible. Teach me to meditate the way Scripture means it: filled, not emptied. Show me the specific thoughts that need to be taken captive this week, and give me the confession to speak in their place. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

James Stockdale's own account of his captivity, referenced in this session's illustration — widely available through Stanford Magazine's profile of him and his own published reflections on Stoic philosophy under duress.
A secular parallel worth reading with discernment — real discipline of thought under extreme conditions, from a source outside Scripture.

SUBSTANTIAL

Any solid devotional commentary on Psalm 1 or Joshua 1:8 that engages *hagah* directly as a practice, not just a concept.
Look specifically for treatments that connect the word's physical, vocal sense — muttering, repeating aloud — to an actual weekly rhythm, not only a mental one.

ACADEMIC

A Greek lexicon entry (Thayer's or BDAG) for *metamorphoō*, read alongside all four New Testament occurrences side by side — Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:2, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18.
Reading all four together, as this session did, is the single clearest way to see what Paul actually meant by "transformed."

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Romans 12:1–2 slowly, aloud. *Where in your life is "conformed to this present world" a more accurate description of your thinking than you'd like to admit?*

DAY 2

Read Matthew 17:1–2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 together. *What does it change to know the word for your own renewal is the same word used for Jesus's transfigured face?*

DAY 3

Read Psalm 1:1–3 aloud, slowly, more than once. *What would it look like, practically, to "meditate" — in* hagah's* sense — on one verse this week rather than reading many verses once?*

DAY 4

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3–5. *Name one specific "stronghold" — a repeated thought pattern that's fortified itself over time. What would taking it captive actually look like this week?*

DAY 5

Read 1 John 1:9 and revisit this session's Experience. *Did you speak your confession aloud, or only write it down? What's the difference for you between the two?*

DAY 6

Practice this session's Experience again, with a second recurring thought. *What pattern, if any, connects the two thoughts you've now worked through?*

Tell one person this week which specific thought you're taking captive, and ask them to ask you about it again in seven days.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Transformation

“If your mind hasn’t actually changed, has anything else you’ve done in this curriculum so far actually changed anything?”

THE UNVEILING

Metamorphoō — the same word used for Jesus’s face shining on the mountain — describes a change from the inside out, never a performance staged for an audience. Paul names the mechanism as beholding, not straining: sustained attention that reshapes a person the way it reshaped Jesus’s own appearance before three friends.

Romans 12:2
Matthew 17:1–2
2 Corinthians 3:18

THE FILLING

Hagah — biblical meditation — is a filling word, not an emptying one: a mouth moving, low and repeated, turning God’s actual words over until they become structural rather than occasional. Philippians 4:8 gives the filter for what earns that kind of sustained attention in the first place.

Psalm 1:2
Joshua 1:8
Philippians 4:8

THE CONTENT

Biblical meditation and mindfulness techniques share a surface — quiet, sustained attention — but point opposite directions: one empties toward nothing in particular, the other fills toward a Person. Quieting your body isn’t the spiritually loaded part; what occupies your mind once it’s still is.

Psalm 1:2

THE CAPTIVE

Paul’s mechanism for renewal has teeth: identify a specific thought, take it captive, make it obey Christ — not passive waiting for a stronghold to erode on its own. Confessing a distorted thought pattern is the same homologeō agreement Session 15 gave to spoken promises, just aimed inward at what’s actually true.

2 Corinthians 10:3–5
1 John 1:9

THE TURN

A mind renewed from the inside out, filled deliberately rather than emptied, and defended by naming specific thoughts and confessing what’s actually true — that’s the whole mechanism this session gave you. Nobody transfigures by accident, and no stronghold falls because someone meant to get around to it eventually.

Romans 12:2

SO NOW

INWARD, NOT STAGED

The word for your renewed mind is the same word used for Jesus’s face shining on the mountain — an inward reality breaking the surface, not a performance staged for anyone watching.

Matthew 17:1–2

FILLED, NOT EMPTIED

Biblical meditation fixes attention on specific, repeated content until it becomes structural — it doesn’t dissolve thought, it fills the space thought already occupies.

Psalm 1:2

CAPTURED, NOT IGNORED

A specific thought gets named and taken captive to obey Christ — it doesn’t get out-waited, and it doesn’t get to run unexamined.

2 Corinthians 10:5

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don’t clear your mind. You fill it with truth until the lie can’t fit.

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Next · Session 18, Freedom & Forgiveness.
You've learned to identify and replace the thoughts that run unchecked. Session 18 turns to something a renewed mind eventually has to face directly: the wounds and unforgiveness that put some of those thoughts there in the first place.

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FREEDOM & FORGIVENESS

Kingdom Essentials: The Preparation

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Forgiveness

03 Restoration

04 Release

05 Self-Care

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Substitutional Forgiveness

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Everyone reading this has been wronged by someone — a parent, a spouse, a friend, a stranger who never even knew what they cost you. Scripture doesn't pretend that away. It asks something harder than pretending:

> *"You must put away every kind of bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling, and evil, slanderous talk. Instead, be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you."*
>
> **EPHESIANS 4:31–32**

If forgiveness is genuinely as costly as it feels, why does Scripture command it so directly, so often, with so little apparent patience for our objections?

Jesus named freedom as the whole shape of His own mission, not a side benefit of it, in the very first sermon He ever preached:

> *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*
>
> **LUKE 4:18-19**

Read all five clauses together, rather than the two that happen to sound most like this session’s own topic, and a single pattern emerges: every one of them names a different kind of bondage broken — the poor’s spiritual lack, the captive’s circumstance, the blind man’s body, the oppressed person’s affliction, and the Jubilee debtor’s entire financial and generational history, canceled on a fixed calendar rather than left to chance. Freedom from bondage isn’t two clauses out of five in Jesus’ own mission statement. It’s the whole sentence, five times over, aimed at five different kinds of chains. This session is about what that freedom actually requires: forgiveness as a decision, restoration as what follows it, release as the ongoing practice of not re-picking up what was already put down, and self-care as something Scripture treats as legitimate rather than indulgent.

CONSIDER THIS

Name one person you’re still carrying resentment toward, even in a small way. You don’t have to write their name down anywhere permanent — just let yourself be honest, for a moment, about who it is.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I don’t want to manage my resentment. I want to actually put it down. Show me what forgiveness really requires of me, and what it doesn’t. Give me the courage to release what I’ve been carrying, and

> *the honesty to admit what I haven't yet. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Forgiveness

> *"For if you **forgive** (ἀφῆτε) **others their sins**, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins."*
>
> **MATTHEW 6:14–15**

WORD STUDY

ἀφίημι *aphiēmi* G863

> **"forgive"** · Matthew 6:14

Range. Thayer's gives the literal, physical sense first: "to send away, to bid go away or depart," built from *apo* ("away from") and *hiēmi* ("send"). From that concrete root, the range extends to letting go of a debt "by not demanding it" — which is exactly the financial metaphor the Lord's Prayer itself uses two verses earlier ("forgive us our debts").

The sense here. Forgiveness, in the word's own root sense, is a release — sending something away, refusing to keep demanding payment for it. It is not a feeling you wait to arrive. It's closer to a legal or financial act: canceling a debt that was genuinely owed, on purpose, by decision.

Why it carries the argument. Because *aphiēmi* is a decision-word rather than a feeling-word, Matthew 6:14–

15’s stakes make a kind of sense that “just feel differently about it” never could. Jesus can command something you decide. He couldn’t fairly command a feeling. That distinction is the hinge this entire section turns on.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. ἀφίημι.

That’s not just a thematic echo of this session’s opening quote. It’s the same word. The Greek behind “release to the captives” and “those who are oppressed… set free” in Luke 4:18 is *aphesis* (G859) — the noun form of *aphiēmi* (G863), the very verb this word study just examined. Jesus reached for the same root to describe freeing a prisoner that Matthew 6:14 uses for canceling a debt. In the language Jesus Himself preached in, forgiveness and freedom aren’t two topics that happen to share a session title. They’re one word, applied twice.

That distinction matters because forgiveness gets confused, constantly, with two things it isn’t. It isn’t excusing what happened — *aphiēmi* assumes a real debt, genuinely owed, not a pretense that nothing happened. Colossians 3:13 makes the same assumption explicit: “bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if someone happens to have a complaint against anyone else” — the complaint is real, named, not minimized, and forgiven anyway.

Forgiveness also isn’t the same thing as reconciliation or restored trust. You can release a debt in full and still, wisely, choose not to hand your keys back to the person who stole your car. A parent can forgive an estranged adult child completely and still, prudently, keep firm boundaries around what access that relationship gets going forward. Forgiveness is what you do with the debt, settled between you and God regardless of what the other person ever does with it. Trust is a separate question, answered by evidence and time, not granted automatically the moment forgiveness happens — a distinction this session’s *Not Saying* returns to directly, because collapsing the two has caused real, avoidable harm in situations where safety, not sentiment, should have been the deciding factor.

ILLUSTRATION

In 1947, Corrie ten Boom — a Dutch Christian who, with her sister Betsie, had been imprisoned at the Ravensbrück concentration camp for hiding Jews from the Nazis, and who watched Betsie die there — was speaking at a church in Munich when a man approached her afterward. “It was in a church in Munich that I saw him,” she later wrote, “and the recognition came flooding back.” He had been a guard at Ravensbrück. He didn’t remember her specifically; he only knew what he had done there, and he asked for her forgiveness, his hand extended.

She described what happened next with total honesty rather than a tidy ending: “I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity.” She prayed silently — not for a feeling, but for the ability to do what *aphiēmi* actually asks: “Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness.” She took his hand. She later wrote that the healing of the world never depended on her own capacity to forgive any more than it depended on her own goodness — it depended on Christ’s, “and He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

Notice what her account doesn’t claim. She didn’t say the feeling came first and the handshake followed. The decision came first, made without the feeling anywhere in sight, exactly the way a decision-word like *aphiēmi* would predict.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where have you been waiting for a feeling to change before you’d consider a decision made? What would it look like to make the decision first, the way Corrie ten Boom’s hand moved before her heart caught up?

Restoration

Forgiveness releases a debt. It doesn’t, by itself, rebuild what the debt cost you. Scripture promises something more than release — actual restoration of what was lost:

> *“I will **restore (שִׁלַּמְתִּי) to you the years that the locust has consumed** — my great army that I sent against you.”*
>
> **JOEL 2:25**

WORD STUDY

שָׁלַם *shalam* H7999

> **“restore”** · Joel 2:25

Range. BDB’s range runs from “be safe” and “be complete” through “make whole or good” to “restore a thing lost” and “pay a debt, requite.” This is the same root behind *shalom* — peace, but a much fuller peace than the absence of conflict: wholeness, completeness, nothing missing and nothing broken.

The sense here. God isn’t merely promising Israel a good harvest next year. He’s promising to pay back — the same transactional weight *aphiēmi* carried for forgiveness — the actual years the locusts destroyed. Restoration, in this word’s own range, isn’t starting over from zero. It’s God settling accounts on time that felt permanently lost.

Why it carries the argument. Restoration shares its root with *shalom* for a reason: what God restores isn’t only the specific thing that was taken, but wholeness itself — the same completeness *shalom* names elsewhere in the Old Testament. Forgiveness that stops at release, without any hope of restoration, is only half of what Scripture actually promises the person who forgives.

ILLUSTRATION

Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery — a real debt, genuinely owed, the kind *aphiēmi* assumes rather than pretends away. Decades later, reunited with them in Egypt with the power to destroy them, he said instead: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Now, do not be upset and do not be angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me ahead of you to preserve life” (Genesis 45:4–5). And later, after their father’s death, when the brothers feared he’d been merely waiting to take revenge: “You meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could

preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day… I will provide for you and your little children" (Genesis 50:20–21).

Notice both movements in the same story. Forgiveness — Joseph released a debt that was real, not imagined. And restoration — he didn't stop at forgiving; he actively provided for the very people who'd wronged him, turning what was meant for harm into the years he'd been given the position to restore. Joseph's story is *shalam* in narrative form: the years the pit and the false imprisonment took were not merely forgiven. They were made to pay back more than they'd cost.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What's something you've written off as permanently lost because of what someone did to you? What would it change to actually ask God for Joel 2:25's promise over that specific loss, by name?

Release

Forgiveness is a decision, made once, about a specific debt. Release is what keeps that decision from quietly reversing itself the next time the memory resurfaces — which it will. Jesus made clear this isn't a one-time transaction:

> *"Then Peter came to him and said, 'Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother who sins against me? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times!'"*
>
> **MATTHEW 18:21–22**

Jesus isn't giving Peter a number to count to. He's telling him the counting itself is the wrong frame — forgiveness isn't a finite resource you eventually exhaust your obligation to extend. The old memory will resurface. The question isn't whether it comes back, but what you do the next time it does.

This is exactly where Session 17's material becomes directly useful again, applied to a specific target: the memory that resurfaces is a *noēma*, in that session's own terms — a thought that doesn't get to run unchallenged just because it's familiar. Taking it captive here looks like re-confessing what's already true — "I already forgave this; I'm not reopening the account" — using the same *homologeō* posture Session 15 established, agreement with a decision already made rather than a debate to be relitigated every time the feeling returns.

Paul gives this ongoing practice its own language, distinct from the initial decision:

> *"Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead, with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*
>
> **PHILIPPIANS 3:13–14**

"Forgetting" here isn't memory failure — Paul remembered his own past with total clarity elsewhere in his letters, naming his own former violence against the church by name (1 Timothy 1:13). It's a decision, repeated, not to let what's behind set the direction of what's ahead. Release is Philippians 3:13 practiced specifically on the debts you've already forgiven: not forgetting they happened, but refusing to let them keep steering.

Practically, this is where Sessions 15 and 17's tools become genuinely useful rather than abstract. When the old memory resurfaces — and Matthew 18:22 already told you to expect it to, repeatedly — that's the moment for the exact sequence this curriculum has already built: name the *noēma* specifically (Session 17), and speak the settled fact aloud rather than relitigate it (*homologeō*, Session 15). "I already forgave this. I'm not reopening the account" is not denial. It's the same agreement-with-an-already-established-fact this curriculum has practiced twice already, aimed now at your own memory instead of at a promise or a lie.

PAUSE & REFLECT

When an old wound resurfaces, what do you usually do with it — replay it, or re-release it? What would "seventy-seven times," practiced honestly, actually look

like for the specific person you named at the start of this session?

Self-Care

Freedom from what someone else did to you and freedom to actually rest are not two separate topics, whatever our culture's version of "self-care" sometimes implies. Scripture shows God attending to a person's exhausted body before addressing the crisis underneath it:

> *"He stretched out and fell asleep under the shrub. All of a sudden an angelic messenger touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.'"*
>
> **1 KINGS 19:5**

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Elijah had just won the single greatest public victory of his ministry — fire from heaven on Mount Carmel, the prophets of Baal defeated, rain finally breaking a three-year drought. Days later, one threat from Jezebel sent him fleeing into the desert, praying to die: "I've had enough! Now, O Lord, take my life. After all, I'm no better than my ancestors" (1 Kings 19:4). God's response wasn't a theology lecture. An angel woke him twice — to eat, and to sleep again — before anything else happened. Only after Elijah had been fed and rested twice over did God ask him the actual question underneath the collapse: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9). The spiritual crisis was real. God addressed the body first anyway, and the text doesn't apologize for the order.

Jesus modeled the same order with His own exhausted disciples: "Come with me privately to an isolated place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31) — spoken, notably, in the middle of urgent, needed ministry, not after it was finished. Rest wasn't what they got once the work was done. It was what made the next round of it

sustainable. Self-care, in this sense, isn't a modern import layered onto Scripture — it's what God did for Elijah and what Jesus told His own closest friends to do, as a matter of course, in the middle of real spiritual crisis and real ministry demand.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn't it unfair to ask me to confess or repent for what my parents did?

This session's Experience below asks you to name specific family patterns honestly and, where appropriate, stand in the gap and confess them — language this curriculum describes as "standing in the place of your parents." That raises a real and fair objection before you're asked to do it: doesn't Scripture itself say a person isn't punished for their parents' sin?

> *"The person who sins is the one who will die. A son will not suffer for his father's iniquity, and a father will not suffer for his son's iniquity."*
>
> **EZEKIEL 18:20**

That's unambiguous, and this session isn't asking you around it. You did not sin when your parent sinned. You do not bear their guilt before God. Nothing about this session's Experience asks you to claim otherwise. But Ezekiel 18 sits alongside a different, older statement that also has to be taken seriously rather than quietly dropped:

> *"I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, responding to the transgression of fathers by dealing with children to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me."*
>
> **EXODUS 20:5**

Read the actual condition in that sentence: “of those who reject me” — not automatically, not regardless of the child’s own choices, but specifically describing children who continue the same rejection their parents modeled. The two texts aren’t actually in tension once read carefully. Ezekiel 18 forecloses inherited *guilt*. Exodus 20:5 describes inherited *pattern* — the observable, well-documented reality that what a parent modeled, a child is statistically far more likely to repeat, not because God assigns the child blame for it, but because patterns propagate through families whether or not anyone intends them to.

Daniel gives the biblical model for what to do with that reality without claiming guilt that isn’t yours: “we have sinned! We have done what is wrong and wicked” (Daniel 9:5) — spoken by a man whose own personal integrity Scripture never once questions, confessing corporately, identifying with a nation’s pattern he did not personally commit. Daniel wasn’t confessing his own guilt. He was naming a true pattern, out loud, and refusing to let it continue unaddressed in his own generation. That is precisely — and only — what this session’s Experience asks of you: not guilt for what isn’t yours, but honest naming of a pattern, and a decision that it stops with you.

I AM NOT SAYING

I AM NOT SAYING

— that you are guilty for your parents’ sin (Ezekiel 18:20 settles that directly), that every family struggle traces back to a “generational curse” needing this specific kind of prayer (Session 20 addresses generational patterns directly and will give the language its own careful treatment), or that forgiving someone obligates you to reconcile with them, trust them again, or place yourself back in a relationship that isn’t currently safe.

I AM SAYING

— that forgiveness releases a debt without requiring you to pretend a real wrong didn’t happen, that release is a repeated practice rather than a single transaction, and that naming an honest pattern in your own family,

> the way Daniel named Israel's, is not the same thing as accepting personal blame for what someone else chose.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Is there a pattern in your own family — not a specific sin you're claiming guilt for, but an observable pattern — worth naming honestly the way Daniel named Israel's, rather than continuing to carry unnamed?

The Turn

You now have what this session set out to give you: forgiveness as a decision (*aphiēmi*, released before the feeling arrives, the way Corrie ten Boom's hand moved before her heart did), restoration as what follows it (*shalam*, God settling accounts on time you thought was permanently lost, the way Joseph's own position restored what the pit had taken), release as the ongoing practice that keeps the decision from quietly reversing (seventy-seven times, not once), and self-care as something Scripture itself modeled rather than a modern indulgence layered on top of it.

None of that requires you to accept guilt that was never yours. It requires you to name what's actually true, decide what forgiveness actually asks, and keep re-deciding it every time the memory comes back around.

The Experience · Substitutional Forgiveness

This is a guided practice in naming a real pattern honestly and releasing it — not in claiming guilt that belongs to someone else.

Think of the specific person you named in this session's opening *Consider This*. If a family pattern is part of what you're carrying — something modeled by a parent or grandparent that you've either repeated or actively fought not to repeat — name it specifically now:

> *The pattern I'm naming is:*
>
> _____

Following Daniel's model, not a claim of personal guilt: speak this aloud, quietly, as an honest acknowledgment rather than a confession of your own sin —

> *"Father, I name this pattern honestly, the way Daniel named Israel's — not claiming their guilt as mine, but refusing to let what I didn't choose keep choosing for me. I release _____ [the specific person] from the debt they owe me. I ask You to restore what that pattern has cost me — the years, the trust, the peace — the way You restored the years the locust ate. And I ask You to help me not pick this back up the next time the memory returns."*

If nothing about your own situation involves a family pattern, use the same prayer for the specific person and specific debt you named at the start of this session instead — the structure works the same way: name it honestly, release the debt, ask for restoration, and expect to need to repeat it.

BIG IDEAS

1. *Aphiēmi* — forgiveness — is a decision-word, not a feeling-word: a debt sent away, released on purpose, the way Corrie ten Boom's hand moved before her heart caught up.
2. *Shalam* — restoration — shares its root with *shalom*: God doesn't only forgive; He restores the actual years and trust a wound cost you.
3. Release is repeated, not singular — "seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:22), the same *noēma*-capture practice Session 17 already gave you, aimed at an old memory instead of a new lie.
4. Ezekiel 18 and Exodus 20:5 aren't in tension: you don't inherit guilt for a parent's sin, but you can inherit a pattern worth naming honestly, the way Daniel named Israel's.
5. Self-care isn't a modern indulgence — God fed and rested Elijah twice before addressing his crisis, and Jesus told His own exhausted disciples to do the same.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Forgiveness releases the debt. Restoration pays back the years. Both are promises, not just decisions.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You that forgiveness doesn't wait for a feeling to arrive before it's real. Where I've confused forgiving with excusing, or with rebuilding trust I'm not ready to rebuild, give me clarity. Where I'm carrying a family pattern I never chose, help me name it honestly the way Daniel did, without claiming a guilt that isn't mine. Restore what's actually been lost, and teach me to release what I've forgiven every time it tries to come back. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (1971).
Her own full account of Ravensbrück and the encounter with the guard this session's illustration draws from — the fuller story behind the summary given here.

SUBSTANTIAL

Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget* (1984).
A widely respected pastoral treatment of forgiveness as decision rather than feeling, including the forgiveness/reconciliation distinction this session draws directly.

ACADEMIC

A commentary treatment of Ezekiel 18 alongside Exodus 20:5–6 — most standard critical commentaries on either book address the apparent tension directly.
Worth reading both passages' full context rather than the two verses in isolation, the way this session's What About handled them.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Ephesians 4:31–32 slowly, aloud. *Where has "put away" felt more like "suppress" than an actual release, up to now?*

DAY 2

Read Genesis 45:4–8 and 50:19–21. *What would it change to actually believe God intends to bring good out of what was done to you — not that the wrong wasn't real, but that it isn't the end of the story?*

DAY 3

Read Matthew 18:21–22 and Philippians 3:13–14 together. *Which old memory keeps needing to be released more than once? What does "seventy-seven times" look like for that one, specifically?*

DAY 4

Read 1 Kings 19:3–9 in full. *Where in your own life has a spiritual or emotional crisis actually been, at least partly, an exhausted body that needed food and sleep before anything else?*

DAY 5

Read Ezekiel 18:19–20 and Daniel 9:4–5 together. *Is there a family pattern worth naming honestly, the way Daniel named Israel's — without claiming guilt that isn't yours?*

DAY 6

Revisit this session's Experience. *Did you speak the release prayer aloud? What, if anything, changed between writing it and saying it?*

Tell one trusted person this week who you're working to forgive — not the full story if it isn't theirs to hear, just the fact that you're doing the work.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Arc and timing (90 minutes). Forgiveness and Restoration carry the session's theological weight; budget real time there. Release and Self-Care move faster — most groups nod along quickly with "rest matters" and "forgiveness isn't one-time." The *What About* and the Experience are where this session actually lives or dies; don't compress either one to make up time elsewhere.

Where the room stalls. Someone will likely go quiet during the Corrie ten Boom illustration or the Joseph illustration — both stories involve real, severe harm, and a person currently carrying something of similar weight may not be ready to hear "forgive" spoken lightly. Don't rush past that silence. Say explicitly, before the Experience begins: forgiveness does not mean reconciliation, does not mean the relationship has to be restored, and does not mean minimizing what happened. Someone may also resist the *What About*'s family-pattern language specifically because they were taught, elsewhere, a version of "generational curse" theology that assigned them direct guilt for a parent's or grandparent's sin — be ready to hold Ezekiel 18:20 clearly and gently for that person.

The ministry moment. This is the most emotionally weighted Experience so far in the curriculum. If your group is comfortable with it, offer the Experience prayer individually or in pairs rather than aloud together — this is not material for a single leader praying one prayer over the whole room. Have tissues visible before you start; treat their presence as ordinary, not as a sign something has gone wrong. If someone discloses abuse or ongoing danger during this session, do not treat it as

a forgiveness-teaching moment — pause, listen, and follow your church's or group's safety and reporting protocols; this session is not a substitute for that.

Discussion questions, if you need more than the Pause & Reflect prompts:

1. Where's the line, for you, between forgiving someone and trusting them again? Has this session changed where you'd draw it?
2. Elijah got food and sleep before he got answers. Where in your own life have you tried to skip that order?
3. What's one family pattern — not a specific person's specific sin, just an observable pattern — you'd be willing to name honestly in a small group like this one?

What to cut if you're behind. The Self-Care section's Mark 6:31 cross-reference can be mentioned in one sentence rather than developed — 1 Kings 19 alone carries the section's full weight. Do not cut the *What About* or its Ezekiel 18 / Exodus 20:5 resolution; skipping it leaves the Experience feeling like it's asking for something Scripture forbids, which is exactly the misreading this session works hardest to prevent.

Freedom & Forgiveness

“If forgiveness is genuinely as costly as it feels, why does Scripture command it so directly, so often, with so little apparent patience for our objections?”



THE DEBT

Forgiveness (*aphiēmi*) is a decision-word, not a feeling-word — sending a real, genuinely-owed debt away on purpose, the way Corrie ten Boom’s hand moved toward her former guard before her heart caught up.

Matthew 6:14–15
Colossians 3:13

THE REPAYMENT

Restoration (*shalam*) shares its root with *shalom*: God doesn’t only forgive a debt, He pays back the actual years it cost — the way Joseph’s position let him provide for the brothers who sold him.

Joel 2:25
Genesis 45:4–5

THE RELEASE

Forgiveness is a decision made once; release is the repeated practice that keeps it from quietly reversing when the memory resurfaces — “seventy-seven times,” not a number to count to.

Matthew 18:21–22
Philippians 3:13–14

THE REST

Self-care isn’t a modern indulgence layered onto Scripture — God fed and rested Elijah twice before addressing his crisis, and Jesus told His own exhausted disciples to do the same.

1 Kings 19:5
Mark 6:31

THE TURN

None of this requires accepting guilt that was never yours. It requires naming what’s actually true, deciding what forgiveness asks, and putting away bitterness for the compassion God in Christ already extended to you.

Ephesians 4:31–32

SO NOW

DECISION, NOT FEELING

Forgiveness is something you decide, on purpose, before any feeling arrives to confirm it — not a state you passively wait to feel your way into.

Matthew 6:14

RESTORED, NOT JUST RELEASED

God doesn’t stop at canceling the debt. He promises to pay back what it actually cost you — the years, the trust, the peace.

Joel 2:25

REPEATED, NOT SINGULAR

The old memory will resurface. Release is what you do the next time it does, not a box you check once and never open again.

Matthew 18:22

MODELED, NOT INDULGENT

Rest isn’t a modern add-on to discipleship. God fed and rested Elijah before He addressed the crisis underneath his collapse.

1 Kings 19:5

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Forgiveness releases the debt. Restoration pays back the years. Both are promises, not just decisions.

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Next · Session 19, Agreements & Strongholds.
You've learned to release what was done to you. Session 19 turns to something related but distinct: the agreements you may have made — knowingly or not — in response to it, and the strongholds those agreements can build.

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19

AGREEMENTS & STRONGHOLDS

Kingdom Essentials: The Preparation

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Agreements

03 Strongholds

04 The Enemy’s Characteristics

05 The Enemy’s Names

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Break Strongholds

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Most people assume a stronghold gets built the way a fortress does — deliberately, brick by brick, on purpose. Scripture describes something closer to a handshake you don’t remember making.

> *“Again, I tell you the truth, if two of you on earth* ***agree*** **(συμφωνήσωσιν)** ***about whatever you ask****, my Father in heaven will do it for you.”*
>
> **MATTHEW 18:19**

If agreement carries that much weight when it’s spoken on purpose toward God, what happens when the exact same mechanism runs unnoticed toward a lie?

Every stronghold this session describes starts the same way every answered prayer in Matthew 18:19 starts — with agreement. The difference isn’t the

mechanism. It's what's being agreed to, and whether you knew you were agreeing at all.

CONSIDER THIS

Complete this sentence honestly, with the first thing that comes to mind: "I'm just the kind of person who _____." Don't edit it. You'll come back to it.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, show me what I've agreed to without ever deciding to. I don't want a lie's fingerprints on my life just because I never noticed them there. Teach me to recognize the enemy's voice, and give me the courage to withdraw every agreement that doesn't belong. In Jesus' name, amen.

Agreements

WORD STUDY

συμφωνέω *symphōneō* G4856

> **"agree"** · Matthew 18:19

Range. Built from *syn* ("together with") and *phōnē* ("sound, voice") — the direct root of the English word "symphony." Thayer's literal sense is musical: "to sound together, be in accord," of instruments or voices actually

harmonizing. From there the range extends to being “in accord,” “like-minded,” and — notably — striking a bargain: “to agree with one in making a bargain.”

The sense here. *Symphōneō* isn’t primarily an intellectual word — agreeing that a fact is true. It’s a harmony word: two things sounding the same note, whether or not either one consciously chose the pitch. Matthew 18:19 uses it for prayer partners deliberately aligning their request. But the same word for “sounding together” doesn’t require both parties to know they’re doing it — a single sustained note and an echo are also, technically, in accord.

Why it carries the argument. This is the lexical key to why a stronghold rarely feels like a decision. You don’t have to consciously choose to harmonize with a lie the way Matthew 18:19’s prayer partners consciously chose to harmonize with each other. You only have to keep sounding the same note it does, long enough, without noticing there’s a difference between your voice and its.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. συμφωνέω.

Not every agreement is a spoken bargain like Matthew 18:19’s. Scripture shows agreements made explicitly with God (“I trust you to heal me”), agreements made with other people (a vow, a promise, Numbers 30:2’s binding pledge), and agreements made with neither — silent, internal, and every bit as real:

ILLUSTRATION

Ananias sold a piece of property, and “with his wife’s knowledge” kept back part of the proceeds while claiming to give the whole amount (Acts 5:1–2). Peter’s question to him names the actual mechanism directly: “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” (Acts 5:3). Nobody handed Ananias a contract to sign. He made an agreement anyway — with a lie about how much generosity actually cost, sounded together with a father of lies until his own voice and its had become indistinguishable. When his wife Sapphira repeated the same lie moments later, Peter’s words to her are just as direct: “Why have you agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?”

(Acts 5:9). *Symphōneō*, or a close relative of it — agreement, harmonized, catastrophically, without either of them ever signing anything.

Most agreements are far less dramatic than Ananias and Sapphira's, and far more common. "She's just shy." "I'm not very organized." "I'm not gifted enough to share my faith." Said often enough, out loud or only in your own head, each one is *symphōneō* in miniature — your own voice gradually harmonizing with a note you never consciously chose to sing.

Paul names the stakes of that kind of harmonizing in stark, architectural language:

> *"Do not become partners with those who do not believe, for what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship does light have with darkness? And what agreement does Christ have with Beliar?… And what mutual agreement does the temple of God have with idols? For we are the temple of the living God."*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 6:14–16**

The image is deliberate: you are a temple, and a temple can only house one presence at a time without contradiction. Every agreement — spoken aloud in a bargain, whispered internally about who you "just are," or simply repeated often enough to stop sounding like a claim — is a small act of either housing that presence more fully or splitting the temple's loyalty between it and something that has no legitimate agreement with it at all. Amos frames the same principle as an observation about ordinary life rather than a command: "Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?" (Amos 3:3). Your daily, actual walk — not your stated beliefs, but the pattern of your days — is itself a running record of who and what you're currently in agreement with, whether or not you'd choose to put it in writing.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Look back at the sentence you completed in this session's opening *Consider This*. Is it something true about you, or something you've simply agreed with often enough that it stopped sounding like a claim and started sounding like a fact?

Strongholds

An agreement, repeated, builds something. Paul names both the weapon and the target directly:

> *"For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down* ***strongholds*** **(ὀχυρωμάτων)***."*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 10:3–4**

WORD STUDY

ὀχύρωμα *ochurōma* G3794

> **"stronghold"** · 2 Corinthians 10:4

Range. Thayer's gives the literal military sense first: a castle, fortress, fastness — a physical structure built to withstand exactly the kind of assault Paul describes bringing against it. Figuratively, Thayer's extends the word to "anything on which one relies" — specifically the arguments and reasonings a person uses "to fortify his opinion and defend it against his opponent."

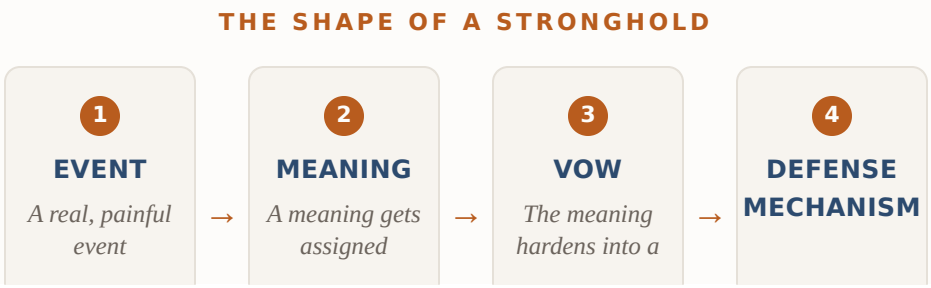
The sense here. Paul isn't picturing a passing thought. He's picturing a fortified position — something built deliberately over time to withstand challenge, the same way

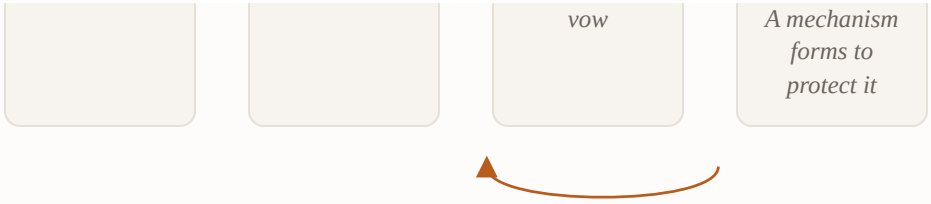
a literal fortress is built to withstand a siege. Session 17 already gave you the word for the individual thought this passage also names (*noēma*, “we take every thought captive”). *Ochurōma* is the structure those thoughts have built together, brick by repeated brick.

Why it carries the argument. A fortress isn’t dismantled by winning one argument at its gate. It’s dismantled the way real sieges actually work — sustained pressure against a specific, identified structure, not a vague hope that it eventually falls. Naming the *ochurōma* specifically — not “I struggle with self-doubt” but the actual agreement underneath it — is the difference between hoping a fortress falls and actually tearing it down.

Source. Thayer’s, s.v. ὀχύρωμα.

A stronghold has a predictable shape, worth knowing before you go looking for your own. It starts with a real, painful event — an offense, a rejection, a genuine wound. From there, a person assigns the event a meaning, usually shaped by pain rather than truth: not just “that hurt” but “that’s what I am now” or “that’s what people are.” That meaning hardens into an inner vow — an unspoken decision, sometimes barely conscious, that sounds like “I will never trust anyone again” or “I will never let myself need anyone.” And the vow produces a defense mechanism that protects against the pain in the short term while quietly reinforcing the whole structure every time it’s used: numbing the feeling rather than processing it, avoiding relationships that could reopen the wound, becoming the person who judges the offender’s category rather than the offense itself, staying in circumstances that underuse real gifts because visibility itself feels dangerous, or losing hours to something that reliably distracts from the discomfort of feeling it at all. None of these mechanisms look irrational from inside the fortress. Each one is doing exactly the job it was built to do — which is precisely why the fortress keeps standing long after the original threat is gone.





Reinforces the vow every time it runs — the wall doesn't need a new event to grow stronger.

ILLUSTRATION

Picture a composite, ordinary version of this — not a specific person, but a pattern common enough to be almost universal. Someone is falsely accused of something at work. The event is real and the injustice is real. From there: "People can't be trusted" becomes the meaning assigned to it. The inner vow follows close behind: "I won't let anyone get close enough to do that to me again." The defense mechanism arrives to protect the vow — quiet withdrawal from every relationship that starts to feel like it's heading toward real trust. Years later, the person wonders, honestly and painfully, why they feel so alone — never quite connecting the isolation to the fortress they built, one reasonable-sounding decision at a time, to protect themselves from a single false accusation that happened once, a long time ago.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Trace your own version of that same shape, as honestly as you can: What was the event? What meaning did you assign it? What vow followed? What defense mechanism has that vow been running ever since? If you can't recall a specific event, pray something like this: "Holy Spirit, bring to my mind a time when I believed a lie resulting in a stronghold?"

The Enemy's Characteristics

Knowing the shape of a stronghold only helps if you also know who's fortifying it. Scripture doesn't leave that vague.

ILLUSTRATION

"A man with an unclean spirit came from the tombs and met him. He lived among the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain… he would cry out and cut himself with stones" (Mark 5:2–5). This is *ochurōma* made visible in the most extreme case Scripture records — a man whose torment had literally driven him to live among graves, bound and re-bound, breaking every chain meant to hold him, harming himself in the process. When Jesus finished with him, the same crowd found him "clothed and in his right mind" (Mark 5:15) — not merely calmer, but a fortress actually torn down. Very few strongholds are this dramatic. The mechanism this session describes is the same one at every scale, from an unspoken vow about trust to a man living among tombs.

Voices

"Because the Church has, in general, been totally ignorant of the way the enemy works, Satan has been able to walk all over the Body of Christ unchallenged, unrecognized and unperturbed."

— Peter Horrobin, Healing Through Deliverance (2003)

Horrobin's word "ignorant" is worth pausing on — it's the same territory 2 Corinthians 2:11 covers below, and it's the entire reason this session bothers naming characteristics and methods specifically rather than leaving "the enemy" as a vague, undifferentiated concept. An enemy you can't describe is an enemy you can't resist with any precision.

Scripture's own list of the enemy's characteristics is long, and worth reading in full rather than summarized away — but three carry particular weight for this session's actual argument. He is deceptive: "there is no truth in him… he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44), which means every stronghold this session has described was built on a lie, not a fact, however factual it felt at the time. He is deliberate: Isaiah 32:7 pictures him planning "wicked schemes," not stumbling into your specific vulnerabilities by accident. And he prefers to remain hidden — deception works best unnoticed, which is precisely why naming a stronghold specifically, out loud, is itself a meaningful act of resistance rather than a preliminary step before the real work starts.

The Enemy’s Names

> *“You people are from your father the* ***devil*** **(διαβόλου)**, *and you want to do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies.”*
>
> **JOHN 8:44**

WORD STUDY

διάβολος *diabolos* G1228

“devil” · John 8:44

Range. From *diaballō*, “to throw across” — specifically, to throw an accusation across at someone. Thayer’s gives the core sense as “a calumniator, false accuser, slanderer.” The English word “devil” is simply this Greek word carried across languages, meaning the name itself is a job description before it’s a proper noun.

The sense here. John 8:44 doesn’t call him “the devil” as a label the way you’d call someone “the mailman.” It’s naming what he specifically does: he throws false accusations — at God, to you; about you, to others; about others, to you. Revelation 12:10 gives the same idea from a different angle: “the accuser of our brothers… accuses them day and night.” Accusation isn’t one tactic among many. It’s close to the center of the whole operation.

Why it carries the argument. If accusation is the enemy’s primary weapon, then most of what a stronghold actually runs on is an accusation you accepted rather than refuted —

"you're not good enough," "you'll always be this way," "nobody actually wants you around." Recognizing his own name, every time an accusation like that surfaces, is itself a form of resistance: not fighting a vague feeling, but naming the specific voice behind it.

Source. Thayer's, s.v. διάβολος.

Scripture gives him several other names worth knowing by the same logic — each one describes a method, not just identifies a being. *Echthros*, "enemy" (Matthew 13:39) — hostile, actively opposing, not neutral. "Tempter" (1 Thessalonians 3:5) — his approach is invitation, not force. "Evil one" (Matthew 13:19) — he "snatches away" what's been planted before it can take root, which is exactly the urgency behind naming a stronghold quickly rather than letting it settle.

One more name is worth its own attention, because Scripture pairs it directly with its own antidote rather than leaving it to stand alone: "you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Romans 8:15). A spirit of fear isn't merely an emotion running high. Paul treats it as an opposing spirit with its own name, answered directly by the very adoption Session 11 already gave you a full word study on — *huiothesia*, the legal standing of a son rather than a slave. Fear and sonship, in Paul's own pairing, are not two moods on the same spectrum. They're two different agreements, and only one of them belongs to you.

Each name is a piece of intelligence, not merely a title — which is precisely why Peter's own advice about him is a promise, not just a command:

> *"So submit to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you."*
>
> **JAMES 4:7**

WHAT ABOUT …

Doesn't this much focus on the enemy give him too much

attention?

A fair instinct, worth taking seriously rather than dismissing: shouldn't a discipleship curriculum keep its eyes on Jesus rather than spend an entire session cataloging the enemy's names and characteristics? Isn't that exactly the kind of fixation Scripture itself seems to warn against?

Paul's own words answer this directly, and the answer isn't "less attention." It's "informed, not obsessive" attention:

> *"…so that we may not be exploited by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes."*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 2:11**

Notice what Paul assumes. Ignorance of the enemy's methods isn't neutral ground — it's the condition he says gets a person exploited. This session's careful attention to characteristics and names isn't fixation for its own sake; it's the specific, limited kind of awareness 2 Corinthians 2:11 says protects against exploitation, no more and no less. A soldier who studies an enemy's tactics isn't obsessed with the enemy. A soldier who never does is simply unprepared.

The difference between healthy awareness and unhealthy fixation isn't how much you know. It's where your attention actually rests once the knowing is done. This session names the enemy's characteristics and methods once, specifically, so you can recognize them quickly and return your attention to Christ — not so you keep circling back to catalog him further. Peter's own advice makes the proportion explicit: submit to God comes first in the sentence, and takes up most of it; resisting the devil is the second half, and it's brief.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where might your own attention to spiritual warfare have drifted from "informed enough to resist" toward "fixated enough to feed"? What would it look like to hold this session's material the way 2 Corinthians 2:11 holds it — not ignorant, but not lingering either?

I AM NOT SAYING

I AM NOT SAYING

— that every difficult thought, mood, or struggle is direct demonic activity requiring “warfare” rather than ordinary discipline, wisdom, or professional help, the same caution Session 17 already gave; that every stronghold is something you consciously chose and are therefore fully to blame for — some are built from what others did to you, or from patterns you inherited rather than authored, which Session 20 addresses directly; or that James 4:7’s promise means resistance is always instant. Some strongholds, built over years, take sustained, repeated resistance to actually come down — the same “seventy-seven times” pattern Session 18 already named for release.

I AM SAYING

— that agreement, not willpower, is the actual mechanism underneath a stronghold, that naming both the agreement and the enemy’s specific method for building it is genuinely useful rather than merely academic, and that James 4:7’s order matters: submission to God comes first, and resistance follows from that position rather than substituting for it.

The Turn

You now have what this session set out to give you: agreement as the actual mechanism (*symphōneō*, harmonizing with a note you may never have consciously chosen), the stronghold that agreement builds when it’s repeated

(*ochurōma*, a fortress, not a passing thought), the enemy's own characteristics — deceptive, deliberate, hidden — and his own names, each one a piece of intelligence rather than a mere title, chief among them *diabolos*, the accuser whose primary weapon is the specific lie you agreed with without ever deciding to.

None of that stays theoretical when it's aimed at something specific. This session's Experience is where you name your own.

The Experience · Break Strongholds

This is a practice in reversing *symphōneō* — deliberately, consciously withdrawing agreement from a specific lie, rather than merely hoping it fades.

Return to the sentence you completed in this session's opening *Consider This*, or the stronghold you traced in the Strongholds section's *Pause & Reflect*. Name the actual agreement, as specifically as you can:

> *The lie I have agreed with is:*
>
> _____

Name the inner vow that grew out of it, if you can identify one:

> *The vow I made in response was:*
>
> _____

Then pray this aloud, slowly, as a genuine act of submission and resistance in James 4:7's order — not a formula, but a real decision:

> *"Father, I submit myself to You. I recognize the agreement I made with [the lie], and I withdraw it now. I break the vow I made in response — [the vow] — and I ask You to reveal what's actually true instead. Devil, I resist you specifically in this: I will no longer sound the same note as your lie. In Jesus' name."*

Expect the old note to try to resound again — James 4:7 promises the enemy will flee, not that memory has no echo. When it does, return to this same prayer rather than starting over from confusion each time. This is the same discipline Session 18 already gave you a name for — release, practiced repeatedly rather than assumed permanent after one prayer — aimed now at the specific agreement you've just named rather than at a general wound.

BIG IDEAS

1. *Symphōneō* — agreement — is the root of the English word "symphony": you don't have to consciously choose to harmonize with a lie, only to keep sounding the same note it does.
2. A stronghold (*ochurōma*) has a predictable shape: event, meaning, vow, defense mechanism — each one reinforcing the last.
3. The enemy's own name, *diabolos*, means "false accuser" — most of what a stronghold runs on is an accusation you accepted rather than refuted.
4. 2 Corinthians 2:11 gives the right proportion of attention: informed enough not to be exploited, not fixated enough to feed the fixation.
5. James 4:7's order matters — submit to God first, resist the devil second, expect him to flee rather than never return.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

A stronghold isn't built by force. It's built by agreement. It comes down the same way.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, show me every agreement I've made without ever deciding to make it. Give me the courage to name what I find, specifically, rather than vaguely hoping it fades. Teach me to recognize the accuser's

> *voice by name, and to submit to You first, every time, before I try to resist anything else. In Jesus' name, amen.*

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (1942).
A senior demon's correspondence to a junior tempter, written from the enemy's own imagined perspective — Lewis's own preface famously warns against both disbelieving in devils and being unhealthily obsessed with them, the same balance this session's What About argues for directly.

SUBSTANTIAL

Peter Horrobin, *Healing Through Deliverance* (2003).
A fuller pastoral treatment of the enemy's characteristics and methods than this session's compressed version.

ACADEMIC

A Greek lexicon entry (Thayer's or BDAG) for *ochurōma*, read alongside its use across the Septuagint's own military and fortress contexts.
Reading the word's literal military range first is what makes its figurative use in 2 Corinthians 10:4 land with its full original force.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Matthew 18:19–20 slowly, aloud. *Where has your own life shown the mechanism of agreement working — for good or*

for harm — even when you weren't consciously choosing it?

DAY 2

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 again, alongside Session 17's material on *noēma*. *What's the difference, in your own experience, between one intrusive thought and an actual fortified stronghold?*

DAY 3

Read Mark 5:1–15 in full. *What does it change to know the same God who freed a man living among tombs is the God addressing whatever stronghold you named this week?*

DAY 4

Read John 8:44 and Revelation 12:10 together. *Where have you recently accepted an accusation — about yourself, about someone else, about God — without checking whose voice it actually was?*

DAY 5

Read 2 Corinthians 2:11 and James 4:7 together. *Where is your own attention to spiritual warfare currently landing — informed, or fixated? Be honest.*

DAY 6

Practice this session's Experience again, naming a second stronghold if one comes to mind. *What's different about naming it the second time?*

Tell one trusted person this week which specific agreement you're withdrawing — not the whole story if it isn't theirs to hear, just the fact that you're doing the work.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Arc and timing (90 minutes). Agreements and Strongholds together carry the session's conceptual weight; budget real time there, especially the stronghold-shape material (event, meaning, vow, defense mechanism), since the Experience depends on the room actually understanding that sequence well enough to trace their own. The Enemy's Characteristics and Names move faster as content, but don't rush past them — this is the material most likely to surface a room's differing comfort levels with spiritual warfare language.

Where the room stalls. Expect a real range of prior exposure to this material — some will have grown up with detailed teaching on demonic names and characteristics; others will find the whole frame unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Don't assume either reaction is wrong. The *What About* exists precisely for the room member thinking "this feels like too much" — name that tension openly before working through it, rather than waiting for someone to raise it. Watch, too, for someone who goes quiet during the stronghold-shape teaching because they're recognizing their own pattern in real time; that recognition is often the most important thing that happens in the room, and it may not come with words attached right away.

The ministry moment. The Experience asks people to name a specific lie and a specific vow, which is more exposing than most prior Experiences. Make clear before you start that no one will be asked to share what they wrote aloud to the group — this is written and prayed individually, even if you're physically together.

If someone wants to share afterward, receive it, but never solicit it.

Discussion questions, if you need more than the Pause & Reflect prompts:

1. Which of the enemy's names in this session was least familiar to you? What does knowing it change about how you'd recognize him?
2. Trace the Strongholds section's four-step pattern through a stronghold you're willing to name in the group, even in general terms.
3. Where's the line, for you, between 2 Corinthians 2:11's "not ignorant" and actual fixation? Has this session moved that line?

What to cut if you're behind. The Enemy's Characteristics section's full list can be summarized to the three named in this session's prose (deceptive, deliberate, hidden) rather than read in full from Scripture's broader list. Do not cut the *What About* or the Experience — they are this session's actual point of contact between the teaching and the room.

Agreements & Strongholds

“If agreement carries that much weight when it’s spoken on purpose toward God, what happens when the exact same mechanism runs unnoticed toward a lie?”



THE AGREEMENT

Agreement (*symphōneō*) is a harmony word, not primarily an intellectual one — you don’t have to consciously choose to harmonize with a lie, only to keep sounding the same note it does, the way Ananias and Sapphira did without signing anything.

Matthew 18:19
Acts 5:1–9

THE STRONGHOLD

A stronghold (*ochurōma*) is a fortified position, not a passing thought — built brick by repeated brick through a predictable shape: a real event, an assigned meaning, an inner vow, and a defense mechanism.

2 Corinthians 10:3–4

THE ENEMY

The enemy’s characteristics aren’t vague — he is deceptive, deliberate, and hidden, the same reality Scripture shows at its most extreme in a man living among tombs whom no chain could hold.

Mark 5:2–5
John 8:44

THE NAMES

Diabolos — “devil” — means false accuser: most of what a stronghold actually runs on is an accusation you accepted rather than refuted, and recognizing his voice by name is itself a form of resistance.

John 8:44

THE TURN

A stronghold comes down the same way it went up — by agreement, not force. Submission to God comes first; resisting the devil, in that order, is a promise, not just a command.

James 4:7

SO NOW

AGREEMENT, NOT ACCIDENT

You don’t have to consciously choose a lie for it to take hold. You only have to keep sounding the same note it does, long enough to stop noticing the difference.

Matthew 18:19

BUILT, NOT RANDOM

A stronghold has a predictable shape — event, meaning, vow, defense mechanism — which means it can be traced, named, and dismantled rather than only endured.

2 Corinthians 10:4

NAMED, NOT VAGUE

An enemy you can describe is an enemy you can resist with precision. Knowing his methods and names isn’t fixation — it’s the opposite of exploitable ignorance.

John 8:44

SUBMITTED, NOT JUST RESISTED

The order matters. Submission to God comes first and carries the weight of the sentence; resisting the devil follows from that position rather than substituting for it.

James 4:7

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

A stronghold isn’t built by force. It’s built by agreement. It comes down the same way.

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Next · Session 20, Bondage. You've learned to recognize agreements you made yourself. Session 20 turns to patterns you may not have chosen at all — what comes from outside you, and what runs in a family before you ever had a say in it.

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20

BONDAGE

Kingdom Essentials: The Preparation

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Wounds From Without

03 Iniquity: What Runs in a Family

04 Shame

05 Soul Ties

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Renounce Sin

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Session 19 gave you the tools for agreements you made yourself. This session is about the harder category: bondage that formed before you ever had a say in it.

> *“Everyone born of a slave woman was born by human intention, but the son by the free woman was born through the promise… For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be enslaved again by a yoke of slavery.”*
>
> **GALATIANS 4:23; 5:1**

If freedom is genuinely as settled as the gospel claims, why does it so often feel like something you’re still, actively, fighting your way toward?

Some bondage you build yourself, one agreement at a time, the way Session 19 already described. Some bondage was built around you — a wound you didn’t cause, a pattern you didn’t originate, a bond you formed before you had the

discernment to know it wasn't good for you. This session names three sources of that second kind: wounds from without, iniquity that runs in a family, and the ties — some godly, some not — that a soul forms with whatever it attaches to.

CONSIDER THIS

Is there a pattern of behavior in your life you've never been able to fully explain — a reaction, a fear, a habit — that feels bigger than any single choice you remember making? Just notice it. You'll return to it.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, give me the courage to face what I didn't choose honestly, without excusing it and without carrying blame that was never mine. Show me what's actually bondage and what's actually already broken, and give me the grace to walk fully into the freedom Christ already purchased. In Jesus' name, amen.

Wounds From Without

> *"Every place the sole of your foot will tread I have already given to you, just as I promised Moses… Be strong and courageous, for you will cause this people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them."*
>
> **JOSHUA 1:3, 6**

Israel's promised land was legally theirs before a single battle was fought — and it still had to be walked into, region by region, against real occupants who didn't

leave voluntarily. Your soul works the same way. Christ has already secured your freedom; the walking-into-it is still real, still contested, and still yours to do. Some of what has to be displaced was never your doing at all.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Bart Millard, lead singer of the band MercyMe, has spoken and written publicly about years of physical abuse from his father growing up — wounds that shaped him long before he had any ability to consent to or resist them. In the years before his father's death, Millard has described watching a genuine transformation take place in him, and the reconciliation that followed became the seed of the song "I Can Only Imagine" — later the basis of a 2018 film telling the same story. Millard didn't cause the wound that shaped so much of his early life. He also didn't stay defined by it. Both things were true at once, the same tension this entire session sits inside.

Not every outside influence is a wound. Some of what shaped you was genuinely good — a strong work ethic, a family that valued relationships, an example of financial responsibility modeled well. This session isn't asking you to treat your whole upbringing as a crime scene. It's asking you to be honest about which parts actually need to be displaced, the way Joshua's Israel had to distinguish the land God had given from the specific occupants still illegally living on it.

Scripture's design for that shaping runs specifically through parents, which is part of why its absence or distortion cuts so deep. A mother's steady presence was designed to convey belonging and acceptance before a child could understand either word. A father's presence was designed to affirm security and identity — who you are, not merely what you produce. When either was missing, inconsistent, or actively harmful, the wound isn't a vague sense that something was off. It's the specific absence of a specific thing you were designed to receive. Jesus Himself modeled both sides of that design in His own ministry — initiating decisively when the moment called for it (overturning the money-changers' tables, Matthew 21:12) and receiving just as decisively when it didn't (submitting to His Father's timing rather than forcing His own, John 10:18). A wound from without often teaches a person only one half of that balance — all initiation and no receiving, or the reverse — and part of walking into freedom is relearning the half the wound left underdeveloped.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What's one influence from your upbringing — family, culture, circumstance — that shaped you in a way you'd genuinely call good? What's one that you'd now call an occupant needing to be displaced?

Iniquity: What Runs in a Family

> *"I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, responding to the **iniquity (עָוֹן) of fathers** by dealing with children to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me."*
>
> **EXODUS 20:5**

WORD STUDY

עָוֹן *avon* H5771

> **"iniquity"** · Exodus 20:5

Range. BDB gives *avon* a distinctive, heavier range than Hebrew's other words for wrongdoing. Where *chatta'ah* ("sin") emphasizes missing a mark or standard, and *pesha* ("transgression") emphasizes deliberate rebellion against known authority, *avon* binds together deed, guilt, and consequence into one weighty reality — BDB's own language is "moral perversity," a corrupted orientation that produces ongoing culpability rather than a single discrete act.

The sense here. NET renders this word "transgression" in Exodus 20:5, where many other translations render it "iniquity" — worth knowing, since it's the same underlying Hebrew word either way. The source guide behind this

session defines it well in plain language: a bent, tendency, or predisposition toward certain patterns, inherited the way behavioral and emotional patterns pass through a family whether or not anyone intends them to.

Why it carries the argument. Session 19 already resolved the apparent tension between this verse and Ezekiel 18:20 — you do not inherit guilt for what a parent did, only, potentially, a pattern worth naming honestly. *Avon*'s own lexical weight explains why that pattern is more than a metaphor: it's not simply "families tend to repeat things" in a vague, sociological sense. It's a specific, named biblical category, with its own word, distinct from ordinary sin.

Source. BDB, s.v. עָוֹן.

ILLUSTRATION

Abraham, afraid for his life in a foreign land, told his wife Sarah to say she was his sister rather than admit she was his wife: "so that it may go well for me because of you and my life will be spared on account of you" (Genesis 12:13). He did the identical thing again years later in a different territory (Genesis 20:2). Decades after that, his son Isaac — facing the same fear, in the same region, over the same kind of danger — did the exact same thing with his own wife: "He replied, 'She is my sister.' He was afraid to say, 'She is my wife'" (Genesis 26:7). Not a similar sin. The same specific deception, verbatim in shape, inherited by a son who almost certainly knew his father's own history with it. That's *avon* in narrative form — not Isaac bearing Abraham's guilt, but Isaac inheriting a bent his father's own fear had carved, and walking directly into it anyway.

The good news sits inside the same verse this session opened with: "showing covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations of those who love me" (Exodus 20:6). The iniquity clause covers three or four generations. The blessing clause covers a thousand. Whatever pattern you're naming honestly in your own family, Scripture's own math says the weight is not evenly balanced.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Is there a pattern in your family that has repeated itself the way Isaac repeated Abraham's — not identical in form, necessarily, but recognizably the same bent? Naming it honestly, the way Session 19's *What About* already modeled with Daniel's example, is not the same as claiming guilt for it.

Shame

Some bondage isn't a pattern between generations. It's a judgment turned entirely inward.

> *"The man and his wife were both naked, but they were not* ***ashamed*** **(יִתְבֹּשָׁשׁוּ)***."*
>
> **GENESIS 2:25**

WORD STUDY

בּוֹשׁ *bosh* H954

> **"ashamed"** · Genesis 2:25

Range. BDB's range runs from a literal, almost physical sense — "to pale," the visible blanching a face does under exposure — to the more familiar figurative sense of shame, disgrace, or being confounded. The word appears well over a hundred times across the Old Testament, spanning from Genesis to the Minor Prophets.

The sense here. Genesis 2:25 states its absence as a simple fact: naked, fully known, fully seen, and not ashamed — the state Eden was designed to hold. One chapter later, after

the eyes of both “were opened” to their own nakedness (Genesis 3:7), the very next thing they do is hide from God among the trees (Genesis 3:8) and, when found, explain themselves with fear rather than honesty (Genesis 3:10). Shame entered the story as a direct, immediate consequence of the fall — not a divine punishment imposed from outside, but the felt experience of exposure itself.

Why it carries the argument. Notice what changed between Genesis 2:25 and Genesis 3:10. Nothing about their actual worth or design changed — they were the same image-bearers God had called very good. What changed was their relationship to being fully known. Shame, in its biblical origin, isn’t primarily “I did something wrong.” It’s “now that I’m seen, I need to hide” — which is exactly the mechanism this session’s source material names when it distinguishes “I made a mistake” from “I am the mistake.”

Source. BDB, s.v. בּוֹשׁ.

That distinction — “I made a mistake” versus “I am the mistake” — is the difference between guilt and shame, and it matters more than the two words’ surface similarity suggests. Guilt says something you did was wrong; it’s answerable, specific, and points toward repair. Shame says something you *are* is wrong; it’s global, identity-level, and points only toward hiding. Paul draws almost the identical line: “sadness as intended by God produces a repentance that leads to salvation, leaving no regret, but worldly sadness brings about death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly grief over a specific wrong leads somewhere — toward repentance, toward life. Shame, left to run unchallenged, only leads back to the trees Adam and Eve hid among.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where in your own life has “I made a mistake” quietly become “I am the mistake”? What would it change to name the actual, specific wrong instead of the global verdict shame keeps pronouncing over you?

Soul Ties

Not every bond is bondage. Scripture's own design for human connection is deeply physical and relational, not merely emotional:

> *"That is why a man leaves his father and mother and **unites with (דָּבַק) his wife**, and they become a new family."*
>
> **GENESIS 2:24**

WORD STUDY

דָּבַק *davaq* H1692

> **"unites with"** · Genesis 2:24

Range. BDB gives *davaq* a physically vivid range: to cling, cleave, stay close, adhere — the word for two surfaces sticking together so completely they function as one. Figuratively, it extends to loyalty and covenant attachment, most famously in Ruth 1:14, where "Ruth clung tightly to" Naomi rather than leaving with her sister-in-law — the same Hebrew verb NET renders "unites with" in Genesis 2:24.

The sense here. *Davaq* is the word behind "one flesh" — not a metaphor for closeness, but a description of actual, designed fusion: two becoming functionally one. Genesis 2:24 uses it for marriage. Ruth uses it for a daughter-in-

law's covenant loyalty. The word itself is neutral about which bond it's describing — the question is never whether you'll form *davaq*-style attachments. You're designed to. The question is what you're forming them with.

Why it carries the argument. This is the actual biblical root underneath what popular teaching calls a "soul tie" — a real word, a real concept, genuinely present in Scripture, even though the specific phrase "soul tie" itself never appears there. That distinction matters enough to be this session's own *What About*.

Source. BDB, s.v. דָּבַק.

ILLUSTRATION

"Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as he did his own life. Jonathan removed his robe and gave it to David, along with his sword, his bow, and his belt" (1 Samuel 18:3–4). This is *davaq* between friends — a real, deep, covenantal soul-bond, given as a gift rather than a warning. Not every bond this session names needs to be broken. Some, like David and Jonathan's, are worth being grateful for.

Not every bond serves you the way David and Jonathan's served each other. A relationship built on deception, a sexual bond formed outside the covenant marriage was designed to hold, an attachment to a person, a substance, or even a device that has quietly begun shaping your mind, will, and emotions more than any healthy relationship should — these attach with the same *davaq*-strength Genesis 2:24 describes, whether or not the attachment is good for you. The strength of the bond was never the question. What it's bonding you to is.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where has *davaq*-strength attachment formed in your life toward something that isn't actually good for you — a person, a substance, a habit, a relationship pattern? Naming it honestly is the first step this session's Experience asks of you.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn’t “soul ties” just made-up, non-biblical language?

This is a fair and important question, and this session’s own word study already half-answered it: the specific phrase “soul tie” appears nowhere in Scripture. That’s worth saying plainly rather than glossing over, because plenty of well-meaning teaching on this topic has spoken with more biblical confidence than the actual text supports.

What Scripture does give, directly and repeatedly, is *davaq* — a real, load-bearing word describing real, designed, sometimes God-ordained attachment. Genesis 2:24 uses it for marriage. Ruth 1:14 uses it for covenant loyalty between women who weren’t even blood relatives. 1 Corinthians 6:16 extends the same concept explicitly to sexual union outside marriage — Paul’s own argument there is that physical union creates real spiritual union, “one flesh,” whether or not either party intended anything beyond the physical. The concept — real, spiritual union formed through sustained attachment — is thoroughly biblical. The specific packaged phrase “soul tie,” with its sometimes-elaborate teaching about how such bonds transfer specific spiritual contamination between people, goes further than *davaq* itself actually establishes.

The honest position, and the one this session takes: use the concept, hold the phrase loosely. “Soul tie” is a useful modern label for a real biblical reality — sustained bonding that shapes you, for good or ill — not a technical term Scripture itself defines with precision. Teaching that claims more specificity than that (exact mechanisms of transfer, guaranteed categories of harm, elaborate diagnostic checklists) is speaking with more confidence than the underlying word actually supports.

This matters practically, not just academically. A vague but confident-sounding phrase like “soul tie” can do real good — giving someone language for an attachment they already sensed was unhealthy but couldn’t name — or real harm, if it’s used to diagnose bondage in every close relationship a person forms, or worse, to convince someone that a specific relationship they’re in is spiritually contaminating them in ways only a leader with special insight can identify. The word study above is the actual safeguard against both failure modes: *davaq* describes real attachment, formed through real proximity and real intimacy, sexual

or otherwise. It does not describe a mysterious transfer of spiritual residue that only some are equipped to detect and diagnose in someone else's life.

I AM NOT SAYING

I AM NOT SAYING

— that every close relationship is a dangerous soul tie requiring renunciation (David and Jonathan's wasn't), that feeling regret after a genuine wrong is itself shame to be resisted rather than godly grief to be listened to (2 Corinthians 7:10's distinction matters), or that this teaching should ever be used by one person to control, isolate, or manipulate another — "your relationship with them is an ungodly soul tie" has been used as a real, documented tool of spiritual abuse in some settings, and that misuse is exactly what a made-up-sounding technical term with borrowed biblical authority makes easier to weaponize.

I AM SAYING

— that *davaq*-strength attachment is real, that not every such attachment serves you, and that naming one honestly and choosing to release it, the way this session's Experience walks through, is a legitimate and biblically grounded practice even though the specific phrase for it isn't found in the text itself.

The Turn

You now have what this session set out to give you: wounds from without that shaped you before you had any say (and don't need to define you now), iniquity — a real, weighty, inherited bent (*avon*), distinct from guilt you don't carry — that can be named honestly without claiming blame that isn't yours, shame's specific lie (*bosh*, "I am the mistake" rather than "I made a mistake") answered by

godly grief instead, and soul ties — real *davaq*-strength attachment, biblically grounded even where the specific phrase for it isn't, worth examining rather than either dismissing or over-claiming.

All of it stays theoretical without a specific act of renunciation. That's what this session's Experience is for.

The Experience · Renounce Sin

This is a guided practice in naming specific bondage — from any of this session's four categories — and renouncing it by name rather than in general terms.

Return to what you noticed in this session's opening *Consider This*, or to whatever surfaced in the *Pause & Reflect* prompts along the way. Name the specific bondage as precisely as you can:

> *The bondage I'm naming is:*
> _____ *(a wound, an inherited pattern, a shame-lie, or a soul tie)*

Then pray this aloud, slowly, adapting the bracketed language to what you actually named:

> *"Holy Spirit, I ask You to reveal the root of this honestly. Where this came from something done to me, I choose to forgive, the way Session 18 already taught me to. Where this is a pattern I've continued myself, I repent of my own part in it now. I renounce [the specific bondage] and the enemy's scheme to use it to hold me in bondage. Where I've formed an attachment that isn't good for me, I break that bond in the name of Jesus, and I ask You to fill what it leaves empty. I take back the ground it occupied and recommit it fully to Christ. Thank You for the freedom You already purchased, and for walking with me into it, little by little, the way Israel walked into the promised land. In Jesus' name, amen."*

Expect this to be a beginning, not a single decisive end — the way every other release practice in this curriculum has already taught you to expect repetition rather than instant, permanent closure.

BIG IDEAS

1. Some bondage forms before you have any say in it — Israel's promised land had to be walked into region by region, and your

soul's freedom works the same way.

2. *Avon* — iniquity — is a real, weighty, inherited bent, distinct from personal guilt: Isaac repeated Abraham's exact deception, but he didn't inherit his father's guilt for it.
3. *Bosh* — shame — says "I am the mistake" instead of "I made a mistake"; godly grief (2 Corinthians 7:10) leads to repentance, while shame only leads to hiding.
4. *Davaq* — the word behind "soul ties" — is real and biblical, but the specific packaged phrase "soul tie" isn't found in Scripture itself; hold the concept firmly and the terminology loosely.
5. Not every bond is bondage — David and Jonathan's *davaq* covenant is something to be grateful for, not something to renounce.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You are not guilty for what was done to you, or for what runs in your bloodline. You are responsible for what you do with it now.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You that freedom was already purchased before I ever started walking into it. Give me courage to name what was done to me without excusing it, to name what runs in my family without claiming its guilt, to answer shame's lie with Your actual verdict over me, and to examine every bond

> *I've formed honestly. Walk with me into this the way You walked with Israel — little by little, faithfully, until the land is fully mine. In Jesus' name, amen.*

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

I Can Only Imagine (2018 film), or Bart Millard's own account of his story in interviews and his memoir.
The real story behind this session's illustration, told at full length rather than summarized.

SUBSTANTIAL

Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (1990, rev. 2000).
A widely used pastoral treatment of exactly this session's territory — strongholds, shame, and ungodly attachments — worth reading alongside this session's own more cautious handling of "soul tie" terminology.

ACADEMIC

A Hebrew lexicon (BDB) entry for עָוֹן (*avon*), read alongside its use across the Torah's own generational-blessing-and-curse passages (Exodus 20:5–6, 34:6–7; Deuteronomy 5:9–10).
Reading all three passages together shows the iniquity clause consistently paired with a far larger blessing clause — never presented alone.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Galatians 5:1 slowly, aloud. *Where does your own freedom feel more like a fight still in progress than a settled*

fact? Why might both be true at once?

DAY 2

Read Genesis 12:10–13, 20:1–2, and 26:6–7 together. *Is there a pattern in your own family that has repeated itself the way Isaac repeated Abraham's? Name it as specifically as you can.*

DAY 3

Read Genesis 2:25 and 3:7–10 together. *Where has "I made a mistake" become "I am the mistake" in your own self-talk? What's the actual, specific wrong underneath the global verdict?*

DAY 4

Read Genesis 2:24 and 1 Corinthians 6:16 together. *What has* davaq-*strength attachment formed toward in your life that isn't actually good for you?*

DAY 5

Read 1 Samuel 18:1–4. *Who's a David-and-Jonathan bond in your own life — one worth being grateful for rather than examined with suspicion?*

DAY 6

Revisit this session's Experience. *Did you pray it aloud? What's different about naming a specific bondage out loud versus only thinking about it?*

Tell one trusted person this week which category of bondage — wound, iniquity, shame, or soul tie — you're actively working through, without needing to explain every detail.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Arc and timing (90 minutes). All four sections carry real weight; resist the temptation to rush Shame or Soul Ties to protect time for the others. If the room is running long, the Iniquity section's Abraham/Isaac illustration can be summarized in a sentence — the word study and Exodus 20:5–6's blessing/iniquity contrast carry the section's actual argument.

Where the room stalls. The Soul Ties section and its *What About* may surface real disagreement — some in your group may have been taught detailed, confident "soul tie" theology elsewhere, and this session's more cautious "hold the concept, hold the phrase loosely" framing may feel like a walking-back rather than a clarification. Don't treat that disagreement as a problem to resolve quickly; let the *What About*'s own reasoning do the work. Watch, separately, for someone who goes quiet during the Wounds From Without or Shame sections — this session asks people to name real, painful history, and readiness to do that varies enormously person to person.

The ministry moment. As with Session 18, the Experience is written for individual, private prayer — even in a group setting, people should write and pray this on their own rather than aloud together. If your group has previously used more detailed "breaking soul ties" prayer models with specific renunciation lists, be ready to explain gently why this session intentionally keeps the language simpler and closer to what davaq itself actually establishes, without dismissing whatever genuine freedom people may have experienced through those other models.

Discussion questions, if you need more than the Pause & Reflect prompts:

1. Which of this session's four categories — wound, iniquity, shame, or soul tie — felt most immediately relevant to you, and why?
2. Where's the line, for you, between healthy caution about "soul tie" teaching and dismissing something real that Scripture does actually describe?
3. Isaac repeated his father's exact deception. What's one pattern you'd genuinely want to make sure doesn't repeat in the next generation after you?

What to cut if you're behind. The Go Deeper's Academic tier reading suggestion can be omitted from group discussion entirely — it's there for personal follow-up, not required for the session itself. Do not cut the *What About*; skipping it leaves "soul tie" language sounding more confidently biblical than this session intends it to.

Bondage

"If freedom is genuinely as settled as the gospel claims, why does it so often feel like something you're still, actively, fighting your way toward?"

THE WOUND

Some bondage was built around you before you had any say in it — a wound from without, needing to be displaced the way Israel had to walk into a land already legally theirs, region by region, against real occupants.

Joshua 1:3

THE PATTERN

Avon — iniquity — is a real, weighty, inherited bent, distinct from personal guilt: Isaac repeated Abraham's exact deception, but Scripture's own math pairs a three-generation iniquity clause with a thousand-generation blessing.

Exodus 20:5
Genesis 26:7

THE LIE

Bosh — shame — says "I am the mistake" instead of "I made a mistake." Nothing about your worth changed between Eden's unashamed nakedness and the hiding that followed the fall; only the relationship to being fully known did.

Genesis 2:25

THE BOND

Davaq — the real biblical word behind "soul ties" — describes genuine, designed attachment. The strength of a bond was never the question; what it's bonding you to is.

Genesis 2:24
1 Samuel 18:3–4

THE TURN

Freedom was already purchased before you started walking into it — not a feeling to wait for, but ground to stand on and keep standing on, one displaced occupant at a time.

Galatians 5:1

SO NOW

DISPLACED, NOT DEFINING

What shaped you before you had a say doesn't have to define what shapes you now. Some of it was good; what wasn't can still be named and displaced.

Joshua 1:3

NAMED, NOT GUILTY

A family pattern can be named honestly without claiming the guilt for it — the same distinction Session 19's Daniel example already modeled.

Exodus 20:5

MISTAKE, NOT IDENTITY

Godly grief over a specific wrong leads to repentance and life. Shame's global verdict over your identity only leads back to hiding.

Genesis 2:25

REAL, NOT RECKLESS

Davaq-strength attachment is genuinely biblical — hold the concept firmly, and hold claims that go further than the word itself loosely.

Genesis 2:24

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You are not guilty for what was done to you, or for what runs in your bloodline. You are responsible for what you do with it now.

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Next · Session 21, Demonization. You've learned to name and renounce bondage from without, from your bloodline, from shame, and from ungodly attachment. Session 21 turns to the most severe end of that same spectrum — what demonization actually is, what causes it, and what to do about it.

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DEMONIZATION

Kingdom Essentials: The Preparation

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 What Is Demonization?

03 What Causes Demonization?

04 What Do I Do About Demonization?

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · [Deliverance]

07 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Session 20 named bondage you didn't choose. This session names something a step further still: what it means when the enemy isn't merely influencing a belief or an attachment, but has gained active, ongoing ground in a person's body or soul.

> *"A Canaanite woman from that area came and cried out, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is horribly* ***demon-possessed*** **(δαιμονίζεται)***!'"*
>
> **MATTHEW 15:22**

If you belong to Christ, can a demon actually get a foothold in you — and if it can, what exactly does that mean?

This is one of the more unsettling questions this curriculum takes on, and it's unsettling partly because English translation has muddied it. The word rendered "demon-possessed" above is a single Greek verb, and — as this session's first word study will show — it doesn't actually claim what the English word "possessed" claims. Getting that distinction right isn't a technicality. It's the

difference between a Christian living in needless fear of losing themselves to darkness, and a Christian equipped to recognize and deal with real ground the enemy has genuinely gained.

CONSIDER THIS

Before this session tells you what Scripture says, notice what you already believe. When you hear the word “demonized,” what image comes to mind — and where did that image actually come from? A film? A story someone told you? A verse you’ve never actually read in context?

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, give me a clear mind and a steady heart for what this session covers. Strip away both the fear that exaggerates the enemy’s reach and the skepticism that dismisses it entirely. Show me what’s actually true, and give me courage to act on it. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What Is Demonization?

Start with the question every honest believer eventually asks: can a Christian be demon-possessed? The confusion here is almost entirely a translation problem, not a theological one.

WORD STUDY

δαιμονίζομαι *daimonizomai* G1139

> **“demon-possessed”** · Matthew 15:22
>
> **Range.** *Daimonizomai* is built from *daimōn* (“demon”) plus a verb form meaning to be dominated, exercised, or under the power of something. It appears thirteen times in the Gospels, always describing someone under real, active demonic influence — never a mild or occasional thing, but always a serious, visible condition.
>
> **The sense here.** NET renders this word “demon-possessed” in Matthew 15:22, and many other translations do the same. That English choice is worth examining closely, because “possess” in ordinary English carries an ownership sense the Greek verb never actually claims. *Daimonizomai* describes being under a demon’s power — occupied territory, not owned property. The distinction matters enormously for a believer, whose actual ownership is already settled elsewhere in Scripture: “you are not your own… you were bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). No English translation choice can undo what God has already purchased.
>
> **Why it carries the argument.** This is the single most important clarification this session makes. A believer’s spirit belongs to God — fully, permanently, non-negotiably. What this session is actually describing, when it uses the word “demonized,” is a demon gaining ground in the body or soul of someone who still, at the deepest level, belongs to Christ. Different territory, different word, entirely different stakes than the English word “possessed” implies.
>
> **Source.** Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, s.v. δαιμονίζομαι.

Picture leaving your house for a two-week vacation, doors and windows wide open. You return to find someone has moved into a spare room. They don’t own your house — the deed is still in your name — but they’re occupying space that isn’t theirs, and getting them out is going to take more than asking politely. That’s a closer picture of what this session means by demonization than anything

involving ownership. The better phrase, and the one this session will use going forward, is demonic **oppression** — ground gained, not identity lost.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> The woman who cried out to Jesus in Matthew 15 wasn't demonized herself — her daughter was, and the mother's desperation for her daughter's freedom is the entire emotional weight of the passage. Jesus' disciples wanted her sent away. Jesus, after testing her faith with a hard saying about "the children's bread," released her daughter with a single sentence: "Woman, your faith is great! Let what you want be done for you" (Matthew 15:28). No lengthy ritual. No extended confrontation. Jesus' authority over demonic oppression, even at a distance, was simply greater than the oppression itself — and it still is.

Scripture is consistent that this kind of oppression didn't stop happening after the resurrection, and hasn't stopped since. Jesus told His disciples to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" as one integrated ministry, not four separate specialties (Matthew 10:8) — deliverance was never a fringe activity in Jesus' own mission; it was core to it. And the reach of that oppression has real boundaries. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian believers asks that "your spirit and soul and body be kept entirely blameless" (1 Thessalonians 5:23) — three distinct categories, not one undifferentiated self. Your spirit, the part of you the Holy Spirit indwells at the moment of salvation, is not territory a demon can occupy; it already belongs to God, fully and finally. Your soul — mind, will, emotions — and your body remain real, contestable ground, the way land inside a nation's borders can still have squatters on it even though the nation's sovereignty over that land was never actually in question.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Does replacing "possessed" with "oppressed" change how threatening this topic feels to you? Why might that shift in language matter for how you'd respond if you suspected oppression in your own life or someone else's?

What Causes Demonization?

If oppression is occupied ground rather than transferred ownership, the next question is how the enemy gets onto the property at all. Scripture's answer centers on one specific word.

> *"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on the cause of your anger. Do not give* ***the devil an opportunity (τόπον)****."*
>
> **EPHESIANS 4:26–27**

WORD STUDY

τόπος *topos* G5117

> **"opportunity"** · Ephesians 4:27

Range. *Topos* is the ordinary Greek word for a physical place — a city, a region, a specific spot marked off from the space around it. English gets "topography" and "topic" from it. Figuratively, it extends to a position, a station, or — as here — an opening, a foothold, an occasion for acting.

The sense here. Paul isn't warning that unresolved anger merely displeases God, though it does that too. He's warning that it hands the enemy an actual foothold — a *topos*, a marked-off piece of ground to occupy and operate from. The image is spatial and legal at once: territory ceded, not merely a rule broken.

Why it carries the argument. This is the mechanism behind nearly every cause this session will name. Habitual, unrepented sin; occult involvement; persistent unforgiveness; willful, sustained disobedience — none of these forces a demon's presence the way a spell in a story

might. Each one simply cedes *topos*, ground the enemy then has standing to occupy, the way an unlocked door doesn't force an intruder inside but does remove the one obstacle that was actually keeping them out.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. τόπος.

The causes worth naming plainly: habitual, unrepented sin (the kind that becomes a settled pattern rather than a struggle you're actively fighting); real involvement in the occult — divination, spiritism, witchcraft, or curses knowingly invited; sustained involvement in false worldviews or false worship; persistent, willful disobedience held onto rather than surrendered; and trauma, which doesn't itself invite a demon but can leave a wound the enemy exploits the way Session 20 already described wounds being exploited by shame and false agreements. None of these operate by accident or by association. A single momentary sin doesn't hand over *topos* the way a settled, protected pattern does.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Two moments, two very different outcomes, both involving the same enemy. When Peter rebuked Jesus for predicting His own death, Jesus answered sharply: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me" (Matthew 16:23). Peter had spoken from wrong thinking in a single moment — real, but momentary, and it passed as quickly as it came. Contrast Judas. "Satan entered Judas, the one called Iscariot" (Luke 22:3) — not a single wrong sentence, but the culmination of a pattern Scripture had already flagged: Judas kept the disciples' money bag and, John tells us plainly, "used to steal from what was put into it" (John 12:6). Sustained, unrepented theft — real *topos*, ceded over time — preceded Satan's entering him. Peter got a sharp rebuke and, three chapters later, a place among the apostles at Pentecost. Judas got neither, because the two men had opened entirely different amounts of ground.

That contrast points to an important boundary this session needs to hold clearly: **not every problem is caused by a demon.** Peter's bad moment wasn't demonization; it was ordinary human wrongheadedness that needed correction, not deliverance. This matters practically, because deliverance ministry aimed at the wrong target does real harm — it can't cast out what was never there, and worse, it can leave a person feeling like their ordinary struggle with sin, grief, or simple human weakness is somehow more sinister than it actually is. As the source tradition behind this session puts it bluntly: you can't disciple a demon,

and you can’t cast out the flesh. Learning to tell the difference is most of the actual skill this session is trying to build.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Is there a pattern in your own life — not a single moment, but a settled, repeated one — that Ephesians 4:27’s logic would call real *topos*? What would it cost you to close that ground rather than continue ceding it?

What Do I Do About Demonization?

Whatever ground has been ceded, Scripture is not vague about the remedy.

> *“The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed: to* ***destroy*** **(λύσῃ)** ***the works of the devil.”***
>
> **1 JOHN 3:8**

WORD STUDY

λύω *lyō* G3089

> **“destroy”** · 1 John 3:8

Range. *Lyō* is one of the most common verbs in the New Testament, and its core meaning is physical: to loose something bound, to untie, to release from a fastening. From there it extends to breaking apart something built, annulling a law or agreement, and — as here — dismantling or undoing a work entirely.

The sense here. John isn't describing a future hope only. He's naming the stated purpose of the incarnation itself: Christ came specifically to *lyō* — untie, dismantle, undo — whatever the devil has built. The same verb elsewhere describes untying a boat from its mooring (Acts 27:40) and loosing a prisoner's chains (Acts 16:26). Applied to the devil's works, the image is precise: whatever the enemy has bound up and fastened together, Christ's stated mission is to untie it.

Why it carries the argument. This is why deliverance ministry isn't presumptuous or a stretch of biblical authority — it's participation in the exact work Christ was already sent to do. The authority a believer exercises in deliverance (Luke 10:19) isn't borrowed from somewhere uncertain; it flows directly from the finished work this verse names. What Christ came to *lyō*, His people carry the authority to *lyō* in His name.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. λύω.

That authority is real, but it isn't magic, and it isn't a solo act. Jesus sent His own disciples out in pairs (Luke 10:1), and deliverance ministry follows the same pattern: one person leads — asking questions, probing gently for the actual root rather than the surface behavior — while at least one other prays quietly and listens for the Holy Spirit's guidance rather than performing for the room. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7) gives the actual order of operations: submission first, resistance second, never the reverse. And the process itself is straightforward, if not always quick: help the person locate the specific lie or agreement underneath the oppression, have them break that agreement and renounce the lie in their own

words rather than yours, then exercise authority in Jesus' name and test whether the ground has actually been vacated.

Two things matter enormously here, and both are easy to get wrong. First, nobody needs to scream, shake, or perform any particular dramatic sign to be genuinely delivered — those things sometimes happen, but they are never the measure of whether deliverance occurred. Second, and more importantly: **a person who isn't ready to repent cannot be delivered against their will**, because the ground they ceded was ceded through their own agreement, and only their own agreement can take it back. This isn't a loophole that lets ministers off the hook for a failed attempt. It's a sober, honest limit built into how *topos* actually works — the same way Session 19 already established that agreements require the person who made them to be the one who breaks them.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> I was once part of a team of five men asked to help a father whose adult son was in serious spiritual trouble. The father had already spent a week trying to help his son himself and was desperate. When the man leading our team — a friend with decades of deliverance ministry experience — arrived and began asking careful questions, it quickly became clear something real and dark was present. The young man's demeanor shifted rapidly between calm, ordinary conversation and violent, venomous outbursts; at one point it took all five of us to keep him from hurting himself or someone else. I remember looking into his eyes at one point and genuinely not recognizing what I saw there. We prayed. We exercised what authority we understood at the time. And that night, we were not successful — not because our team lacked authority, and not because God's presence wasn't with us, but because the young man himself wasn't yet ready to repent and let go of what he was holding onto. Later that same week, on his own terms, he was. This is the part of deliverance ministry Scripture doesn't hide and Hollywood usually skips: sometimes the outcome depends less on the minister's authority than on the person's own readiness to release what they've been agreeing with, and a hard night doesn't mean the effort failed — sometimes it's simply not finished yet.

PAUSE & REFLECT

James 4:7's order is submit, then resist. Where in your own life have you tried to resist something spiritually before actually submitting the relevant area to God first? What would it look like to reverse that order?

WHAT ABOUT …

How do I tell the difference between demonic oppression and mental illness?

This question deserves a direct, careful answer, not a dodge in either direction — and Session 17 already promised you this session would take it up.

The honest starting point is that Scripture itself does not always draw a bright line. The boy in Mark 9 whose father describes seizures, foaming, and being thrown into fire and water (Mark 9:17–22) presents symptoms a modern reader might reasonably associate with epilepsy — and the text names the cause as a spirit, and Jesus addresses it as a spirit. That single passage should keep any of us from being overconfident in either direction: not every seizure is demonic, and Scripture does not treat this one as merely medical.

Here is the most honest, useful distinction available. Demonic oppression, where it's genuinely present, typically shows some combination of: resistance specifically to spiritual things — Scripture, prayer, worship, the name of Jesus — that doesn't track with the person's ordinary temperament; a sense of another will or voice intruding rather than simply distorted thoughts arising from the person's own mind; and some identifiable point of entry — a *topos* actually ceded, traceable to a real cause this session already named. Mental illness, by contrast, typically has an identifiable biological, chemical, or circumstantial basis; responds, at least partially, to medical or therapeutic treatment; and does not show the specific aversion to spiritual practice that oppression often does. These are patterns, not a checklist, and they can and do coexist in the same person — the wisest response is rarely either/or.

Practically: **if you suspect oppression in yourself or someone you love, that suspicion is not a reason to avoid a doctor or a counselor, and getting medical or psychological help is not a lack of faith.** Bring both. Bring wise, experienced spiritual counsel and bring appropriate medical or psychological care, and let each do the part only it can do. A demon cannot be medicated away, and a chemical imbalance cannot be delivered away — treating one as though it were the other helps no one and can genuinely harm someone in real distress.

I AM NOT SAYING

I AM NOT SAYING

— that every hard mental health struggle, every diagnosis, or every intrusive or dark thought is demonic in origin; that seeking medical or psychological treatment reflects insufficient faith; or that a failed or incomplete deliverance means the person being ministered to did something wrong, lacked enough faith, or is somehow at fault. The account above ended, that first night, without full resolution — not because anyone present failed, and not because the young man was uniquely resistant, but because repentance genuinely cannot be forced, borrowed, or performed on someone else's timeline. This curriculum has said from the beginning that it will not build a mechanism for assigning blame, and that commitment applies with special weight here, where the stakes and the pain are both real.

I AM SAYING

— that demonic oppression is a genuine biblical reality with real, nameable causes and a real remedy; that discerning it from other explanations takes humility, wisdom, and usually more than one set of eyes; and that pursuing both spiritual and medical/psychological help, rather than choosing between them, is wisdom, not a hedge on faith.

The Turn

You now have language for what this session set out to give you: demonization as occupied ground, not lost ownership (*daimonizomai*); real, nameable causes that

operate through ceded *topos* rather than random attack; and a remedy that flows directly from Christ's own stated mission to dismantle the enemy's works (*lyō*). You also have an honest boundary — not every struggle is demonic, not every failed attempt is anyone's fault, and both spiritual and medical wisdom belong in the room together.

None of it does much good left as information. This session's Experience gives you a way to actually exercise the authority you now understand.

The Experience · [Deliverance]

This is a guided practice for examining your own life for ceded ground and, where you find it, taking authority over it in Jesus' name. If you sense this Experience is surfacing something beyond what you should walk through alone, stop, and bring a trusted, spiritually mature friend or leader into it with you — the teamwork principle in this session's body applies here too.

Begin by asking the Holy Spirit directly, and waiting quietly for an honest answer:

> *"Holy Spirit, is there any ground in my life that I have given the enemy an opportunity to occupy — through habitual sin, through something I've willfully held onto, or through an old wound I never fully released? Show me clearly, and give me the courage to see it honestly."*

Whatever surfaces, name it specifically rather than generally, then pray this aloud, adapting the bracketed language to what you actually named:

> *"Father, I submit this area of my life fully to You. I confess and repent of [the specific pattern or agreement], and I renounce any ground I have given the enemy through it. In the authority and name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I resist the enemy's hold here, and I ask You to fill this space completely with Your presence. Where there has been fear, release faith. Where there has been shame, release Your acceptance. Where there has been bondage, release freedom. Thank You for the finished work that already secured this. In Jesus' name, amen."*

If nothing specific surfaces, that is itself a legitimate outcome — this practice is diagnostic as well as ministry, and a clear conscience after honest examination is worth as much as a named breakthrough.

BIG IDEAS

1. “Demon-possessed” is a translation choice, not a theological claim about ownership — *daimonizomai* describes occupied ground, and a believer’s ownership belongs to Christ permanently regardless.
2. The enemy gains ground through ceded *topos* — habitual sin, occult involvement, sustained disobedience — never by force against someone’s will.
3. Not every problem is a demon: Peter’s single bad moment and Judas’s sustained pattern both involved Satan, but only one was demonization.
4. Christ’s stated mission includes to *lyō* — dismantle — the works of the devil; deliverance ministry participates in that finished work rather than reaching beyond it.
5. Repentance cannot be forced on someone else’s timeline — a hard or unresolved night doesn’t mean anyone failed.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

The ground the enemy occupies was ceded, never seized. What was ceded through agreement can be reclaimed the same way — through a deliberate, honest act of your own will, submitted first to God.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You that Christ was revealed specifically to undo the enemy’s works, and that

> *whatever ground has been ceded in my life can be reclaimed in His name. Give me discernment to know what's actually spiritual and what calls for wisdom of another kind, courage to name what I find honestly, and patience with myself and others when freedom doesn't arrive all at once. In Jesus' name, amen.*

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (1990, rev. 2000).
Already recommended in Session 20's Go Deeper — its second half deals directly with this session's deliverance-ministry territory.

SUBSTANTIAL

Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare* (1997).
A careful, biblically grounded treatment written specifically to correct both over-spiritualizing and under-spiritualizing tendencies in deliverance ministry.

ACADEMIC

Mark 9:14–29 read alongside a study Bible's textual and medical notes on the boy's described symptoms.
The single passage that best displays Scripture's own refusal to resolve every case into either a purely spiritual or purely medical explanation.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Matthew 15:21–28 slowly. *Notice what the mother does with her desperation — she brings it directly to Jesus rather than managing it alone. Where in your own life could you do the same?*

DAY 2

Read Ephesians 4:26–27 aloud. *Is there unresolved anger, or any other settled pattern, that Paul's logic would call real ceded ground in your life right now?*

DAY 3

Read Matthew 16:21–23 and Luke 22:3–6 together. *What's the actual difference between Peter's moment and Judas's pattern? Which one more closely resembles a struggle you're currently facing?*

DAY 4

Read 1 John 3:8 and Luke 10:19 together. *Christ came to undo the enemy's works, and gave that same authority to His followers. Does that authority feel real and available to you personally? Why or why not?*

DAY 5

Read James 4:7 slowly. *Submit, then resist — never the reverse. Where have you tried to resist something spiritually before actually submitting that area to God?*

DAY 6

Revisit this session's Experience. *Did anything specific surface? If so, who is a trusted, spiritually mature person you could bring into it rather than carrying it alone?*

Tell one trusted person this week one thing this session clarified for you about the difference between “possessed” and “oppressed.”

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I’d genuinely like to hear it — email me.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Arc and timing (90 minutes). This session carries unusual emotional and theological weight — protect real time for the *What About* on mental illness rather than rushing to the Experience. If you're short on time, the Six-Day Practice's Day 3 (Peter/Judas contrast) can be assigned as personal follow-up rather than discussed live; the *What Causes Demonization* section's core teaching doesn't depend on the group working through it together.

Where the room stalls. Two very different reactions tend to surface in this session, sometimes in the same room: genuine fear (someone worried this session means they or someone they love is "possessed" in the ownership sense the word study corrects) and genuine skepticism (someone who finds all of this uncomfortably close to superstition). Don't rush past either reaction to get to content — both are worth naming out loud before moving on. Watch closely during the "Don" illustration and the *What About*; this session sits closer to real trauma and real mental health struggle than almost any other session in the curriculum, and someone in the room may be carrying either one silently.

The ministry moment. The Experience is written for private, individual prayer, even in a group setting — this is not the session to invite public group deliverance ministry, which requires far more training, discernment, and one-on-one care than a small-group format can safely provide. If someone discloses something serious during discussion — genuine distress, a suspected oppression situation, or a mental health crisis — do not attempt ministry in the moment. Thank them for their

honesty, offer to follow up privately, and involve a pastor, counselor, or both as appropriate. Do not let the room's momentum pressure you into more than that.

Discussion questions, if you need more than the Pause & Reflect prompts:

1. Before this session, what did you assume the word "demon-possessed" meant? Has that changed?
2. What's the practical value of the "not every problem is a demon" boundary — what could go wrong without it?
3. Where do you see the wisdom in bringing both spiritual and medical/psychological help to a hard situation, rather than choosing one?

What to cut if you're behind. The Go Deeper's Academic tier can be entirely omitted from group time — it's there for personal follow-up. Do not cut the *What About*; skipping it leaves the session's most pastorally important distinction unaddressed.

Demonization

"If you belong to Christ, can a demon actually get a foothold in you — and if it can, what exactly does that mean?"

THE GROUND

Daimonizōmai describes occupied territory, not owned property — a believer's spirit belongs to Christ permanently and non-negotiably, even where a demon has genuinely gained ground in the body or soul.

Matthew 15:22
1 Corinthians 6:19–20

THE OPENING

The enemy gains ground through ceded *topos* — habitual sin, occult involvement, sustained disobedience — never by force. Peter's single bad moment and Judas's sustained pattern both involved Satan, but only one ceded real ground.

Ephesians 4:26–27
Luke 22:3

THE REMEDY

Christ's stated mission was to *lyō* — untie, dismantle — the devil's works, and His people carry that same authority. But it isn't a solo act, and repentance cannot be forced on someone else's timeline.

1 John 3:8
James 4:7

THE LINE

Scripture doesn't always draw a bright line between oppression and mental illness, and neither should you. Bring both spiritual and medical help — a demon can't be medicated away, and a chemical imbalance can't be delivered away.

Mark 9:17–22

THE TURN

What was ceded through agreement can be reclaimed the same way — a deliberate, honest act of your own will, submitted first to God, participating in the exact work Christ was already sent to do.

1 John 3:8

SO NOW

OCCUPIED, NOT OWNED

"Possessed" overclaims what the Greek actually says. A believer's ownership belongs to Christ permanently, regardless of what ground has been gained.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20

CEDED, NOT SEIZED

The enemy doesn't force his way in. He occupies ground that's handed over through habitual sin, sustained disobedience, or a wound left unaddressed.

Ephesians 4:27

PATTERN, NOT MOMENT

A single bad moment isn't demonization. A settled, sustained pattern — ceded again and again — is real ground, and real ground is what actually gets occupied.

Luke 22:3

BOTH, NOT EITHER

Suspected oppression is never a reason to skip a doctor, and a diagnosis is never a reason to skip prayer. Bring both, and let each do the part only it can do.

Mark 9:17–22

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

The ground the enemy occupies was ceded, never seized. What was ceded through agreement can be reclaimed the same way — through a deliberate, honest act of your own will, submitted first to God.

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Next · Session 22, Kingdom Health. You've now covered the full arc of preparation — identity, prayer, the tongue, faith, transformation, forgiveness, strongholds, bondage, and demonization. Session 22 turns toward wholeness: God's design and provision for healing, in body and soul alike.

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22

KINGDOM HEALTH

Kingdom Essentials: The Preparation

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Divine Health

03 Divine Healing

04 The Turn

05 The Experience · [Communion]

06 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Every session in this movement has been about reclaiming ground the enemy has occupied — in your thinking, your agreements, your bloodline, your soul. This session turns to the last and most visible frontier: your body.

> *"But he lifted up our illnesses, he carried our pain… He was wounded because of our rebellious deeds, crushed because of our sins; he endured punishment that made us well; because of his wounds we have been healed."*
>
> **ISAIAH 53:4–5**

Does God still heal today — and if so, why doesn't He always?

This is a question every believer eventually asks, usually at the hardest possible moment: beside a hospital bed, in a waiting room, at a funeral that faith didn't prevent. This session won't pretend the question is simple. It will make the strongest honest case Scripture actually makes for divine health and healing, and it will refuse to turn the hard cases into anyone's fault.

CONSIDER THIS

Think of someone you've prayed for who wasn't healed — yourself, maybe. What did you conclude about why? Was that conclusion something Scripture actually says, or something you assumed?

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, give me a settled confidence in what You have actually promised, without pretending I understand everything about why healing comes when it comes and tarries when it tarries. Heal what You choose to heal today, and give me grace to trust You either way. In Jesus' name, amen.

Divine Health

Start where Genesis starts. "God saw everything that he had made — and it was very good" (Genesis 1:31) — no sickness, no disease, no decay in that original design. Every illness that has ever touched a human body entered through the same door sin and death entered through; it was never part of the blueprint. That doesn't mean every case of sickness has a traceable spiritual cause — it means sickness itself, as a category, is foreign to what God originally made, not a feature He built in.

WORD STUDY

σώζω *sōzō* G4982

> **"made well"** · Luke 8:48

Range. *Sōzō* is one of the most common verbs in the New Testament — well over a hundred occurrences — and English struggles to translate it with one word, because it doesn't distinguish the way English does between spiritual, physical, and psychological restoration. Thayer's range runs from rescuing someone from danger, to healing or restoring health, to preserving life, to the specifically theological sense of salvation from sin's penalty.

The sense here. The same Greek word underlies "your faith has made you well" (Luke 8:48, physical), "the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick" (James 5:15, physical again), and "you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8, spiritual). NET's translators have to pick an English word each time; the Greek text uses one word for all of it.

Why it carries the argument. This is the linguistic root behind the claim that Kingdom health touches the whole person. Whatever the New Testament means by salvation, it's naming a single Greek concept that includes bodily healing as one of its ordinary senses — not a separate, lesser category tacked onto "real" salvation, but genuinely part of the same word's range.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. σῴζω.

ILLUSTRATION

A woman had suffered constant bleeding for twelve years, had spent everything she had on physicians, and "could not be healed by anyone" (Luke 8:43). She didn't approach Jesus directly or ask permission — she pressed through a crowd and touched the edge of His cloak, and "at once the bleeding stopped" (Luke 8:44). When Jesus found her, trembling, He didn't rebuke her for the presumption. He said, "Daughter, your faith has **made you well** (σέσωκέν). Go in peace" (Luke 8:48). Twelve years of failed remedies didn't disqualify her. A single, desperate reach toward Jesus was enough.

The Old Testament makes the identical claim in its own vocabulary, centuries earlier.

> *"If you will diligently obey the Lord your God… then all the diseases that I brought on the Egyptians I will not bring on you, for I, the Lord, am your* ***healer*** **(רֹפְאֶךָ)**.*"*
>
> **EXODUS 15:26**

WORD STUDY

רָפָא *rapha* H7495

> **"healer"** · Exodus 15:26

Range. BDB's picture for *rapha* is concrete and almost domestic: to mend, to stitch back together, to bring wholeness where damage or disorder has intruded. The word appears roughly sixty-seven times across the Old Testament, spanning literal physical healing, the healing of water (2 Kings 2:21–22), and the restoration of a broken relationship with God (2 Chronicles 7:14).

The sense here. Exodus 15:26 doesn't say God *performs* healing occasionally. It says, in a sentence structured as self-identification rather than mere promise, "I, the Lord, *am* your healer" — *Yahweh Rapheka*, a covenant name, the same grammatical form as "I am the Lord who sanctifies you" (Leviticus 20:8) or "the Lord is my banner" (Exodus 17:15). Healing isn't presented as an occasional action God performs. It's presented as an identity God claims.

Why it carries the argument. A God whose self-given name includes "healer" hasn't grown distant from that name in the New Testament. The consistency between *rapha* here and *sōzō* eight hundred years later isn't coincidence — it's the same God, the same character, described in two languages across two testaments.

Source. BDB, s.v. רָפָא.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Does thinking of “healer” as God’s actual name — not just something He occasionally does — change how you’d pray the next time you or someone you love is sick?

One honest boundary belongs here before this session goes any further: divine health is not the same promise as immortality. “We will all experience death as a result of the Fall” is simply true, and no amount of faith changes that this side of the resurrection. Scripture never promises escape from aging or from eventual death; it promises something narrower and still remarkable — that sickness and disease are not the *normal*, expected companions of a life of faith the way they’re often assumed to be, and that healing, when it comes, is a genuine down payment on a body that will one day be fully free of both. Holding these together honestly — real aging is not a faith failure, and neither is real sickness — matters enormously for anyone walking this season of life with the years actually adding up.

Divine Healing

If health is God’s design and healing is God’s character, the next question is practical: what did Jesus and His followers actually do about sickness, and what does that mean for you?

The pattern in the Gospels is remarkably consistent. Jesus “healed all who were sick” wherever crowds brought them (Matthew 8:16), and the invitations attached to His healing ministry are consistently universal — “as many,” “all,” “everyone” (Matthew 12:15, 14:36, Luke 6:19). Matthew explicitly ties this healing ministry to Isaiah’s prophecy: “In this way what was spoken by Isaiah the prophet was

fulfilled: ‘He took our weaknesses and carried our diseases’” (Matthew 8:17, quoting Isaiah 53:4). Whatever else Isaiah 53 accomplishes — and this curriculum has already treated its atonement for sin as settled ground — Matthew himself reads it as reaching further than sin alone.

> *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we may cease from sinning and live for righteousness. By his wounds you were* ***healed*** **(ἰάθητε)***.”*
>
> **1 PETER 2:24**

WORD STUDY

ἰάομαι *iaomai* G2390

> **“healed”** · 1 Peter 2:24

Range. *Iaomai* is the New Testament’s standard word for medical-style healing — curing, restoring, making whole — used both literally (physical cures throughout the Gospels) and, less often, figuratively of moral or spiritual restoration.

The sense here. Peter writes: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree… By his wounds you were healed [*iathēte*]” (1 Peter 2:24). Read in context, the healing Peter names sits inside a passage about sin, righteousness, and returning to “the shepherd and guardian of your souls” (v. 25) — the same word Isaiah used for a suffering servant whose wounds heal others is used again here, deliberately, in a passage primarily about sin.

Why it carries the argument. This is the actual textual basis for what theologians call “healing in the atonement” — the claim that Christ’s suffering secured physical healing the same way it secured forgiveness. That claim is real and textually grounded, not invented. What it doesn’t settle, on

its own, is the harder question this session's *What About* takes up directly: if healing was purchased at the cross the same way forgiveness was, why does forgiveness land completely and immediately while healing so often doesn't?

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. ἰάομαι.

Healing was never a solo specialty either. Jesus sent His disciples out with a two-part commission, not a two-part option: "preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:2) — the announcement and the healing traveled together, the second acting as visible evidence of the first. "Heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10:9). Healing, in the Gospels, is never presented as an isolated favor for the sufferer alone; it's presented as a sign that the Kingdom itself has arrived in that place — which is exactly why its partial, "already but not yet" arrival matters so much for understanding why it doesn't arrive everywhere the same way.

James gives the New Testament's one direct instruction for what to do about it: "Is anyone among you ill? He should summon the elders of the church, and they should pray for him and anoint him with oil in the Lord's name. And the prayer of faith will save [*sōzō*] the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up" (James 5:14–15). Notice what this verse does and doesn't say. It doesn't say healing is automatic, mechanical, or guaranteed on demand. It says: bring your sickness into the community rather than carrying it alone, ask specifically and in faith, and trust the outcome to the Lord who raises up. James adds one more layer worth naming: "confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed" (James 5:16) — not because sin causes every sickness, this session has already refused that equation, but because honest community, not private performance, is where James locates the ordinary practice of healing prayer.

ILLUSTRATION

Job lost his health, his wealth, and his children in a single catastrophic season, and Scripture is explicit about the source: Satan, not God, struck him with disease (Job 2:7), even though God permitted it within limits He set (Job 1:12, 2:6). When Job's three friends arrived, their theology was simple and, on the surface, reasonable. Eliphaz states it as settled fact within the first few chapters: "Call to mind now: who, being innocent, ever perished? And where were upright people ever destroyed?" (Job 4:7). The logic runs in one direction only — suffering this severe must mean hidden sin, and repentance would bring relief — and the friends repeat variations of it across dozens of chapters, with real conviction and real Scripture-adjacent reasoning. And at

> the end of the book, God rebukes them by name: “My anger is stirred up against you and your two friends, because you have not spoken about me what is right, as my servant Job has” (Job 42:7). The friends weren’t wrong that God cares about sin. They were wrong to assume Job’s suffering proved he had some. God’s own verdict, stated plainly, is that the blame-the-sufferer theology was the actual error in the story — not Job’s continued insistence on his innocence.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Job’s friends built an entire theology around “your suffering must mean something you did wrong.” Where have you seen — or held — a version of that same assumption, even a quieter one?

WHAT ABOUT …

If healing is God’s will and Jesus purchased it, why isn’t everyone healed?

This is the honest question underneath everything this session has said so far, and it deserves a direct answer rather than a dodge in either direction.

Scripture’s own witness includes cases that resist a simple formula. Paul — an apostle whose ministry included healings so tangible that people carried handkerchiefs he’d touched to the sick (Acts 19:11–12) — still told Timothy plainly to treat his own recurring stomach trouble with wine rather than a command of faith: “Stop drinking just water, but use a little wine for your digestion and your frequent illnesses” (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul’s own coworker Epaphroditus, serving right alongside him, “became so ill that he nearly died,” and Paul describes God’s mercy in his eventual recovery with real, relieved gratitude rather than treating the illness as something faith should simply have prevented (Philippians 2:26–27). And near the end of his life, writing to Timothy

without a hint of embarrassment or unbelief, Paul reports simply: “Trophimus I left ill in Miletus” (2 Timothy 4:20) — not healed, not explained, just left. If any human being in Scripture had standing to command healing by unwavering faith, it was Paul. Sickness still touched his own body, his closest coworkers, and the people he cared about — and he didn’t always resolve it by command.

The honest resolution runs through the same “already, but not yet” shape this curriculum has traced since Session 2’s opening definition of Kingdom Life. The Kingdom has genuinely broken in — Jesus healed, the apostles healed, and the New Testament’s own testimony is that healing continues wherever the Spirit chooses to move. And the Kingdom has not yet fully arrived. “We ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we eagerly await… the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). Firstfruits are real fruit, genuinely tasted now — not the full harvest. Healing today is real, available, and worth praying for with genuine expectancy. Full, final, guaranteed freedom from every disease belongs to the resurrection body, not fully to this one.

That means the honest posture toward healing prayer holds two things at once without collapsing either one: pray with real, unhedged expectancy — not the faith-destroying reflex of tacking “if it be your will” onto every request as a hedge against disappointment — and hold the outcome open-handed, the way Paul held Trophimus’s illness: reported plainly, without explanation or self-blame, rather than forced into a tidy resolution. Those aren’t in tension. They’re the same posture the woman with the twelve-year hemorrhage held when she pressed through a crowd she had no guaranteed right to interrupt.

This isn’t a retreat from the authority Session 13 already established. You genuinely carry real, Christ-given authority to pray boldly for healing, the same authority that covers agreements, strongholds, and demonic oppression elsewhere in this movement. What changes here is the target. Authority over a lie you agreed with, or ground the enemy occupied through your own sin, is authority over something entirely within the enemy’s jurisdiction to begin with — Session 21 already covered exactly how that works. A body living inside a not-yet-fully-redeemed creation, “groaning” alongside all creation for a redemption still being awaited (Romans 8:22–23), is a more complex kind of ground. Authority is still real. It simply operates inside a Kingdom that is genuinely inaugurated and not yet finished — the same tension this whole session has been naming honestly rather than resolving away.

> **I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> - I’m not saying sickness is usually caused by personal sin, hidden unbelief, or insufficient faith. Job’s

friends built exactly that theology and God rebuked them for it by name (Job 42:7); Jesus rejected the identical assumption about the man born blind — “Neither this man nor his parents sinned” (John 9:3) — when His own disciples reached for it.

- I’m not saying seeking medical treatment reflects a lack of faith or spiritual maturity. Luke, one of the New Testament’s own authors, is identified as “the physician” (Colossians 4:14) without a hint of tension between that vocation and his standing in the early church — Paul himself told Timothy to use wine for his stomach, not a command of faith (1 Timothy 5:23). Prayer and medicine are not competing sources of healing; they’re both provision from the same God.
- I’m not saying every prayer for healing will be answered the way it’s asked. Paul’s own report of leaving Trophimus ill, unexplained, settles that question for anyone tempted to claim otherwise.

I AM SAYING

- I am saying God’s stated character includes “healer” as a name, not an occasional favor.
- I am saying Jesus’s ministry and the New Testament’s own instruction (James 5:14–15) invite real, expectant prayer for healing rather than passive resignation.
- I am saying that when healing doesn’t come the way you asked, the right response is Paul’s own — continued trust in a God whose grace has already proven sufficient — not a search for whose fault it must have been.

The Turn

You now have what this session set out to give: a settled confidence that God's character includes healing (*rapha*), that Kingdom wholeness reaches the whole person (*sōzō*), that Christ's suffering genuinely secured healing as well as forgiveness (*iaomai*) — and an honest refusal to turn unhealed suffering into anyone's fault, Job's friends' way.

The Preparation movement closes here. You've been equipped, session by session, to walk in freedom — from false thinking, false agreements, false bondage, and now false blame about your own body. This session's Experience returns to the oldest, simplest practice the church has for receiving what Christ purchased: the table He set Himself.

The Experience · [Communion]

This is a guided practice of taking communion — bread and a cup, whatever you have available — slowly and attentively, specifically remembering both what Christ's body secured.

Read this aloud before you begin:

> *"For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes… A person should examine himself first, and in this way let him eat the bread and drink of the cup."*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 11:26, 28**

Paul's warning in the verses right after this — that careless, inattentive participation in communion had left the Corinthian church "weak and sick," some even dead (1 Corinthians 11:30) — is one of the most sobering claims in the New Testament, and worth taking seriously without over-reading it into a formula. Paul's own remedy wasn't fear; it was attentiveness: "examine himself first."

Take the bread in your hand. Before eating it, say aloud:

> *"Lord Jesus, this bread is Your body, broken for me. I receive what it represents — forgiveness fully secured, and healing genuinely*

purchased for whatever in me still needs it, today or in the resurrection to come."

Eat. Then take the cup, and before drinking, say aloud:

> *"This cup is the new covenant in Your blood. I proclaim Your death until You return, and I receive the wholeness — body, soul, and spirit — that Your death secured. Where You choose to heal today, I receive it gladly. Where healing tarries, I trust the grace that has already proven sufficient. In Jesus' name, amen."*

Drink. Sit for a moment in silence before returning to ordinary life.

BIG IDEAS

1. Sickness entered through the Fall; it was never part of God's original design, and it isn't the norm Scripture asks you to make peace with.
2. *Rapha* — "healer" — is a name God claims for Himself (Exodus 15:26), not merely an occasional action.
3. *Sōzō* describes a single, seamless kind of wholeness spanning body, soul, and spirit — the same word behind "saved" and "made well."
4. *Iaomai* in 1 Peter 2:24 grounds the real, textual claim that Christ's atonement secured healing alongside forgiveness — but forgiveness lands completely now, while healing lives in the "already, but not yet" tension of an unfinished Kingdom.
5. Suffering is never proof of hidden sin or insufficient faith — God rebuked Job's friends by name for building exactly that theology.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Healing is God's character and Christ's purchase, offered freely and prayed for

expectantly — never a scoreboard for measuring anyone's faith.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You that healing is who You are, not merely something You occasionally decide to do. Give me expectant faith to pray boldly the next time sickness touches my life or someone I love, and give me the same steady trust Paul showed when Trophimus stayed sick and the answer wasn't the one he'd have wanted. Free me from ever assuming suffering is proof of anyone's failure. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (1993).
A former cessationist seminary professor's own account of re-examining Scripture on healing and the gifts — referenced directly in this session's 2018 source material.

SUBSTANTIAL

The book of Job, read in full rather than only its opening and closing chapters.
The friends' speeches (chapters 4–37) are worth reading before God's rebuke in chapter 42 lands with its full weight.

ACADEMIC

A comparative reading of Isaiah 53, Matthew 8:16–17, and 1 Peter 2:24 alongside a systematic theology's treatment of "healing in the atonement" (e.g., Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, already recommended in Session 16's Go Deeper).
Grudem represents a measured, mainstream-evangelical case that healing is provided for in the atonement without being unconditionally guaranteed in this life — a useful counterweight to both extremes.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Genesis 1:31 and Isaiah 53:4–5 together. *Sickness was never part of the original design. Does that change how you think about praying for it to be undone?*

DAY 2

Read Exodus 15:26 aloud, slowly. *"I, the Lord, am your healer." Sit with that as God's self-description, not just a promise.*

DAY 3

Read Luke 8:43–48. *Twelve years of failed remedies didn't disqualify this woman. What's a "twelve years" situation in your own life you've stopped bringing to Jesus?*

DAY 4

Read Job 42:1–8. *Where have you assumed — about yourself or someone else — that suffering must mean hidden failure? Name it honestly.*

DAY 5

Read 1 Timothy 5:23 and 2 Timothy 4:20 together. *Paul gave Timothy a practical remedy, not a command of faith; Trophimus stayed sick, unexplained. What does it change to know even Paul's own story includes ordinary, unresolved illness?*

DAY 6

Revisit this session's Experience. *Did taking communion with this specific attentiveness feel different than usual? What made the difference?*

Pray specifically this week for one physical need — your own or someone else's — with the same unhedged expectancy the woman in Luke 8 showed, and hold the outcome the way Paul held Trophimus's illness — plainly, without forcing an explanation.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Arc and timing (90 minutes). This session covers dense theological ground across two full sections before reaching the *What About* — protect real time for that section rather than treating it as a quick coda. If you're short on time, the *Go Deeper* Academic tier's Grudem comparison can be assigned as personal follow-up rather than covered live.

Where the room stalls. This is likely the most personally raw session in the entire curriculum for many groups — nearly everyone has either prayed for healing that didn't come, or watched someone they love do the same. Expect real grief to surface, sometimes unexpectedly, during the Job illustration or the *What About*. Do not rush past it. If someone shares a painful, unresolved healing story, resist the urge to explain it theologically in the moment; let the room's compassion do more work than an answer would. Watch also for the opposite reaction — someone who has been taught a harder-edged "enough faith always heals" theology and may initially experience this session's caution as a step backward rather than a correction.

The ministry moment. The Communion Experience works well as a genuine group practice, unlike several of this movement's more private Experiences — consider closing your session together at the table rather than sending people home to do it alone, if your group setting allows for it. If someone is currently facing serious illness, invite the group to lay hands and pray specifically for them after communion, following James 5:14's pattern, but keep expectancy and open-handed trust equally present in how you lead that prayer.

Discussion questions, if you need more than the Pause & Reflect prompts:

1. Before this session, did you lean more toward "God usually heals if you have enough faith" or "healing mostly stopped after the apostles"? Has either position shifted?
2. What's the practical difference between praying with real expectancy and praying presumptuously?
3. Job's friends meant well. What makes well-meaning theology dangerous when it's wrong?

What to cut if you're behind. The Six-Day Practice's Day 2 (Exodus 15:26 meditation) can be assigned without discussion — it's a short, self-contained reflection. Do not cut the *What About* or *Not Saying*; skipping either leaves this session's healing claims sounding more absolute and less honest than intended.

Kingdom Health

“Does God still heal today — and if so, why doesn’t He always?”

THE DESIGN

Sickness was never part of the original blueprint — God’s own self-given name includes “healer” (*rapha*), and Kingdom wholeness (*sōzō*) reaches body, soul, and spirit as one seamless concept.

Genesis 1:31
Exodus 15:26

THE PURCHASE

Christ’s suffering genuinely secured healing (*iaomai*) the same textual way it secured forgiveness — a real, grounded claim, though one this session refuses to force into more certainty than the text itself supports.

Matthew 8:17
1 Peter 2:24

THE PRACTICE

Bring your sickness into the community, ask specifically in faith, and trust the outcome — and never build the blame-the-sufferer theology God rebuked Job’s friends for by name.

James 5:14–15
Job 42:7

THE TENSION

Even Paul’s own story includes ordinary, unresolved illness in the people he loved. Healing today is real firstfruits, genuinely tasted now — not yet the full harvest of a fully redeemed body.

2 Timothy 4:20
Romans 8:22–23

THE TURN

God rebuked Job’s friends by name for turning unhealed suffering into anyone’s fault. Whatever healing does or doesn’t come, the verdict over you was never theirs to render.

Job 42:7

SO NOW

DESIGN, NOT PUNISHMENT

Sickness entered through the fall; it was never God’s original blueprint for a human body, and it isn’t the norm you’re asked to make peace with.

Genesis 1:31

CHARACTER, NOT OCCASIONAL

“I, the Lord, am your healer” is a self-given name, not a promise God occasionally decides to keep.

Exodus 15:26

NOW, NOT YET

Healing available today is real firstfruits, genuinely tasted — not the full harvest a still-groaning creation is still waiting for.

Romans 8:23

HONEST, NOT BLAMED

God rebuked Job’s friends by name for assuming suffering proved hidden sin. Unhealed prayer is never proof of anyone’s failure.

Job 42:7

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Healing is God’s character and Christ’s purchase, offered freely and prayed for expectantly — never a scoreboard for measuring anyone’s faith.

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Next · Session 23, The Trinity. The Preparation movement is complete — you've been equipped in mind, will, and now body. Session 23 opens The Prize: the movement given to knowing God Himself, beginning with who He actually is.

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23

THE TRINITY

Kingdom Essentials: The Prize

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 The Trinity in the Old Testament

03 The Trinity in the New Testament

04 Accepted Truth and Common Errors

05 Tension in the Mystery

06 The Experience · [Worship]

07 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Everything in The Mission, The Power, and The Preparation has assumed a God worth knowing. This session asks the question those movements never paused to answer directly: who, exactly, is He?

> *“Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven — what can you do? Deeper than Sheol — what can you know?”*
>
> **JOB 11:7–8**

Can a doctrine be both completely true and only partially comprehensible?

That’s the honest starting posture for this session. Christians confess that God is three Persons and one God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — and the word most commonly used for that confession, “Trinity,” never actually appears in Scripture. That single fact makes some believers nervous. It shouldn’t. This session will make the case, directly from Scripture, that the doctrine is thoroughly biblical even though its name is not — and it will be honest about exactly where understanding runs out and worship has to begin instead.

CONSIDER THIS

Before this session makes its case, notice your own starting point. If someone asked you right now to explain the Trinity in one sentence, what would you say — and how confident are you in that sentence?

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, the fact that You are ultimately beyond my full comprehension is unsettling, but it isn't unsatisfying. I want to know everything You've revealed about Yourself, and I want the humility to be at peace with what You haven't. Holy Spirit, teach me. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Trinity in the Old Testament

Start with the text every faithful Jew has recited twice daily for millennia:

> *"Listen, Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is* ***one*** **(אֶחָד)***!"*
>
> **DEUTERONOMY 6:4**

WORD STUDY

אֶחָד *echad* H259

> **"one"** · Deuteronomy 6:4

Range. *Echad* is Hebrew's ordinary word for the number one, appearing roughly 970 times across the Old Testament. Its range runs from simple arithmetic ("one man," "one day") to a specific compound sense: unity formed out of more than one part.

The sense here. The Shema's confession that "the Lord is one" uses *echad*, not the Hebrew word for an indivisible singularity (*yachid*, used elsewhere for an only child — Genesis 22:2). That choice of word matters. The same *echad* describes marriage: "a man leaves his father and mother and unites with his wife, and they become a new family" (Genesis 2:24) — two distinct persons, described as *echad*, one. A husband and wife are genuinely two; Scripture calls their union *echad* anyway.

Why it carries the argument. This doesn't prove the Trinity by itself — *echad* is used plenty of places for a plain, simple one, and this session won't claim more precision than the word actually carries. What it shows is that Hebrew's ordinary word for "one," used by God to describe His own unity in the Shema, is fully compatible with — and elsewhere in the same book of the Torah, actually describes — a unity that contains real plurality. The Shema was never grammatically forced to mean "one" in the flattest possible sense.

Source. BDB, s.v. אֶחָד.

That compatibility becomes suggestive the moment you notice how God refers to Himself elsewhere in Genesis.

> *"Then God said, 'Let us (נַעֲשֶׂה) make humankind in our image, after our likeness…'"*
>
> **GENESIS 1:26**

WORD STUDY

אֱלֹהִים *elohim* H430

> **“Let us”** · Genesis 1:26

Range. *Elohim*, God’s most common Old Testament name, is grammatically plural in form — the plural of *eloah*. It’s used well over two thousand times, and BDB notes it most frequently governs *singular* verbs and adjectives when referring to the one true God, a pattern grammarians call the “plural of majesty.”

The sense here. That caveat matters, and this session states it plainly rather than skip past it: the plural form of *elohim* alone doesn’t prove a triune God. A plural-of-majesty explanation is genuinely available, and honest scholarship acknowledges it. What tips the evidence further is what happens when *elohim* is paired with first-person-plural pronouns describing God’s own action — “let *us* make… in *our* image, after *our* likeness” (Genesis 1:26), “the man has become like one of *us*” (Genesis 3:22), “let *us* go down” (Genesis 11:7). A plural of majesty explains a plural noun. It doesn’t as easily explain God referring to Himself with plural pronouns while still, three verses later, being confessed as *echad* — one.

Why it carries the argument. Genesis doesn’t argue for a Trinity outright — the doctrine’s full shape only comes into focus once the New Testament identifies the plurality as Father, Son, and Spirit. But it plants something real: a text that describes the one true God, in His own words, using language too plural for simple singularity and too unified for simple multiplicity. Scripture’s own writers left that tension sitting in the text, unresolved, for well over a thousand years before the New Testament resolved it.

Source. BDB, s.v. אֱלֹהִים.

ILLUSTRATION

The Old Testament's clearest single hint may be the one hiding in plain sight inside the Shema itself. "The Lord is *echad*" — one — is the same word Genesis uses for a husband and wife becoming "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24): two real, distinct persons, genuinely called one. Rabbinic tradition has never fully explained why the text chose that particular word for God's unity rather than the more absolute *yachid*. Long before any New Testament writer named Father, Son, and Spirit, the vocabulary for describing their unity was already sitting inside Israel's own daily confession of faith.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Does it surprise you that the Old Testament's own vocabulary already had room for plurality-within-unity, centuries before the New Testament named who that plurality actually was?

The Trinity in the New Testament

Whatever the Old Testament left as suggestive tension, the New Testament resolves directly — beginning with the single scene where all three Persons appear together.

ILLUSTRATION

"When Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from

> heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:16–17). In a single moment: the Son standing in the water, the Spirit visibly descending, the Father’s voice speaking from heaven. Not three gods taking turns. Not one God changing costumes. Three distinct, simultaneous, mutually addressing Persons at the same event — the Son being spoken *to* by the Father, the Spirit resting *on* the Son. Every Gospel writer records this scene (Matthew 3:16–17, Mark 1:10–11, Luke 3:21–22, John 1:32–34); it wasn’t a detail any of them thought to soften or omit.

The pattern repeats throughout the New Testament’s own vocabulary for God, most explicitly in the words Jesus Himself commanded His followers to use: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Notice the grammar carefully — *name*, singular, not *names*, plural — one name shared by three distinct Persons, named individually. Paul’s letters make the same move repeatedly, almost as a matter of course rather than a deliberate argument: “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14); “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all” (1 Corinthians 12:4–6).

The clearest single verse for the claim that each Person is *fully* God, not a lesser or created being, is one the writer of Hebrews uses about the Son:

> *“The Son is the radiance of his glory and the* ***representation (χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως) of his essence****, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.”*
>
> **HEBREWS 1:3**

WORD STUDY

ὑπόστασις *hypostasis* G5287

> **“essence”** · Hebrews 1:3

Range. *Hypostasis* is a rich, technical Greek term: literally “that which stands under,” it came to mean the actual, underlying substance or reality of a thing — as opposed to its mere appearance. Outside this specific theological use, it

also carries a sense of confident assurance (Hebrews 11:1's "faith is the assurance [*hypostasis*] of things hoped for").

The sense here. Hebrews pairs *hypostasis* with *charaktēr* — the precise image stamped by a die onto a coin, an exact impression rather than a rough resemblance. The Son isn't described as *resembling* God's essence from the outside. He's described as its exact, stamped impression — sharing the identical underlying reality the word names.

Why it carries the argument. This is the very word later theologians borrowed to describe the "Persons" of the Trinity — three *hypostaseis*, one *ousia* (essence). Hebrews 1:3 is the New Testament seed of that later technical vocabulary: whatever the Father's essence actually is, Hebrews says the Son is its exact representation, not an inferior copy. That single verse is the direct textual answer to the ancient error — Arianism — that this session's next section names by name.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. ὑπόστασις.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Hebrews 1:3 says the Son is the "exact representation" of God's essence, not merely a reflection of it. What difference does that distinction make for how you think about Jesus?

This isn't merely a doctrine to confess correctly and set aside — it shapes the ordinary mechanics of a believer's own prayer life, the territory Session 14 already walked through in detail. "Through him [Christ] we both have access in

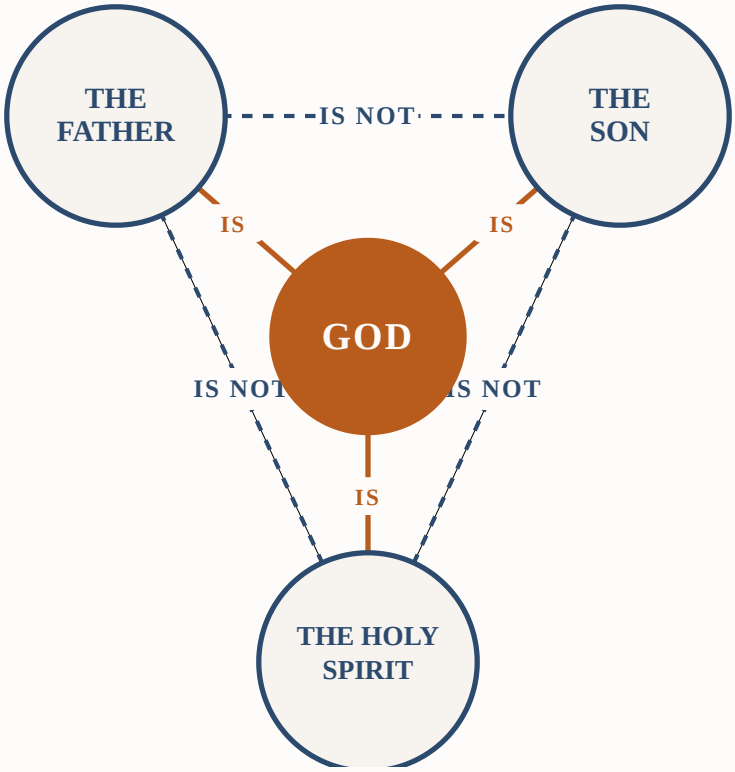
one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18) describes prayer itself as a genuinely Trinitarian act: access secured by the Son, granted through the Spirit, directed to the Father. When you pray "in Jesus' name," you're not invoking a password. You're standing inside the actual relational structure Ephesians 2:18 describes — one Spirit, one access, one Father, made available through one Son. The doctrine this session is working to state precisely is the same doctrine you've likely already been living out, less precisely, every time you've prayed.

Accepted Truth and Common Errors

Historic, orthodox Christianity summarizes everything the Old and New Testaments together reveal about God's nature in three simple statements, and every significant historical error about the Trinity has come from denying exactly one of them.

God is three Persons. Each Person is fully God. There is one God. Hold all three simultaneously, deny none of them, and you have the doctrine the church has confessed since its earliest centuries — formally clarified, though not invented, at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., convened by the emperor Constantine to settle a controversy a presbyter named Arius had ignited seven years earlier. Arius taught that the Son was a created being, exalted but not eternal — a direct denial of the second statement above. The council's response, later completed at a second council in Constantinople in 381 A.D., produced the Nicene Creed: language affirming that Jesus is "true God from true God… of one essence with the Father." The council didn't invent the doctrine of the Trinity. It clarified, under real theological pressure, language the church needed in order to keep saying accurately what Scripture had already revealed.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> At Nicaea, the debate wasn't academic. Arius and his opponents — most famously the young deacon Athanasius, who would spend much of the rest of his life defending the council's conclusion against repeated attempts to reverse it — were arguing about whether the Jesus Christians worshiped and prayed to was actually, fully God, or merely God's first and greatest creation. Athanasius's own later summary of what was at stake became a well-known theological principle: only a fully divine Savior could actually save. A created being, however exalted, could represent humanity to God, but could not accomplish what only God Himself can do. The stakes of getting this doctrine right were never merely intellectual.



The *Shield of the Trinity* (Latin *Scutum Fidei*) — a diagram used in Western Christian teaching since at least the 12th century. Unlike the analogies below, it doesn't compare God to anything outside Himself. It states the doctrine's own relations directly: each Person *is* God, and no Person *is* either of the other two.

Three historic errors, each denying one leg of the three-legged truth above, are worth naming specifically:

Denying God is three Persons produces Modalism — the claim that God is a single Person who merely appears in different "modes" (Father, then Son, then Spirit) at different times, the way an actor plays different roles. This fails the baptism scene directly: Modalism can't explain Father, Son, and Spirit being simultaneously present and distinct at the Jordan.

Denying each Person is fully God produces Arianism — the ancient error named above, still alive today in groups that teach Jesus is a created, lesser being rather than fully God. Hebrews 1:3's "exact representation of his essence" is Scripture's own direct answer to this error.

Denying there is one God produces Tritheism — treating Father, Son, and Spirit as three separate gods rather than one God in three Persons. This is historically the rarest of the three errors, but it's the one popular analogies (see below) most often accidentally teach.

I AM NOT SAYING

— that the Old Testament passages in this session's first section prove the Trinity with the same clarity the New Testament does on its own; that the doctrine of the Trinity was invented, rather than merely clarified, at Nicaea; or that every believer who struggles to articulate this doctrine precisely, or who leans slightly toward one of the three historic errors without realizing it, has therefore stepped outside genuine faith. Getting the language exactly right is hard, and generations of careful theologians have worked at it for centuries.

I AM SAYING

— that Scripture's own witness, Old and New Testament together, genuinely teaches one God in three co-equal, co-eternal Persons; that this doctrine is worth the intellectual effort it takes to hold accurately, because what it protects (a Savior who is actually God, a Spirit who is actually God, one God rather than a divided loyalty between several) matters enormously; and that not fully comprehending it is not the same thing as not being able to trust it.

Tension in the Mystery

Humans reach for analogies to make hard ideas graspable. Every common analogy for the Trinity fails, and noticing exactly *how* each one fails is itself a useful way to understand the doctrine more precisely.

Water can be solid, liquid, or gas — one substance, three forms. But a single water molecule is only ever one of those forms at a time, never all three simultaneously the way Father, Son, and Spirit are simultaneously, eternally distinct. This analogy quietly teaches Modalism. A triangle has three distinct sides forming one shape. But any single side, alone, is just a line — not a triangle. This

analogy quietly teaches Arianism: each “Person” alone isn’t fully what the whole is. Three separate individuals — three close friends, say — are three distinct persons. But three friends are three separate beings, not one. This analogy quietly teaches Tritheism. Every analogy reaches for something in ordinary experience and comes up short, because nothing in ordinary experience is three fully distinct, co-equal, co-eternal Persons sharing one undivided essence. That’s not a flaw in the teachers who use these analogies. It’s a genuine limit of finite comparison applied to an infinite, unique reality.

Another Voice

“No man can fully explain the Trinity, though in every age scholars have propounded theories and advanced hypotheses to explore this mysterious Biblical teaching… Perhaps the chief reason for this is that the Trinity is a-logical, or beyond logic. It, therefore, cannot be made subject to human reason or logic.”

— Walter Martin, Essential Christianity (1975)

That’s not an excuse to stop thinking carefully — this entire session has been an exercise in thinking carefully. It’s a recognition that some true things are genuinely bigger than the human mind’s native categories, the way a child can trust a parent’s love completely without comprehending everything about how that love works. “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Scripture reveals enough about the Trinity to be confessed, worshiped, and trusted. It doesn’t reveal enough to be fully diagrammed.

Paul himself, writing to a church he’d personally taught for well over a year, admits the same limit about knowing God generally: “now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). If the apostle who wrote a third of the New Testament was content to know in part, a modern reader working through a discipleship curriculum can hold the same posture without embarrassment. Partial knowledge of an infinite God, held with confidence rather than anxiety, is not a failure of faith. It’s the appropriate size of a finite mind’s grasp on the God who made it.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn’t the Trinity just Christianity borrowing ideas from pagan triads?

This is a fair, commonly raised objection, and it deserves a real answer rather than a defensive dismissal. Ancient religions did have groupings of three gods — Egyptian, Babylonian, and later Hindu triads are the examples most often raised. If Christianity’s Trinity is just another version of the same instinct toward divine threes, the doctrine looks more like inherited mythology than revealed truth.

The comparison doesn’t hold up under any real scrutiny, for a specific, structural reason. Pagan “trinities” are collections of separate gods — genuinely three distinct beings, each with independent origin, will, and existence, sometimes ranked in a hierarchy, sometimes simply grouped by association or family. That’s Tritheism, precisely the error this session’s *Common Errors* section already named and rejected. The Christian doctrine claims something structurally different and, as far as comparative religious history shows, essentially unique: not three gods, but three Persons who are co-equal, co-eternal, and share a single, undivided essence — one God, not three gods cooperating. No pagan triad in the ancient world made that specific claim, because the claim itself only makes coherent sense within a framework, like Israel’s, that had already firmly established there is exactly one God to begin with. Trinitarian theology didn’t emerge from polytheism gradually softening into unity. It emerged from the strictest monotheism in the ancient world — the Shema itself — being pressed by direct New Testament revelation to include real plurality it had never previously named.

The Experience · [Worship]

This is a guided practice of worship addressed specifically to each Person of the Trinity in turn, then together — not because they can be worshiped separately (they cannot; there is one God), but because addressing each by name deepens what “worshiping the Trinity” actually means beyond an abstract phrase.

Find a quiet space. Pray each section aloud, slowly, pausing between them.

> *To the Father: “Father, I worship You as the source of all things, the One from whom every good gift comes. Thank You for loving me before I ever loved You. I receive Your Fatherhood over my life today.”*

To the Son: "Jesus, I worship You as fully God and fully man, the exact representation of the Father's own essence, who gave Yourself for me. Thank You for making the Father known and for making a way for me to know Him. I receive Your lordship over my life today."

To the Holy Spirit: "Holy Spirit, I worship You as fully God, my Helper and Guide, who dwells in me and teaches me all things. Thank You for never leaving me alone. I receive Your presence and leadership over my life today."

To the Triune God, together: "Father, Son, and Spirit — three Persons, one God, beyond my full comprehension and worthy of my complete trust. I can't fully explain You. I can fully worship You. Amen."

BIG IDEAS

1. *Echad* — the Shema's word for God's "oneness" — is the same word used for marriage's "one flesh": Hebrew's own vocabulary already had room for unity containing real plurality.
2. *Elohim*'s plural form alone doesn't prove the Trinity (a plural of majesty genuinely explains it) — but paired with God's own plural self-reference ("let us," "our"), it plants a tension only the New Testament resolves.
3. Hebrews 1:3's *hypostasis* — the Son as the "exact representation" of the Father's essence — is Scripture's own direct answer to Arianism.
4. Every common analogy for the Trinity quietly teaches one of three historic errors (Modalism, Arianism, or Tritheism) — which is why the doctrine resists tidy illustration.
5. The Christian Trinity is structurally unlike any pagan triad: not three separate gods, but three co-equal, co-eternal Persons sharing one undivided essence.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Not fully comprehending God is not the same as not being able to trust Him. Confession and worship don’t require complete comprehension — they require accurate, humble trust in what has actually been revealed.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, Son, and Spirit — one perfect God in three Persons. The math doesn’t resolve, yet You are exactly who You are, not what I imagine or wish You to be. Expand my capacity to understand what You’ve revealed, and my willingness to be amazed by what You haven’t. I can only bow in worship at how great You truly are. In Jesus’ name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

The Bible Project’s video series on the Trinity (available on YouTube), or Kenneth Boa’s *Unraveling the Big Questions About God*.
Both are aimed at a general audience without sacrificing theological accuracy.

SUBSTANTIAL

Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1965, frequently revised and updated since).

The standard evangelical reference for how the historic errors this session named show up in specific present-day groups and movements.

ACADEMIC

J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, chapters on the fourth-century Trinitarian controversies.
A rigorous historical treatment of exactly how the church arrived at Nicene and post-Nicene Trinitarian language, and why it mattered as much as it did.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Job 11:7–8 slowly. *How must a heart be positioned to study a doctrine this far beyond full comprehension?*

DAY 2

Read Deuteronomy 6:4–5 aloud, then Genesis 2:24. *Notice the shared word, echad. Let both texts sit together without rushing to resolve the tension.*

DAY 3

Read Matthew 3:16–17 and picture the scene. *All three Persons, present and distinct, at one moment in history. What does this scene rule out about how you'd previously pictured God?*

DAY 4

Read Hebrews 1:1–3. *"The exact representation of his essence." Sit with what this claims about who Jesus actually is.*

DAY 5

Reread this session's three failed analogies (water, triangle, three friends). *Which analogy, if any, has quietly shaped your own picture of God without your realizing it?*

DAY 6

Revisit this session's Experience. *Did addressing each Person by name, in turn, change how "worshiping God" felt compared to your ordinary prayer?*

Tell one trusted person this week one thing about the Trinity you now hold with more confidence, and one thing you're still honestly wrestling to understand.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

The Trinity

“Can God be three Persons and one God — genuinely, at the same time?”

THE HINT

Hebrew’s own word for God’s “oneness” already had room for real plurality, and God’s own plural self-reference plants a tension the Old Testament leaves sitting there, unresolved, for over a thousand years.

Deuteronomy 6:4
Genesis 1:26

THE REVEAL

At the Jordan, Father, Son, and Spirit appear simultaneously distinct — not three gods taking turns, not one God changing costumes. One name, singular, shared by three Persons named individually.

Matthew 3:16–17
Matthew 28:19

THE GUARDRAILS

Three Persons, each fully God, one God — hold all three and deny none. Deny any one leg and you get Modalism, Arianism, or Tritheism.

Hebrews 1:3

THE MYSTERY

Every common analogy for the Trinity quietly teaches one of the three historic errors. Scripture reveals enough to be confessed and worshiped. It doesn’t reveal enough to be fully diagrammed.

Deuteronomy 29:29
1 Corinthians 13:12

THE TURN

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God.” Not fully comprehending God is not the same as not being able to trust Him.

Deuteronomy 29:29

SO NOW

PLURALITY, NOT INVENTED LATER

The Old Testament’s own vocabulary for God’s oneness already had room for what the New Testament would go on to name.

Deuteronomy 6:4

FULLY GOD, NOT MERELY GODLIKE

The Son is the exact representation of the Father’s essence — not an inferior copy, not a created being.

Hebrews 1:3

THREE PERSONS, ONE NAME

Baptizing in the name — singular — of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: three Persons, individually named, sharing one name.

Matthew 28:19

TRUSTED, NOT FULLY DIAGRAMMED

Scripture reveals enough about the Trinity to be confessed and worshiped — not enough to be fully explained.

Deuteronomy 29:29

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Not fully comprehending God is not the same as not being able to trust Him. Confession and worship don’t require complete comprehension — they require accurate, humble trust in what has actually been revealed.

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Next · Session 24, The Unknowable God. You've confessed who God is in His triune fullness. Session 24 turns to a related, equally humbling question: what it means that this same God is simultaneously knowable and, in real ways, beyond knowing.

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THE UNKNOWABLE GOD

Kingdom Essentials: The Prize

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Thinking Biblically

03 God Is Knowable

04 God Is Unknowable

05 Divine Attributes

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · [Worship]

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Session 23 confessed who God is — three Persons, one God. This session asks a harder, more personal question: can that same God actually be known, or only confessed?

> *“My plans are not like your plans, and my deeds are not like your deeds… just as the sky is higher than the earth, so my deeds are superior to your deeds and my plans superior to your plans.”*
>
> **ISAIAH 55:8–9**

If God is genuinely beyond your full comprehension, is pursuing Him even worth the effort?

This session holds two claims together that feel, at first, like they can’t both be true: God is knowable — invitingly, rewardingly, really knowable — and God is unknowable, genuinely beyond the reach of a finite mind. Both are biblical.

Neither cancels the other. Learning to hold both without collapsing into either false confidence or despair is most of what this session is actually about.

CONSIDER THIS

If someone who had never met you tried to describe your personality after reading only your grocery lists, how accurate would their picture be? Now consider: how much of your own picture of God has come from something similarly partial — a feeling, a single hard experience, a preacher's offhand comment — rather than from what He's actually revealed about Himself?

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You are perfect, and You want to make Yourself known to me. Flush from my mind any thought about You that isn't from You. Enlarge my capacity to think accurately, and give me peace with what You haven't chosen to reveal. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thinking Biblically

Every wrong idea about God has the same root, and Scripture names it in its very first pages.

> *"The serpent said to the woman, 'Surely you will not die,' for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will open and you will be like divine beings who know good and evil."*
>
> **GENESIS 3:4–5**

The serpent's actual strategy wasn't to deny God existed. It was to suggest something false about God's *character* — that He was withholding something good, that His restriction was selfish rather than protective. Adam and Eve didn't stop believing in God. They started believing a smaller, more suspicious version of Him, and then acted on that belief. That's the pattern behind essentially every idolatry that has followed since: not usually outright denial, but a quiet substitution of a god who conforms to what we'd prefer for the God who has actually revealed Himself.

The Psalmist names exactly what happens next to people who make that trade:

> *"Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see… Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them."*
>
> **PSALM 115:4–5, 8**

This is a spiritual law, not merely a poetic warning: you become like the god you worship. A god imagined as distant becomes an excuse for distant, uninvolved faith. A god imagined as a harsh accountant becomes the reason for a joyless, performance-driven Christianity. A god imagined as a permissive grandfather becomes the reason sin stops feeling dangerous. None of these gods are the God who has actually spoken. Every one of them will be worshiped anyway, quietly, by someone who has never noticed the substitution.

This isn't a merely academic mistake. A low view of God has visible, practical consequences: it's the quiet cause behind treating sin as manageable rather than deadly, behind a victim mentality that blames God for what the enemy actually did, behind a joyless faith that experiences God's commands as handcuffs rather than the guardrails they were designed to be. "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17) — a God rightly known produces freedom. A god wrongly imagined produces exactly the opposite, no matter how sincerely he's worshiped.

ILLUSTRATION

The Fall itself is the illustration. Adam and Eve had unbroken access to God's own voice, walking with them "in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8) — about as direct a revelation as a human being has ever received. And they still chose the serpent's smaller, more suspicious picture of God's character over the God who had been plainly present with them. Access to true revelation has never, by itself, guaranteed that a person will actually believe what's been revealed

rather than what they'd prefer to imagine. That's still true of every reader working through this curriculum.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where might you be worshiping a smaller or more suspicious version of God than the one Scripture actually reveals — one shaped more by a hard experience, a cultural assumption, or a preference, than by His own self-disclosure?

God Is Knowable

Against that warning stands an equally strong biblical invitation: this same transcendent God genuinely wants to be known, and rewards those who pursue Him.

> *"If people want to boast, they should boast about this: they should boast that they understand and **know** (יָדֹעַ) **me**."*
>
> **JEREMIAH 9:24**

WORD STUDY

יָדַע *yada* H3045

> **"know"** · Jeremiah 9:24

Range. *Yada* is one of the Old Testament's richest verbs, and BDB is emphatic that it's never merely intellectual. It

spans simple factual awareness, but its deepest uses describe relational, experiential, even covenantal knowing — the same word used for marital intimacy (Genesis 4:1) and for God's own covenant selection of a people ("You alone have I known of all the families," Amos 3:2).

The sense here. Jeremiah doesn't invite boasting in intellectual mastery of facts about God. He invites boasting in *yada* — a knowing that binds head and heart together, the kind Moses pursued when he asked God directly, "let me know your ways, that I may know you" (Exodus 33:13).

Why it carries the argument. This is the biblical answer to the Thinking Biblically section's warning. The remedy for imagining a smaller God isn't merely correcting facts — it's actual relational pursuit, *yada*-knowledge, the kind that changes a person rather than just informing them. Knowing God, in Scripture's own terms, was never meant to stay theoretical.

Source. BDB, s.v. יָדַע.

ILLUSTRATION

Moses had already spoken with God face to face, led a nation out of Egypt, and received the Law at Sinai — and it still wasn't enough for him. "Show me your way, that I may know you," he asked (Exodus 33:13), and then, more boldly still: "Show me your glory" (Exodus 33:18). God didn't rebuke the request. He answered it, on His own terms: "I will make all my goodness pass before your face" (Exodus 33:19). Moses is the biblical model for exactly the kind of seeking this session commends — not casual curiosity, but relentless, humble pursuit of a God who had already given him more revelation than perhaps anyone alive, and who Moses still wasn't satisfied to stop pursuing.

There's a shortcut through all of this that the Old Testament seekers this session has named didn't yet have available: Jesus Himself. When Philip asked to see the Father, Jesus' answer was direct: "The person who has seen me has seen the Father!" (John 14:9). Not a resemblance. Not a partial picture. Whoever wants to know what God is actually like has the clearest possible answer available: look at Jesus. Every attribute this session goes on to survey is safely anchored the

moment it's checked against His life, since He is, in Hebrews' words already used in this curriculum, "the radiance of his glory and the representation of his essence" (Hebrews 1:3).

The pattern holds throughout Scripture: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7) — three present-tense verbs describing continuous, not one-time, pursuit. "Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). Believing God exists isn't enough — even the enemy knows that much. What Hebrews commends is confident, diligent seeking, the kind God has promised to reward.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Moses had already received more direct revelation than almost anyone in Scripture, and still pursued more. What's one specific way you could pursue *yada*-knowledge of God this week, beyond what's already familiar to you?

God Is Unknowable

Hold that invitation next to an equally biblical warning: however far the pursuit of God goes, it never arrives at full comprehension.

> *"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how* ***fathomless*** **(ἀνεξιχνίαστοι)** ***his ways!"***
>
> **ROMANS 11:33**

WORD STUDY

ἀνεξιχνίαστος *anexichniastos* G421

> **“fathomless”** · Romans 11:33

Range. This rare, vivid word is built from *ichnos* — a footprint or track — with a negating prefix: literally, “impossible to track by following footprints.” Thayer’s defines it as that which “cannot be traced out, that cannot be comprehended.”

The sense here. Paul isn’t merely saying God’s ways are complicated or hard to predict. He’s saying they leave no trail a finite mind can follow back to its source — the way a skilled tracker can follow footprints through a forest until the ground itself stops holding any impression at all. Paul reaches this conclusion at the climax of Romans 9–11, three chapters spent wrestling hard with some of Scripture’s most difficult questions about God’s sovereignty and human history — and he lands not in a tidy resolution, but in worship.

Why it carries the argument. This is the honest ceiling on the previous section’s invitation to seek. Pursuit is genuinely rewarded (Hebrews 11:6) — and pursuit still terminates, eventually, at *anexichniastos* ground, footprints Paul himself, one of history’s sharpest theological minds, couldn’t fully trace. That’s not a failure of the pursuit. It’s the appropriate size of a finite mind’s grasp on an infinite God.

Source. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, s.v. ἀνεξιχνίαστος.

Paul isn’t alone in reaching that conclusion. “Things that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, are the things God has prepared for those who love him… For who among men knows the things of a man except the man’s spirit

within him? So too, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9, 11). Left entirely to natural human reasoning, God's own thoughts are as inaccessible to us as your private thoughts are to a stranger who's never met you. What makes any of it knowable at all is God's own initiative to reveal Himself by His Spirit — the *yada* of the previous section was never a human achievement to begin with. It was always a gift.

Another Voice

"If we insist on trying to imagine God, we end up with an idol, made not with hands but with thoughts; an idol of the mind is as offensive to God as an idol of the hand."

— A. W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy (1961)

Divine Attributes

Scripture reveals genuine, specific things about God's nature — not everything, but enough to satisfy real inquiry and to steady real faith. Theologians typically sort these into attributes God shares with His image-bearers in limited measure (love, wisdom, mercy) and attributes uniquely His alone. This session surveys a representative handful of the latter, the ones theologians call "incommunicable."

> *"God said to Moses, '**I am (אֶהְיֶה) that I am**.' And he said, 'You must say this to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you."'"*
>
> **EXODUS 3:14**

WORD STUDY

הָיָה *hayah* H1961

> **“I am”** · Exodus 3:14
>
> **Range.** *Hayah* is Hebrew’s fundamental verb of existence — to be, to become, to happen. BDB stresses it’s never a weak, merely grammatical connector; it carries real emphasis, meaning genuine existence or occurrence.
>
> **The sense here.** When Moses asks for God’s name, God answers with *hayah* doubled back on itself — *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, “I am that I am,” or “I will be what I will be.” Every other being in existence can answer the question “what caused you?” God’s own name is His answer to that question: nothing caused Him. He simply, eternally, is.
>
> **Why it carries the argument.** This single name grounds the attribute theologians call self-existence — God as uncreated, uncaused, dependent on nothing outside Himself. Every other attribute in this section builds on this one. A God who came from somewhere, or who could cease, wouldn’t be infinite, immutable, or sovereign in any of the ways Scripture actually claims.
>
> **Source.** BDB, s.v. הָיָה.

Three more attributes round out this session’s survey. God’s **immutability** means He does not change in His being, character, or promises: “I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6) — not because He’s static or uninterested, but because He’s already perfectly complete, with nothing to gain or lose by changing. God’s **omniscience** means He knows all things completely, including you — not merely your actions, but your experience: Jesus Himself is “not unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are” (Hebrews 4:15). And God’s **omnipresence** means there is nowhere His presence doesn’t reach: “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?… even there your hand shall lead me” (Psalm 139:7, 10).

One more attribute deserves a moment, because it corrects a common misreading of everything else in this section: God’s **self-sufficiency**. He lacks nothing and needs nothing — “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13), not because He requires your effort to accomplish His purposes, but because He delights in inviting you into work He was never actually dependent on you for. Session 5 already covered this ground under

Kingdom Partnership: you don’t serve God the way an employee serves an employer who needs the labor. You partner with a God who needs nothing from you and wants everything to do with you anyway. That distinction changes what every other attribute in this section actually means for you personally — an infinite, self-existent, unchanging, all-knowing, everywhere-present God has no gap your presence fills. And He wants you close regardless.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> When Job finally got the audience with God he’d spent thirty-seven chapters demanding, God didn’t answer a single one of his questions directly. Instead: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you possess understanding!” (Job 38:4) — the first of more than seventy rapid-fire questions about creation, weather, animal life, and cosmic order, none of which Job could answer. God’s response to Job’s suffering wasn’t an explanation. It was a display of scale, calibrated to remind a finite man exactly how much of reality he wasn’t positioned to evaluate. Job’s response afterward is the only response that actually fits: “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you… therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5–6).

PAUSE & REFLECT

Job’s questions about his own suffering were never answered directly — he got a display of God’s greatness instead, and it was enough. Is there an unanswered question in your own life where the same kind of encounter, rather than an explanation, might actually be what you need?

WHAT ABOUT …

Doesn’t God “changing His mind” (Genesis 6:6, Jonah 3:10) contradict His immutability?

This is a real, specific tension Scripture itself creates, not one skeptics invented. God “regretted that he had made humankind” (Genesis 6:6). God “relented concerning the judgment he had threatened” Nineveh with (Jonah 3:10). Samuel says outright that the Lord “regretted that he had made Saul king” (1 Samuel 15:11). Set those texts next to Malachi 3:6’s “I the Lord do not change” or Numbers 23:19’s “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a human being, that he should change his mind,” and the tension is obvious enough that it deserves a direct answer.

The resolution turns on a distinction theologian Wayne Grudem states precisely: “God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations.” Immutability was never a claim that God is emotionally flat or that His actions never vary — it’s a claim that His *character*, His *purposes*, and His *promises* never vary. When Nineveh repented, God’s unchanging character — mercy toward genuine repentance — produced a different action than His unchanging character would have produced toward continued rebellion. The action changed because the situation changed. The character behind the action didn’t move at all. A judge who shows mercy to a repentant defendant and justice to an unrepentant one hasn’t changed his principles; he’s applied the same unchanging principles to two different realities. That’s closer to what Scripture means by God “relenting” than any picture of God genuinely reconsidering His own perfect character.

> **I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> — that these “regret” and “relent” passages are merely figures of speech with no real content, or that this session’s list of attributes above is exhaustive (Scripture reveals more incommunicable attributes than four, and this session deliberately surveyed only a representative sample rather than repeating a more complete list). I’m also not saying that using human analogies, illustrations, or careful reasoning to describe God is itself the error the Thinking Biblically section warned against — this whole curriculum, this session included, uses exactly those tools constantly. The Fall’s error wasn’t using imagination or reasoning about God; it was trusting an imagined, self-serving picture of His character *instead of* what He had actually revealed.

I AM SAYING

— that God's unchanging character can and does produce genuinely different actions in response to genuinely different human choices, without that character itself ever moving; that God is honestly, fully knowable in everything He's chosen to reveal; and that He is honestly, fully unknowable beyond that — and that both of those truths are meant to produce worship, the way they did for Job, rather than either false confidence or despair.

The Turn

You now hold what this session set out to give you: a warning against imagining a smaller God than the one who has actually spoken (Genesis 3), a real invitation to pursue *yada*-knowledge of Him without limit (Jeremiah 9, Moses at Sinai), an honest ceiling on how far that pursuit can go this side of eternity (*anexichniastos*, Romans 11), and a representative survey of what He actually has revealed about His own nature (*hayah*, and three attributes beyond it).

None of that is meant to end in an argument won. It's meant to end where Job did.

The Experience · [Worship]

This is a guided worship practice built directly on this session's tension: addressing what is genuinely knowable about God with confidence, and what is genuinely unknowable with humility — both as worship.

Find a quiet space. Pray each section aloud, slowly.

> *Confessing what is knowable: "Father, I know You because You have made Yourself known — in Your Word, in Your Son, in Your Spirit's witness within me. I know Your character: faithful, just, righteous, good. Thank You that this knowledge isn't something I earned or invented, but something You gave."*

Confessing what is unknowable: "Father, I don't know why some of what has happened in my life happened as it did. I don't fully understand Your ways — they are fathomless, past my tracing. I don't ask You to explain everything today. I ask for the grace Job received: not an answer, but an encounter."

Together: "You are the great I AM — self-existent, unchanging, all-knowing, everywhere present. I can know You truly without knowing You completely. That is enough. I worship You for both — for what You've shown me, and for what remains beyond me. Amen."

BIG IDEAS

1. Every wrong idea about God traces back to the same root as the Fall: trusting an imagined, self-serving picture of His character instead of what He's actually revealed.
2. *Yada* — the Old Testament's word for "know" — describes relational, experiential knowing, not merely intellectual fact-gathering; God rewards those who pursue it diligently.
3. *Anexichniastos* — "fathomless," literally "untraceable by footprint" — is Paul's own honest ceiling on how far understanding God can go, even for an apostle.
4. *Hayah*, God's self-declared name "I AM," grounds His self-existence — every other incommunicable attribute builds on this one.
5. God's unchanging character can produce genuinely different actions toward genuinely different human responses, without the character itself ever moving.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You become like the God you worship. Pursue the God who has actually revealed Himself, not the one you'd find more comfortable — and hold what remains

unknown with worship rather than either false confidence or despair.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, I can only think, praise, and worship You using words, and my words are wholly inadequate to describe You. Give me new language anyway. You are the Holy One — infinitely knowable and infinitely beyond me, both at once, and both worthy of my worship. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (1961).
Quoted throughout this session's source material — a genuinely accessible, devotional entry point into everything covered here.

SUBSTANTIAL

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (1973).
The modern classic on exactly this session's central tension — pursuing real knowledge of a God who remains, in real ways, beyond full knowing.

ACADEMIC

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (1994), chapters on the incommunicable attributes of God.

Already referenced directly in this session's What About — a rigorous, comprehensive treatment of every attribute this session could only survey.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Genesis 3:1–7 slowly. *What specific claim about God's character did the serpent attack? Where have you believed a similar claim about Him?*

DAY 2

Read Exodus 33:12–19. *Moses had already received extraordinary revelation and still asked for more. What would asking for more look like for you this week?*

DAY 3

Read Romans 11:33–36 aloud. *Notice Paul's tone. After three chapters of hard theological wrestling, he lands in worship, not frustration. What would it look like for you to do the same with your own unresolved questions?*

DAY 4

Read Exodus 3:13–14 and sit with the name "I AM." *What does it change to know God's own self-description is simply, eternally, "I am"?*

DAY 5

Read Genesis 6:5–8 and Jonah 3:6–10 together. *Where do you see God's unchanging character producing two different actions toward two different human responses?*

DAY 6

Read Job 38:1–7 and 42:1–6. *Job's questions were never answered. What was he given instead, and was it enough?*

Tell one trusted person this week one thing about God you're more confident of after this session, and one thing you're at peace leaving unresolved.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

The Unknowable God

"If God is genuinely beyond your full comprehension, is pursuing Him even worth the effort?"

THE SUBSTITUTION

The serpent's real strategy wasn't denying God existed — it was suggesting something false about His character. Every idolatry since has been a smaller, more suspicious god substituted for the real one.

Genesis 3:4–5
Psalm 115:4–5

THE INVITATION

Yada — relational, experiential knowing — is what God invites you to boast in. Moses had already received more revelation than almost anyone alive and still asked for more.

Jeremiah 9:24
Exodus 33:13

THE CEILING

Even Paul, at the climax of his hardest theological wrestling, reaches ground too fathomless to trace. Pursuit is genuinely rewarded, and it still terminates short of full comprehension.

Romans 11:33

THE NAME

God's own name — "I AM" — grounds His self-existence. Every other attribute this session surveys, unchanging, all-knowing, everywhere present, builds on this one.

Exodus 3:14
Malachi 3:6

THE TURN

Job's questions were never answered directly. He got a display of God's greatness instead — and it was enough.

Job 42:5–6

SO NOW

REVEALED, NOT INVENTED

Every wrong idea about God traces back to the Fall's own pattern: a smaller, more suspicious picture substituted for who He actually is.

Genesis 3:4–5

PURSUED, NOT MERELY BELIEVED

Yada is relational, experiential knowing — the kind Moses kept pursuing even after unmatched access to God.

Exodus 33:13

FATHOMLESS, NOT FRUSTRATING

Even Paul's sharpest theological reasoning terminated in worship, not a fully traced answer.

Romans 11:33

SELF-EXISTENT, NOT SELF-MADE

God's own name means nothing caused Him — every other attribute stands on this one.

Exodus 3:14

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You become like the God you worship. Pursue the God who has actually revealed Himself, not the one you'd find more comfortable — and hold what remains unknown with worship rather than either false confidence or despair.

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Next · Session 25, Knowing God. This session surveyed a handful of God’s incommunicable attributes. Session 25 goes deeper still — into the specific, foundational attributes that ground everything else you’ll ever come to know about who He is.

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KNOWING GOD

Kingdom Essentials: The Prize

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 The Grounding Attributes

03 The Goodness of God

04 The Great Deception and the Great Truth

05 The Consequences and the Promises

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · [Relocate the Blame]

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

Session 24 surveyed several of God's attributes at a distance. This session asks the question that actually determines whether any of those attributes feel safe to trust.

> *"'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.'"*
>
> **MARK 10:17–18**

Is God actually, unreservedly good — or is "God is good" something Christians say more confidently than Scripture and experience always seem to support?

This session takes that question seriously rather than assuming the answer. It also finishes something Session 24 started: a closer look at God's eternity, and an honest reckoning with the single lie about God's character this curriculum considers the most dangerous of all.

This isn't an abstract question for most people who ask it. It tends to surface at the exact moment it matters most — beside a hospital bed, after a job loss, in the silence following a diagnosis — which is precisely why it deserves more than a reflexive answer. The Psalmist asked a version of this question from inside real trouble, not from a safe theological distance, and answered it with confidence rather than certainty about his circumstances: "Where would I be if I did not believe I would experience the Lord's favor in the land of the living?" (Psalm 27:13). He didn't know how his crisis would resolve. He knew what he believed about God's character regardless of how it resolved. That's this session's actual goal — not to explain every hard providence away, but to establish a confidence in God's goodness sturdy enough to hold before the hard providence is explained, if it ever is.

CONSIDER THIS

Complete this sentence honestly, before reading further: "God is good, except when…" If you can finish that sentence, notice what you just filled in. That's this session's actual subject.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, Your goodness is greater than I can fully imagine, and there's nothing I could do to deserve it. Where I've quietly believed something less than the truth about Your character, expose it gently and replace it with what's actually true. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Grounding Attributes

Session 24 already gave full treatment to two of the attributes this session's source material also covers: God's self-existence — grounded in His own name, *hayah*, "I AM" (Exodus 3:14) — and His self-sufficiency, the truth that He lacks nothing

and needs nothing, yet delights in partnering with those who need everything (Philippians 2:13, cross-referencing Session 5's Kingdom Partnership). Rather than re-deriving either one, this session adds the third grounding attribute Session 24 didn't cover: eternity.

> *"Even before the mountains came into existence, or you brought the world into being, you were the* ***eternal*** **(עוֹלָם)** ***God****."*
>
> **PSALM 90:2**

WORD STUDY

עוֹלָם *olam* H5769

> **"eternal"** · Psalm 90:2

Range. *Olam* is Hebrew's primary word for duration beyond ordinary reckoning — BDB's own gloss calls it "the vanishing point," time so extended it passes beyond the horizon of ordinary perception. It covers ancient past ("days of old"), indefinite future ("forever"), and, applied to God directly, existence with no beginning and no end at all.

The sense here. The Psalmist doesn't merely say God has existed for a very long time. The grammar of Psalm 90:2 places God's existence *before* the mountains and the world itself — before the created markers humans normally use to measure "a long time ago." *Olam* here describes existence outside the category time itself creates.

Why it carries the argument. Every attribute Session 24 surveyed depends on this one holding. A God who began to exist could, in principle, cease to exist, and everything built on His unchanging character, self-sufficiency, and faithfulness would rest on borrowed time rather than solid

ground. Eternity isn't one attribute among many. It's the floor the others stand on.

Source. BDB, s.v. עוֹלָם.

There's a second, more personal layer to this attribute worth naming: "he has also placed [eternity] into man's heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11, cross-referencing the Hebrew *olam* used here too). You weren't merely made by an eternal God. You were made *for* eternity — which is part of why mortality has always felt wrong to the human heart in a way that other limitations don't. Paul makes the connecting claim directly: Christ "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). What death originally took from image-bearers made for *olam*, the gospel gives back.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Ecclesiastes says eternity is "in your heart" — you were made for it, even though you can't fully grasp it. Where do you notice that ache for something beyond this life's boundaries most clearly in your own experience?

Goodness and eternity aren't separate topics in Scripture; they're paired constantly. "For the Lord is good. His loyal love endures, and he is faithful through all generations" (Psalm 100:5) — the Psalmist reaches for *olam*'s own idea, generation after generation, the instant he wants to describe how thoroughly good God is. Nahum, writing centuries later to a very different audience facing very different circumstances, reaches for the same pairing: "The Lord is good — indeed, he is a fortress in time of distress, and he protects those who seek refuge in him" (Nahum 1:7). An eternal God whose goodness might run out somewhere down the line would be cause for anxiety, not refuge. Scripture presents the two together for a reason: goodness that doesn't last isn't actually goodness a life can be built on.

The Goodness of God

Every attribute this curriculum has covered so far — power, authority, sovereignty, even eternity itself — would be genuinely terrifying in the hands of a being who wasn't also, entirely, good.

> *"'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me* ***good*** **(ἀγαθός)***? No one is good except God alone.'"*
>
> **MARK 10:17–18**

WORD STUDY

ἀγαθός *agathos* G18

> **"good"** · Mark 10:18

Range. Thayer's range for *agathos* runs from a basic, functional sense — something that is fully what it should be, according to its own nature and purpose (fertile soil, a fruitful tree) — through moral excellence, to what is beneficial or salutary for someone else.

The sense here. Jesus' response to the rich young ruler wasn't false modesty or a denial of His own deity. He was redirecting a man who was using "good" as flattery, not theology, toward the actual, singular source of the category: "no one is good except God alone." Every derivative goodness in creation — a kind act, a fruitful season, a faithful friend — borrows the word from the One who alone possesses it completely and originally.

Why it carries the argument. If *agathos* belongs to God alone in its fullest sense, then whatever else this session goes on to say about hardship, discipline, or unanswered questions has to be reconciled with that starting point —

not the other way around. God's goodness isn't a conclusion this session reaches after weighing the evidence. It's Scripture's own stated premise.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. ἀγαθός.

ILLUSTRATION

Jesus was on His way into the town of Nain when He encountered a funeral procession headed the opposite direction: a widow, burying her only son (Luke 7:12). Nothing in the text says she asked Him for anything. "When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep'" (Luke 7:13) — and then He touched the funeral bier, stopped the procession, and gave her son back to her alive (Luke 7:14–15). No request. No demonstrated faith on her part. Just Jesus' own character encountering real grief and responding the only way *agathos* knows how to respond. If you want to know what God is actually like when He encounters human loss uninvited, this scene is as direct an answer as Scripture gives.

This isn't an isolated data point. "All generous giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change" (James 1:17). James reaches for astronomical language on purpose — the sun and stars whose light shifts constantly, whose shadows lengthen and shorten with the seasons — and says God's giving does not move that way. Session 24 already established God's immutability as unchanging character, promises, and being (Malachi 3:6). This is that same attribute applied specifically to His goodness: not merely that God is good today, but that His goodness has no "variation," no "shadow of turning," no version of Him waiting somewhere less generous than the One who stopped a funeral procession for a grieving stranger. Whatever this session goes on to say about hardship and discipline has to be read against that fixed point, not the other way around.

The Great Deception and the Great Truth

Given everything established so far, this session's source material names what it considers the single most damaging lie circulating among believers — and this curriculum agrees it deserves that weight.

The lie, stated plainly: *blaming God for the evil the enemy has actually caused.* "God caused this sickness." "God is allowing this disaster to continue." "God is using this suffering to teach me something." Sometimes said in grief, sometimes taught deliberately, this belief attributes to a perfectly good God the very works Scripture says Jesus came specifically to destroy: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

Scripture doesn't leave this as an inference to be drawn carefully from silence. It states the case directly, twice, in two different voices. "God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5) — not mostly light with some darkness mixed in, not light with occasional lapses, but light with "no darkness at all," a category statement about His entire nature. James makes the same point from a different angle, aimed specifically at the temptation to blame God for what's actually a solicitation to sin: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one" (James 1:13). If God cannot even be tempted toward evil, attributing actual evil — sickness, disaster, abuse — to His direct authorship isn't a minor category error. It contradicts what Scripture states as flatly as it states anything about His character.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Imagine a father, watching his own child suffer harm, who had the power to stop it instantly and chose not to — and then told the child it was for their own good. No honest person would call that father good. They'd call him something much darker, however lovingly he explained himself afterward. This isn't a real account; it's a deliberately uncomfortable thought experiment, the same category Session 19 used once before for its stronghold-formation scenario. Its purpose is narrow and specific: to test whether "God causes or allows suffering for your growth" actually survives being applied to a human father before accepting it as a description of God's own character.

The logical problem runs deeper than discomfort. If the Father causes or maintains sickness to teach a lesson, and Jesus spent His entire earthly ministry healing every sick person who came to Him (Matthew 8:16, Matthew 12:15, Luke 6:19), then Father and Son were working at cross-purposes — Jesus undoing what the Father had supposedly ordained. Scripture's own logic rules this out directly: "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste" (Matthew 12:25). A divided Godhead isn't a mystery to hold in tension. It's a contradiction Scripture itself won't permit.

The great truth answers the great deception directly: to see Jesus is to see the Father's actual character, already established in this curriculum's own words. "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, Session 24). And what Jesus reveals, He states as His own explicit purpose: "The reason the Son of God

appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8, Session 21) — not negotiate with them, not permit them for pedagogical reasons, but destroy them outright.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where have you, even quietly, attributed something to God that Scripture would actually attribute to "the thief" of John 10:10? What would it change to relocate that blame accurately?

The Consequences and the Promises

Getting this right isn't merely a theological correction — we are emphatic that believing the deception has real, practical costs. When a believer thinks God might be behind their suffering, they stop resisting the actual source of it (James 4:7's "resist the devil" becomes hard to obey toward an enemy you've mistaken for God), and a church that quietly assumes God trains His children through pain stops expecting the miraculous it was designed to carry (Acts 4:29–30).

But getting it right doesn't mean pretending hardship, consequence, and difficulty disappear from a believer's life. Scripture's very first pages already built consequence into the structure of human choice itself:

> *"You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the orchard, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die."*
>
> **GENESIS 2:16–17**

Real choice has always meant real consequence — not because God is looking for reasons to punish, but because choice without consequence isn't actually freedom at all. Much of what a person experiences as "hardship" traces back not to divine punishment or enemy attack exclusively, but to the ordinary, built-in weight of choices — their own or someone else's — playing out in a real world. Distinguishing that category honestly from both "God caused this" and "the enemy caused this" matters for keeping this session's argument accurate rather than overcorrected.

Paul names this dynamic directly, and deliberately avoids soft language while doing it: "Do not be deceived. God will not be made a fool. For a person will reap what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). That's consequence, not punishment — the natural, built-in outworking of a real choice in a real world, the same category Genesis 2:16–17 already established. A believer who ignores wise counsel and suffers a financial collapse, or who neglects their health for decades and then faces its results, hasn't necessarily been struck by God or attacked by the enemy either. They've reaped what they sowed — a category this session's argument has to leave room for, or its account of hardship becomes as oversimplified as the deception it's trying to correct.

> *"And we know that all things* ***work together*** **(συνεργεῖ)** ***for good*** *for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."*
>
> **ROMANS 8:28**

WORD STUDY

συνεργέω *synergeo* G4903

> **"work together"** · Romans 8:28

Range. *Synergeo* — the root of the English word "synergy" — means to work jointly, to cooperate, to labor alongside toward a shared outcome. It's used elsewhere for co-laborers in ministry (2 Corinthians 6:1) and for faith cooperating with action (James 2:22).

The sense here. Romans 8:28 doesn't say God *causes* all things. It says all things *synergize* — work together,

cooperate toward good — under God's active involvement, for those who love Him. That's a precise and important distinction. A skilled composer doesn't need to have written every individual note of chaos to weave it into a resolved piece; a masterful editor doesn't need to have caused every plot complication to bring a story to a satisfying end. God's genius, this word suggests, isn't that He originates every event — many events, this session has already argued, He actively opposes. It's that nothing, not even what He opposes, escapes His ability to work it toward good for those who love Him.

Why it carries the argument. This is the difference between "God causes all things" (which this session has already rejected) and "God uses all things" (which this session affirms without qualification). Both claims sound similar. They are not the same claim, and the difference matters enormously for how a suffering believer prays.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. συνεργέω.

ILLUSTRATION

After Stephen's martyrdom, "a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem," and believers "were forced to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1) — real, enemy-driven, unjust violence, the kind Session 25's entire argument says God did not cause. And yet: "those who had been forced to scatter went around proclaiming the good news of the word" (Acts 8:4). The persecution itself stayed exactly what it was — evil, from the enemy, opposed by God. And *synergeo* happened anyway: the very scattering the enemy intended to crush the church became the mechanism that spread it across an entire region. God didn't need to author the persecution to redeem what it produced.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Can you identify a real hardship in your own life — one you wouldn't call good, and shouldn't have to — that God has nonetheless worked *synergeo*-style into

something genuinely good? Naming that isn't the same as calling the hardship itself good.

WHAT ABOUT …

Doesn't Hebrews 12's "divine discipline" mean God sometimes does use pain to train us?

This is a real, fair challenge to everything this session has argued, and it deserves a direct answer rather than the dismissiveness this session's source material shows toward every hard question in this territory.

Hebrews is unambiguous: "the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts… all discipline seems painful at the time, not joyful. But later it produces the fruit of peace and righteousness for those trained by it" (Hebrews 12:6, 11). That's real, Scripture-affirmed, sometimes-painful fatherly discipline — language this session's source material seems to reject outright with its question, "who wants to join a family where God 'trains' His kids using pain?"

The honest resolution requires a distinction the source material never quite draws. Hebrews 12's discipline is relational correction from a Father actively present in it — guiding, correcting, always aimed at "our benefit, that we may share his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10), the way a good parent's correction differs categorically from an abuser's cruelty even when both involve some discomfort. John 10:10's "kill, steal, and destroy" describes something else entirely: an enemy's assault, aimed at harm for its own sake, with no redemptive intent at all. Sickness, disaster, and destruction carry the second signature. A father's loving correction — a hard conversation, a consequence for a genuinely wrong choice, a season of character-building difficulty this session's own Genesis 2 point already named — carries the first. Conflating the two, in either direction, gets the doctrine of God's character wrong. Collapsing all hardship into "God's loving discipline" risks excusing real evil as secretly good. Collapsing all hardship into "the enemy's attack" risks denying that a good Father is ever, genuinely, actively forming you through difficulty He allows without causing.

A related question tends to follow close behind: if God is this good, why does the enemy get any room to operate at all? Session 13 already laid the groundwork for the answer — God delegated real, functioning authority over the earth to humanity from the beginning (Genesis 1:28), authority the first humans then forfeited to the enemy rather than exercised faithfully. A good God who honors the authority He Himself delegated, even when it's been misused, isn't the same as a good God who causes or wants the resulting damage. That distinction doesn't remove the mystery of why He hasn't simply ended the conflict outright. It does clarify that the room the enemy currently has to operate traces back to a forfeited human authority, not to a gap in God's goodness or power.

I AM NOT SAYING

— that every hardship in your life traces to the enemy exclusively, with no room for the real, Scripture-affirmed category of a Father's loving discipline (Hebrews 12) or the built-in consequences of genuine choice (Genesis 2:16–17); that honestly questioning God's goodness in the middle of real suffering is itself something to repent of — Session 22 already held up Job's continued, unrebuked wrestling as the biblical model for exactly this kind of honesty; or that this session's distinctions resolve every hard case cleanly. Some suffering's actual source stays genuinely unclear this side of eternity, and this curriculum would rather say so honestly than force a clean answer it can't actually supply.

I AM SAYING

— that Scripture consistently distinguishes the enemy's destructive attacks from both God's character and His occasional, loving, relational discipline; that "God causes all things" and "God works all things together for good" are different claims, and only the second is biblical; and that God's goodness is Scripture's stated

> premise, not a conclusion that has to survive every hard question before it's allowed to stand.

The Turn

Eternity grounds every other attribute of God; goodness qualifies what all of them mean in practice. You now have Scripture's own distinction between what the enemy causes (and God opposes), what a loving Father sometimes allows as real, relational discipline, and what God *synergeo*-works toward good regardless of its source — three genuinely different categories this session refused to collapse into one.

None of that is meant to end as settled information. It's meant to end in worship of the God this session has actually described.

The Experience · [Relocate the Blame]

This is a guided naming exercise built directly on this session's Great Deception/Great Truth material — the practice of identifying, out loud, where blame has quietly been misplaced, and relocating it to where Scripture actually places it.

Find a quiet space, and have something to write with.

Step one: Name it. Think of one hardship, past or present, where you've caught yourself thinking — even briefly, even without saying it aloud — some version of "God did this to me" or "God is allowing this to teach me something." Write it down in one honest sentence.

Step two: Test it. Ask this session's own question of your sentence: does this sound like something John 10:10's thief would do, something a loving Father's Hebrews 12 discipline would do, or the ordinary consequence of a real choice in a real world? Sit with the answer rather than reaching for whichever one feels most comfortable.

Step three: Relocate it. Say the correction aloud, using whichever category actually fits what you named:

If it belongs to the enemy: "Father, I've been quietly blaming You for what the thief actually did. I relocate that blame where it belongs. You did not do this to me — You oppose it, and Your goodness toward me hasn't wavered."

If it belongs to loving discipline: "Father, I recognize this as Your correction, not Your cruelty. Thank You for caring enough to train me toward 'the fruit of peace and righteousness' rather than leaving me unformed."

If it belongs to consequence: "Father, this is what I sowed, not what You did to me. Thank You that even here, You're still willing to work synergeo — toward good — if I bring it to You honestly rather than hiding it."

Step four: Receive the truth. Close by praying Psalm 100:5 back to God as your own confession: "Father, You are good. Your loyal love endures, and You are faithful through every generation — including mine, including this hardship. I choose to trust Your character even where I still don't understand Your reasons."

If you're comfortable, share what you named in step one with one trusted person this week. Misplaced blame tends to lose its grip once it's said out loud to someone else.

BIG IDEAS

1. *Olam* — eternity — is the floor every other attribute of God stands on; a God with a beginning could, in principle, have an end.
2. *Agathos* — goodness — belongs to God alone in its fullest, original sense; every other goodness borrows from His.
3. Scripture rules out a divided Godhead: if the Father caused sickness and Jesus healed it, they'd be working against each other — a contradiction Scripture itself forbids.
4. *Synergeo* — "work together" — is not "cause." Romans 8:28 says God works all things toward good, not that He originates them all.
5. Hebrews 12's real, loving discipline and John 10:10's enemy assault carry different signatures — collapsing either one into the other gets God's character wrong.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God’s goodness is Scripture’s starting premise, not its conclusion. Relocate blame where Scripture actually places it, and trust His character to hold even where His reasons stay hidden.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You alone are fully good, and every hardship in my life deserves an honest accounting of its actual source — Yours, the enemy’s, or my own choices. Give me discernment to tell the difference, courage to resist what’s actually the enemy’s work, and trust in Your goodness even where the difference stays unclear. In Jesus’ name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good* (2009).
A pastorally careful, accessible treatment of exactly this session’s central question, written for readers walking through real suffering rather than only debating it academically.

SUBSTANTIAL

C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (1940).
The classic evangelical treatment distinguishing God's character from the reality of evil and suffering in a fallen world.

ACADEMIC

Gregory A. Boyd, *Is God to Blame?* (2003).
A rigorous theological treatment of exactly this session's central distinction — God's character versus the enemy's works — from a scholar who has written extensively on this specific question.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Mark 10:17–18 slowly. *"No one is good except God alone." Sit with that claim as a starting premise rather than something to prove.*

DAY 2

Read Psalm 90:1–4 and Ecclesiastes 3:11 together. *You were made for olam — eternity. Where do you feel that ache most clearly?*

DAY 3

Read Luke 7:11–17. *The widow never asked. Jesus' compassion moved first. Where in your own life could you receive that same unrequested compassion?*

DAY 4

Read John 10:10 and Matthew 12:25 together. *Notice how the second verse rules out a divided Godhead. Where have you, even briefly, blamed God for what belongs to "the thief"?*

DAY 5

Read Romans 8:28 and Acts 8:1–4 together. *Watch synergeo in action: real evil, genuinely opposed by God, worked toward real good without God causing it.*

DAY 6

Read Hebrews 12:5–11. *Where has a season of real, hard discipline — not enemy attack — produced "the fruit of peace and righteousness" in your own life?*

Tell one trusted person this week where you've quietly blamed God for something that Scripture would actually attribute elsewhere.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Knowing God

"Is God actually, unreservedly good — or is that something Christians say more confidently than Scripture and experience always support?"

THE FLOOR

Every other attribute of God rests on His eternity. A God with a beginning could, in principle, have an end — everything built on His character would rest on borrowed time.

Psalm 90:2

THE PREMISE

No one is good but God alone. Every derivative goodness in creation borrows the word from the One who alone possesses it completely and originally.

Mark 10:18

THE THIEF

The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy; God is light, with no darkness in Him at all. Sickness and disaster carry the enemy's signature, never the Father's.

John 10:10
1 John 1:5

THE SYNERGY

God doesn't cause all things. He works all things together for good — even what He actively opposes never escapes His ability to redeem it.

Romans 8:28

THE TURN

His loyal love endures, and He is faithful through every generation. Trust His character even where His reasons stay hidden.

Psalm 100:5

SO NOW

THE FLOOR, NOT ONE ATTRIBUTE AMONG MANY

God's eternity is what every other attribute stands on — self-sufficiency, immutability, goodness itself.

Psalm 90:2

THE PREMISE, NOT THE CONCLUSION

Goodness belongs to God alone in its fullest sense — this session's starting point, not its finish line.

Mark 10:18

THE THIEF'S WORK, NOT THE FATHER'S

A divided Godhead is a contradiction Scripture itself won't permit — the Father did not ordain what the Son spent His ministry undoing.

John 10:10

WORKED TOGETHER, NOT CAUSED

God doesn't need to author what He opposes in order to redeem what it produces.

Romans 8:28

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God's goodness is Scripture's starting premise, not its conclusion. Relocate blame where Scripture actually places it, and trust His character to hold even where His reasons stay hidden.

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Next · Session 26, Kingdom Stories. You now hold a clear, biblically grounded confidence in who God is and what He’s actually like. Session 26 turns to the stories you tell — about Him, and about yourself — and why the stories you believe shape the life you live.

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KINGDOM STORIES

Kingdom Essentials: The Prize

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Definitions

03 The Warning

04 The Encouragement

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · [God Story]

07 Big Ideas

08 Six-Day Practice

The Question

> *“But they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die.”*
>
> **REVELATION 12:11**

Notice what this verse pairs with the blood of the Lamb — the single most important event in the history of the universe — as a weapon believers actually use to overcome the enemy: “the word of their testimony.” Not a doctrine. Not a strategy. A story, spoken out loud.

Do you have a habit of telling other people what God has actually done for you — or does it rarely occur to you that this is something Scripture treats as spiritual warfare rather than small talk?

Most believers have God stories. Far fewer tell them, and this session argues that gap costs more than it looks like it costs.

It’s worth being honest about why the gap exists. Sharing a God story means talking about yourself, and this curriculum has already spent an entire session (Kingdom Violence) naming how quickly Christian culture can turn suspicious of anyone who seems to be drawing attention to their own life. It’s easier, and safer, to talk about doctrine — abstract, unassailable, nobody’s personal business — than to say “here’s the specific thing God did for me,” which opens the door to being doubted, dismissed, or quietly judged as showing off. This session isn’t asking you to ignore that real social cost. It’s asking whether Scripture treats the cost as worth paying anyway, given what it says testimony actually does.

CONSIDER THIS

Think of one specific thing God has done in your life that you could tell in under a minute. When did you last actually tell someone?

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You have moved in my life in ways I’ve noticed and, if I’m honest, in ways I’ve let myself forget. Bring those back to mind. Give me the courage to talk about what You’ve actually done, out loud, to someone who needs to hear it. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Definitions

Scripture uses a specific word for this — not “story” in the vague, anecdotal sense, but *testimony*, a word with real legal and prophetic weight behind it.

*“Worship God, for the **testimony** **(μαρτυρία)** **about Jesus** is the spirit of prophecy.”*

REVELATION 19:10

WORD STUDY

μαρτυρία *martyria* G3141

“testimony” · Revelation 19:10

Range. Thayer’s range for *martyria* runs from formal legal testimony given before judges, through a historian’s factual record of events, to a personal, ethical witness to someone’s character. It’s the root of the English word “martyr” — someone whose testimony cost them everything.

The sense here. John is told, almost startlingly, that *martyria* about Jesus — an ordinary record of what He has done — carries “the spirit of prophecy.” That’s not a throwaway phrase. A record of what God has already done functions, in God’s own economy, as a prophetic release of what He’s about to do again. Telling what happened isn’t merely nostalgia. It’s activation.

Why it carries the argument. If testimony genuinely carries prophetic weight, then staying quiet about what God has done isn’t a neutral, humble default. It’s leaving a specific kind of spiritual power unused — cross-referencing Session 15’s *homologeō* study, where speaking agreement with what’s already true was shown to matter, not merely describe.

Source. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, s.v. μαρτυρία.

This is worth connecting back to the very first verse of this session. “The accuser of our brothers and sisters, the one who accuses them day and night before our God, has been thrown down” (Revelation 12:10) — the verse immediately before “they overcame him… by the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11). *Martyria*’s legal register isn’t incidental here. There’s an actual accuser, actually

pressing an actual case, and Scripture's own answer isn't a legal brief or a systematic rebuttal. It's testimony — specific, first-person, sworn evidence of what God has actually done — entered directly into the record against him. Every time you tell what God did, in this register, you're not merely encouraging a friend. You're filing evidence in a case that's still open.

The Old Testament carries the same word into a strikingly concrete place.

> *"You are to put into the ark the **testimony** (עֵדֻת) that I will give to you."*
>
> **EXODUS 25:16**

WORD STUDY

עֵדוּת *eduth* H5715

> **"testimony"** · Exodus 25:16

Range. BDB traces *eduth* to the verb *uwd*, "to repeat, to do again, to bear witness" — the same idea Thayer's found on the Greek side of this study. It names both the covenant document itself (the stone tablets) and, by extension, the whole category of God's self-witness deposited among His people.

The sense here. God doesn't merely instruct Moses to write down the covenant terms. He calls the resulting object "the testimony" and has it placed inside the ark, at the exact spot He names as His meeting place with Israel: "I will meet with you there… from above the atonement lid… I will speak with you" (Exodus 25:22). The testimony isn't filed away in an archive. It sits at the center of the camp, at the literal location where God's ongoing presence is promised.

Why it carries the argument. Long before Revelation calls testimony "the spirit of prophecy," the Old Testament

had already placed testimony at the physical center of God's relationship with His people — not as a historical record to be consulted occasionally, but as the very object marking where He meets with them. Keeping a testimony was never optional bookkeeping. It was always meant to sit at the center.

Source. BDB, s.v. עֵדוּת.

Two different words, two different Testaments, the same underlying claim: testimony isn't peripheral to a relationship with God. It's meant to sit at the center of it.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> A formerly blind man, healed by Jesus, is dragged before religious authorities determined to discredit both him and the One who healed him. They press him with theological questions he isn't equipped to answer. His response is a model of exactly what this session is about to argue a good testimony looks like: "I do not know whether he is a sinner. I do know one thing — that although I was blind, now I can see" (John 9:25). No theological debate. No defense of his own credibility. One sentence, entirely about what happened, offered under real pressure. Two thousand years before anyone wrote a "how to tell a God story" tip sheet, this man had already mastered it.

PAUSE & REFLECT

The healed man in John 9 didn't need a theology degree to give a testimony that held up under hostile questioning — he just told what happened. What's stopping you from telling yours with that same simplicity?

The Warning

Scripture doesn't merely encourage testimony as a nice practice. It treats forgetting what God has done as a serious, repeated failure with real consequences — the specific failure that defines an entire generation's downfall in Psalm 78.

> *"We will tell the next generation about the Lord's praiseworthy acts, about his strength and the amazing things he has done."*
>
> **PSALM 78:4**

That's the intention stated at the top of the psalm. What follows is a long, unflinching record of Israel failing to live it out: "They forgot what he had done, the amazing things he had shown them" (Psalm 78:11); "they did not remember what he had done, how he delivered them from the enemy" (Psalm 78:42).

WORD STUDY

זָכַר *zakar* H2142

> **"remember"** · Psalm 77:11

Range. BDB defines *zakar* as "to mark, so as to be recognized" — remembering as a deliberate act of attention, not passive recall that simply happens or fails to happen on its own. It affects "present feeling, thought, or action" — to *zakar* something is to let it change what you do next.

The sense here. Psalm 78 uses this same root negatively, again and again, to describe Israel's failure: they did not *zakar*. But the psalmist himself models the positive alternative elsewhere. Same verb, same writer, opposite outcome — because he chose it deliberately rather than waiting for it to happen automatically.

Why it carries the argument. *Zakar* is a discipline, not a feeling. Telling a God story deliberately, on purpose, even when you don't feel like it, is *zakar* in action — the same choice the psalmist made when memory alone wasn't offering itself up freely.

Source. BDB, s.v. זָכַר.

> *"I will remember (אֶזְכְּרָה) the works of the Lord. Yes, I will remember the amazing things you did long ago!"*
>
> **PSALM 77:11**

The psalm is explicit about why this matters enough to write an eighty-verse warning about it: "so that they will not be like their ancestors, who were a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that was not committed and faithful to God" (Psalm 78:8). The goal was never merely avoiding God's displeasure for its own sake. It was breaking a cycle — a family, and eventually a whole nation, repeating the same faithless pattern generation after generation because no one had told the next one what they'd actually seen.

Notice what the psalm says actually happens when a generation stops remembering out loud: "How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness, and insulted him in the desert! They again challenged God, and offended the Holy One of Israel" (Psalm 78:40–41). Forgetting isn't a passive, harmless gap. Left alone, it becomes a pattern of quiet distrust — because a people with no active memory of what God has already proven Himself faithful to do has nothing solid to stand on the next time faith is required. What you stop talking about, you eventually stop expecting. What you stop expecting has a way of quietly disappearing from your actual experience of God — not because He stopped acting, but because you stopped watching for it, stopped expecting it, stopped seeking it, stopped asking for it, and stopped building the muscle of naming it when it came.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Psalm 78's generation had genuinely seen God act — and still let it slip from active memory. What's one thing God has done for you that's already started fading because you haven't talked about it in a while?

The Encouragement

Jesus' own parable of the sower gives a warning about what happens to a word that's received but never allowed to take root and produce something.

> *"The seed sown among thorns is the person who hears the word, but worldly cares and the seductiveness of wealth choke the word, so it produces nothing… But as for the seed sown on good soil, this is the person who hears the word and understands. He bears fruit, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown."*
>
> **MATTHEW 13:22–23**

A testimony works the same way. Hearing about what God has done and never doing anything with it — never repeating it, never letting it produce anything further — is its own quiet way of letting the word get choked out. Scripture's own instruction runs the opposite direction: "We will tell the next generation about the Lord's praiseworthy acts" (Psalm 78:4). The Hebrew verb behind "tell" here, *saphar*, is worth a brief note even without a full word study: it's the same root that gives Hebrew its words for "scribe" and "book" — a verb that starts out meaning "to count" and ends up meaning "to keep the record, out loud." Telling a God story, in this word's own range, was never meant to be casual chatter. It was meant to function like keeping the books.

Psalm 71 shows what this looks like across an entire lifetime rather than a single telling: "O God, you have taught me since I was young, and I am still declaring your amazing deeds… Even when I am old and gray, O God, do not abandon me, until I tell the next generation about your strength, and those coming after me about your power" (Psalm 71:17–18). The psalmist doesn't treat aging as a reason to stop keeping the record. He treats it as the very reason he's still asking God to

keep him alert enough to finish the job — there's a generation still waiting to hear it from him specifically, and no one else can tell it exactly the way he can.

Deuteronomy 6 shows the moment this actually tends to happen — not scheduled, but triggered by an honest question: "When your children ask you later on, 'What are the stipulations, statutes, and ordinances that the Lord our God commanded you?' you must say to them, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt in a powerful way'" (Deuteronomy 6:20–21). Notice the shape of the answer Moses instructs. The child asks an abstract question about rules. The commanded answer isn't a rule. It's a story — a specific, remembered act of deliverance, told as personally as if it happened yesterday rather than centuries before most of the hearers were born. Every generation's honest questions about God are, more often than not, an open door for exactly the kind of telling this session has been arguing for — if there's a story ready when the door opens.

This session offers genuinely practical guidance on doing this well: a good God story takes sixty seconds or less, contains only the relevant information, and stays focused on what God did rather than the drama of the problem itself.

One practical habit makes all of this sustainable rather than a one-time exercise: keep a running, written list. Session 1's opening practice already established journaling as this curriculum's baseline discipline for noticing what God is doing; a dedicated "God stories" list is that same discipline aimed specifically at *saphar*-style record-keeping. A single running page — one line per entry, dated, nothing elaborate — turns "what has God actually done for me?" from a question you scramble to answer on the spot into a question you can answer instantly, because the record's already kept.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> One men's prayer gathering practiced this literally: the first hour of every meeting was reserved entirely for "God Stories" — men taking turns recounting, in a minute or two apiece, what God had done in their own lives or the lives of people close to them. The rule was strictly enforced: dwelling on the problem got a man gently cut off and redirected back to what God had actually done. The result, by the group's own account, was a room full of men whose faith kept climbing before they even got to the actual praying — because by the time they started, they'd just spent an hour rehearsing evidence that God shows up. This is a real, documented practice from a men's ministry, not a claim about any particular reader's own group; it's included here as a working model of what "keeping the record out loud, on purpose, as a group habit" can look like in practice.

> **ILLUSTRATION**

> Two versions of the same true event. Version one: “So it was this whole thing — work had been a mess for weeks, my manager wasn’t even talking to me, I’d been stressed about money on top of it, and then my car started making this noise, and I almost didn’t even go to the appointment because of everything else going on, but anyway I finally went and —” Version two: “I’d been out of work for four months. I prayed one specific prayer on a Tuesday. I had a job offer by Friday.” Same event. The second version is the one someone actually remembers, repeats to someone else, and lets build their own faith — not because it minimizes real hardship, but because it puts the weight where the source material insists it belongs: on what God did.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn’t sharing what God has done just a subtle form of bragging?

This is a fair, common hesitation — especially for anyone shaped by a culture, family, or personality that treats self-focused talk of any kind as suspect.

Scripture draws the line precisely, rather than telling believers simply to stay quiet: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31). Paul, who had more to legitimately boast about than almost anyone in the New Testament, put it even more sharply: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). The test isn’t whether you’re talking about your own life — a God story necessarily is. The test is who gets the credit inside the story you tell. “I prayed and God answered” keeps the weight on Him. “I finally had enough faith and it worked” quietly shifts it back onto you. The source material’s own guidance — keep the story about what God did, not the drama you faced — turns out to be more than a communication tip. It’s the actual difference between testimony and boasting.

There’s a second answer worth adding, beyond simply not being boasting: testimony has a stated purpose beyond your own faith. “Blessed is… the Father of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). A God story you keep to yourself never becomes comfort for anyone else. The very awkwardness of telling it — the discomfort boasting-averse readers rightly feel — is worth pushing through precisely because someone in your life is currently facing the kind of trouble your story is the specific, tested comfort for.

A related hesitation deserves its own answer: “My story isn’t dramatic enough to be worth telling.” An answered prayer for patience with a difficult coworker, a small provision that arrived at exactly the right week, a moment of unexpected

peace during a hard diagnosis — none of it reads like Acts. Scripture has its own answer for exactly this instinct: “For who dares make light of small beginnings?” (Zechariah 4:10). The verse is spoken directly against dismissing a modest, unglamorous act of God as beneath notice. If God Himself doesn’t despise small beginnings, treating your own quieter story as too small to tell isn’t humility. It’s applying a standard God explicitly refuses to apply.

I AM NOT SAYING

- I’m not saying failing to share a God story on any given day means God is personally angry with you. Psalm 78 describes a whole generation’s sustained, willful pattern of forgetting across decades, not an individual believer’s quiet week.
- I’m not saying every believer needs to become the extroverted, first-to-speak storyteller in a room. Some of the most faithful people you know process and remember privately rather than performing it aloud — this session’s actual point is the discipline of remembering and being ready, not a personality requirement.
- I’m not saying a testimony has to be polished or rehearsed to count. The man born blind in this session’s own illustration had no time to prepare his answer and gave the truest version anyway; a God story that comes out a little rough the first few times you tell it is still doing exactly what Scripture describes.

I AM SAYING

- I am saying Scripture treats testimony as genuinely consequential, not merely pleasant: it’s named a weapon (Revelation 12:11), a prophetic release (Revelation 19:10), and a discipline whose absence

has real, documented spiritual cost across Israel's own history (Psalm 78).
- I am saying having at least one God story ready to tell, and telling it sometimes, is not optional decoration on a healthy Kingdom life — whatever your personality.

The Turn

You already have God stories — plural, almost certainly more than you'd list if asked right now. What Psalm 78 warns against isn't the absence of a story to tell. It's the slow, quiet erosion of an active memory that would have already noticed one.

Testimony, evidence, discipline, comfort for someone else's trouble — this session has stacked up a lot of reasons your stories matter more than "small talk." None of them require you to become someone you're not. A quiet, reserved storyteller and an animated, first-to-speak one are both keeping the same record, in the same register Scripture uses, as long as the record actually gets kept and actually gets told sometime rather than staying permanently private.

PAUSE & REFLECT

List three things God has done for you in the last year, right now, before moving on. If you got stuck after one, that itself is worth noticing.

The Experience · [God Story]

This is a guided practice for actually doing what this session has argued for, rather than only agreeing with it.

Take out something to write with. Give yourself five minutes.

Write one God story, sixty seconds or less when spoken aloud. Use only the relevant details, and more sentences about what God did than about the problem you were facing. If you're stuck, use Psalm 77:11's own method — ask "what do I remember Him doing?" rather than waiting for one to occur to you. If nothing recent comes to mind, reach back further — a story from years ago still counts, and Psalm 71's whole argument is that the older stories are worth keeping in active circulation too, not retired once they've aged.

Read it aloud to yourself once, timing it. Cut anything that isn't carrying weight. If you find yourself explaining the problem for three sentences and God's response for one, that's the exact imbalance this session has been arguing against — flip the ratio before you move on.

This week, tell it to one person — not as a performance, but as *saphar*: keeping the record, out loud, the way Scripture itself keeps describing it. If you're comfortable, close by praying the way the source material itself suggests: after telling your story, pray prophetically about what you'd like to see God do again.

Big Ideas

BIG IDEAS

1. *Martyria* — testimony — carries "the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10); recounting what God has done functions as a release of what He's about to do again, not mere nostalgia.
2. *Zakar* — remember — is a deliberate discipline, not passive recall; Psalm 78's generation didn't lose their memory of God's acts by accident, they let it lapse by neglect.
3. *Saphar* — tell — shares its root with "scribe" and "book"; telling a God story is keeping a record, not idle chatter.
4. A good God story stays under sixty seconds, includes only relevant detail, and stays focused on what God did rather than the drama that preceded it.
5. Testimony and boasting are distinguished by one question: who gets the credit inside the story you're telling.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

What you stop talking about, you eventually stop expecting. Keep the record — out loud, on purpose — and watch what it does to your own faith the next time you need it.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for what You have actually done in my life — more than I remember on any given day. Help me keep the record faithfully, and give me the courage to speak it out loud rather than letting it fade into something I only privately believe. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Elevation Worship, "Do It Again" (2016).
The song referenced in this session's source material — a contemporary worship expression of exactly Psalm 78's argument: remembering what God has already done as the basis for confidence in what He'll do again.

SUBSTANTIAL

Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker* (2011).
A widely read, practically oriented treatment of bold, specific prayer built on remembering God's past faithfulness — a natural next step for putting this session's Experience into an ongoing habit.

ACADEMIC

Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (1995).
A scholarly treatment of the Psalms' own theology of memory and lament, including extended attention to how Israel's worship functioned specifically as rehearsed testimony.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Revelation 12:11. *Testimony is named alongside the blood of the Lamb as something believers use to overcome. Sit with that pairing.*

DAY 2

Read Revelation 19:10. *"The testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." What does it change to treat your own story as prophetic rather than merely personal?*

DAY 3

Read Psalm 78:1–8. *Notice the stated intention: telling the next generation on purpose. Who is your "next generation" — literal or otherwise?*

DAY 4

Read Psalm 78:40–42. *Forgetting wasn't neutral for this generation. Where might quiet forgetting be costing you something right now?*

DAY 5

Read John 9:24–25. *One sentence, under real pressure, entirely about what happened. Practice saying your own one-sentence version out loud.*

DAY 6

Read 1 Corinthians 1:31 and Galatians 6:14 together. *Boasting and testimony share the same subject — your own story — but not the same object. Who gets the credit in the story you tell most often?*

Tell your Experience story — the one you wrote this session — to one person this week, exactly as practiced.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Stories

“Do you have a habit of telling other people what God has actually done for you?”

THE WITNESS

Testimony carries real legal and prophetic weight. Telling what God has done functions, in God’s own economy, as a release of what He’s about to do again.

Revelation 19:10
Exodus 25:16

THE FORGETTING

Remembering is a deliberate discipline, not passive recall. A whole generation’s downfall traced back to letting an active memory of God’s acts lapse.

Psalm 77:11
Psalm 78:11

THE RECORD

“Tell” shares its root with “scribe” and “book.” A running, written list turns “what has God done?” into a question you can answer instantly.

Psalm 78:4
Deuteronomy 6:20–21

THE CREDIT

Testimony and boasting share the same subject — your own life — but not the same object. The test is who gets the credit inside the story you tell.

1 Corinthians 1:31
Galatians 6:14

THE TURN

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. A story, spoken out loud, is spiritual warfare, not small talk.

Revelation 12:11

SO NOW

PROPHETIC, NOT NOSTALGIC

A record of what God has already done functions as a release of what He’s about to do again.

Revelation 19:10

DELIBERATE, NOT AUTOMATIC

Remembering is a discipline you choose, not a feeling that shows up on its own.

Psalm 77:11

KEPT, NOT RECALLED UNDER PRESSURE

A running, written list turns “what has God done?” into a question you can answer instantly.

Psalm 78:4

CREDITED TO HIM, NOT YOU

The test isn’t whether you’re talking about your own life — it’s who gets the credit inside the story.

1 Corinthians 1:31

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

What you stop talking about, you eventually stop expecting. Keep the record — out loud, on purpose — and watch what it does to your own faith the next time you need it.

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Next · Session 27, Kingdom Lifestyle. You now have a record worth keeping and a habit of keeping it. Session 27 turns to the ongoing rhythms — worship, listening, obedience, feeding on the Word — that keep a Kingdom life sustainable for the long run rather than a single dramatic season.

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KINGDOM LIFESTYLE

Kingdom Essentials: The Prize

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Four Rhythms

03 Feeding on the Word

04 The Turn

05 The Experience · [Feeding Yourself]

06 Six-Day Practice

The Question

> *"Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, 'If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my* ***disciples*** **(μαθηταί).***'"*
>
> JOHN 8:31

WORD STUDY

μαθητής *mathētēs* G3101

"disciples" · John 8:31

Range. Thayer's defines *mathētēs* from the verb *manthanō*, "to learn" — a pupil, in constant relationship to a teacher, learning by continued exposure rather than a single lesson. It's used throughout the Gospels for those who followed Jesus long-term, not merely those who heard Him once.

The sense here. Jesus doesn't say believing Him, once, makes someone a disciple. He says *continuing* in His teaching does. The test isn't the moment of belief — it's what happens across every ordinary day after it.

Why it carries the argument. This entire session exists because of this one distinction. Every discipline this curriculum has taught — worship, listening, obedience, feeding on the Word — was never meant to be a single powerful session you experienced once. It was meant to become a lifestyle, in exactly the sense *mathētēs* describes: ongoing, daily, cumulative.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. μαθητής.

Twenty-six sessions in, you have more spiritual tools than most believers ever accumulate. What happens to them next — filed away as things you once learned, or built into the actual rhythm of your daily life — depends entirely on what this session is about.

There's a real risk in reaching a session like this one late in a long curriculum: treating it as a graduation rather than a genuine turning point. A curriculum can teach you everything true about God and still fail to change how Tuesday actually goes, if the content never gets translated into rhythm. This session is the deliberate hinge between the two — between everything you now know and the actual shape of a week that lives it out.

CONSIDER THIS

Of everything this curriculum has taught you so far, what's the one discipline you meant to build into a habit and haven't yet?

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

> *Father, You haven't given me twenty-six sessions of information to file away. You've given me a way to live. Weave what I've learned into an actual rhythm — not one more thing to feel guilty about neglecting, but a life I actually want to keep living. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Four Rhythms

This curriculum has built four ongoing rhythms across its sessions, and this session's job isn't to introduce a fifth. It's to name all four together and show how they hold each other up.

Notice, too, why it's exactly these four and not some other list. Worship answers who God is worth responding to. Listening answers what He's actually saying. Obeying answers what you do with what you heard. Feeding on the Word answers where all three keep getting their raw material. Remove any one and the other three eventually thin out — worship without listening drifts into performance; listening without obeying stalls into passive spectating; obeying without feeding on the Word runs out of anything specific to obey; and none of the three survive long on a diet of memory rather than fresh contact with Scripture. They were never meant to compete for your calendar. They were meant to sustain each other.

Worship

Sessions 23 through 25 already gave worship its full treatment — confessing who God is (Session 23), holding His knowability and unknowability together (Session 24), and settling the question of His unreserved goodness (Session 25), each closing in an actual worship practice rather than only an argument. This session adds one thing those didn't: worship isn't a Sunday event or a session's closing exercise. "Present your bodies as a sacrifice — alive, holy, and pleasing to God — which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). Paul's word for "service" there is the same word used for temple worship — an ordinary Tuesday, offered as an act of worship, counts as fully as a gathered service does.

Paul makes the same point even more broadly elsewhere, stretching worship across the most mundane categories imaginable: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Eating and drinking are about as far from a worship service as human activity gets, and Paul names them anyway. If worship can stretch that far, it was never really confined to a sanctuary or a session to begin with — it was always meant to be the posture underneath an entire life, including the parts of your week that never feel spiritual at all.

Paul makes the same claim even more directly about ordinary work: “Whatever you are doing, work at it with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not for people… Serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23–24). Session 8’s Kingdom Purpose material already established that your work carries real Kingdom weight, not merely spiritual work but any work done as service to Christ. This session adds the other half: that same work, offered this way, isn’t just purposeful. It’s worship — meaning a Tuesday spent doing your actual job well, for God’s eyes rather than only a supervisor’s or a client’s, already qualifies as one of this session’s four rhythms in action, whether or not it ever feels like a spiritual moment while you’re doing it.

Listening

Session 9 already built the case at length: God still speaks, and Scripture gives real, tested ways of learning to recognize His voice. This session adds the claim that actually holds the other three rhythms up: listening isn’t the third item on a list of four equal disciplines. It’s the precondition for the other three. You cannot obey a voice you haven’t heard. You cannot worship who God actually is if you’ve stopped expecting Him to keep speaking. And feeding on the Word, done without any expectation that God still says something through it *to you, today*, quietly turns Scripture into research rather than relationship.

> *“My sheep **listen** (ἀκούουσιν) **to my voice**, and I know them, and they follow me.”*
>
> **JOHN 10:27**

WORD STUDY

ἀκούω *akouō* G191

> **“listen”** · John 10:27

Range. Thayer's gives *akouō* a range running from simple physical audition to a much deeper sense: to attend to, to give ear to teaching, and — in its fullest New Testament use — to yield obedience to what's heard. The word itself carries no hard line between hearing and heeding; Scripture's own vocabulary treats them as points on one continuum rather than two separate acts.

The sense here. Jesus doesn't say His sheep merely overhear His voice among many others. He says they *listen* to it — the attentive, responsive sense of the word — and that listening is precisely what produces the following that closes the verse.

Why it carries the argument. This is the same root this session's Obeying section builds its own word study on (*hypakouō*, "to hear under"). Scripture uses one family of words for both listening and obeying because it doesn't consider them two different skills. Jon Ruthven makes a version of this same case at book length: he argues that an intimate, conversational, listening relationship with God — not merely correct information about Him — is the Bible's own central, recurring theme from Genesis to Revelation, and that a tradition can hold impeccably correct doctrine while having quietly lost the thing Scripture was actually about (*What's Wrong with Protestant Theology?*, 2022). I don't think every conclusion in that book is beyond dispute, but on this one point I think he's reading the text's own emphasis correctly, and this session's four rhythms are built on the same conviction.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. ἀκούω.

Jesus is this word study's clearest exhibit, not merely its teacher. Ask what authorized everything He did, and His own answer is total, repeated dependence on what He heard and saw the Father doing first:

> *"I tell you the solemn truth, the Son can do nothing on his own initiative, but only* ***what he sees the Father doing.*** *For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does."*
>
> **JOHN 5:19–20**

Read that claim at full strength: Jesus doesn't say He usually consults the Father, or that He follows general principles the Father laid down in advance. He says He can do *nothing* on His own initiative — every healing, every parable, every confrontation with the religious leaders of His day, was a response to something He had first heard or watched the Father do. He says nearly the identical thing about His own words a few chapters later: "I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak just what the Father taught me" (John 8:28). The most powerful ministry the world has ever seen ran entirely on listening. If Jesus needed that dependence, the assumption that you or I could safely operate without it doesn't survive contact with His own example.

Jesus' own pattern is worth noticing here too, since it ties listening directly to timing: "Then Jesus got up early in the morning when it was still very dark, departed, and went out to a deserted place, and there he spent time in prayer" (Mark 1:35). He didn't wait for a crisis to prompt listening. He built it into the rhythm of an ordinary day, before the day's demands had a chance to crowd it out — a pattern worth noticing for anyone whose schedule, unlike Jesus' first-century ministry, has genuine flexibility in it to imitate.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If everything Jesus did was a response to something He first heard or saw the Father doing, where in your own life are you currently acting — even acting *for* God — without having actually listened first?

Obeying

This is genuinely new ground — no earlier session has addressed it directly, even though nearly every session has assumed it.

> *"Do you not know that if you present yourselves as **obedient (ὑπακούετε) slaves**, you are slaves of the one you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or obedience resulting in righteousness?"*
>
> **ROMANS 6:16**

WORD STUDY

ὑπακούω *hypakouō* G5219

> **"obey"** · Romans 6:16

Range. Thayer's traces *hypakouō* to two combined roots — *hypo* ("under") and *akouō* ("to hear") — literally, "to hear under," in the sense of hearing from a position of submission. Its most literal New Testament use is answering a door: hearing a knock and responding to it (Acts 12:13).

The sense here. Paul's choice of this particular word ties obedience directly back to listening, at the level of the word's own construction — not by analogy, but by etymology. To obey, in this word's own range, *is* a form of hearing — hearing that actually moves you to answer the door rather than just registering the knock.

Why it carries the argument. This one word dissolves a false distinction this session's Four Rhythms could otherwise imply: listening and obeying aren't two separate disciplines that happen to be practiced together. In Scripture's own vocabulary, they're close enough to be nearly the same word. Listening that never becomes

obeying was never, in this word's own terms, complete listening.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. ὑπακούω.

Worth naming before going further: none of this means flawless compliance. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9) — a verse written specifically for people who obey imperfectly, which is to say, everyone. *Hypakouō* describes a direction, not a scorecard; a life bent toward listening and answering, not a record with no failed obedience in it at all. Confession and restart are built into the pattern, not evidence the pattern has failed.

Jesus Himself ties obedience to something other than duty or fear: "If you love me, you will obey my commandments" (John 14:15). Obedience, in Jesus' own framing, isn't the price of His love — it's love's natural expression, the way a marriage's daily faithfulness expresses a love that was never in doubt rather than earning it fresh each day. He goes further still: "The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will reveal myself to him" (John 14:21). Obedience isn't only about avoiding consequences. It's the specific condition under which Jesus promises to reveal more of Himself — which reframes every act of obedience less as a rule kept and more as an invitation accepted.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Jesus tells a story that maps this word study exactly onto two kinds of builders: "Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and puts them into practice — I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug down deep, and laid the foundation on bedrock. When a flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the person who hears and does not put my words into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against that house, it collapsed immediately, and was utterly destroyed!" (Luke 6:47–49). Both men, in the parable, hear the same words. The entire difference between a house left standing and a house in ruins is *hypakouō* — hearing that becomes doing.

Feeding on the Word

This is this curriculum's fourth rhythm — the daily intake that feeds the other three.

> *"He said to me, 'Son of man, eat what you see in front of you — eat this scroll — and then go and speak to the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth and he fed me the scroll. He said to me, 'Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll I am giving to you.' So I ate it, and it was sweet like honey in my mouth."*
>
> **EZEKIEL 3:1–3**

Scripture doesn't merely ask to be read. It asks to be eaten — taken in and metabolized until it becomes part of you, not just information you've reviewed.

> *"**Taste (טַעֲמוּ) and see** that the Lord is good! How blessed is the one who takes shelter in him!"*
>
> **PSALM 34:8**

WORD STUDY

טָעַם *ta'am* H2938

"taste" · Psalm 34:8

Range. BDB defines *ta'am* as "to taste," with a natural figurative extension to "to perceive, to discern" — the same move English makes when it calls a person of good judgment someone with "taste." The word assumes direct, personal contact, not secondhand description.

The sense here. The Psalmist doesn't invite you to be told God is good, or to study evidence that God is good. He invites you to taste — direct, personal, experiential contact

— and let that experience itself be the proof. Reading Scripture, in this word's range, isn't research. It's tasting.

Why it carries the argument. Ezekiel's scroll was sweet as honey in his actual mouth, not merely correct in his mind. If Scripture is meant to be tasted rather than only studied, then a reading habit that only produces facts about God, without ever producing an experience of Him, has fallen short of what this word describes — regardless of how theologically accurate the facts are.

Source. BDB, s.v. טָעַם.

The writer of Hebrews explains why Scripture can do this in a way no other book can: "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). When you read God's Word, in a very real sense, it reads you.

There are four practical postures worth keeping: read **receptively** — checking your own heart first, asking whether you're reading from obligation or hunger ("He who has ears to hear, let him hear," Mark 4:9); read **expectantly** — leaning in the way you would for genuinely important news, trusting real insight is available (Ephesians 3:4); read **meditatively** — not emptying the mind but rehearsing a phrase or verse across the day, cross-referencing Session 17's *hagah* word study rather than re-deriving it here; and read **personally** — applying it to yourself first, before anyone else, since "you are His favorite transformation project" (James 1:22, Session 1's *imago Dei* material already established why).

Joshua ties meditation and obedience together in a single verse, closing the loop this session has been building toward: "This law scroll must not leave your lips! You must memorize it day and night so you can carefully obey all that is written in it. Then you will prosper and be successful" (Joshua 1:8). Notice the sequence — meditation isn't the destination. It's what makes obedience possible, which is what makes the promised result possible. Feeding on the Word was never meant to end at feeding. It flows directly back into the Obeying rhythm this session already built.

There is guidance on timing and volume is worth understanding, since it resists a temptation this curriculum has already named more than once: turning a good discipline into a performance. There's no biblically mandated time of day or minimum chapter count. The consistent pattern across Scripture — Jesus included — favors a quiet, unhurried, undistracted window, protected from the day's

demands rather than squeezed into whatever's left over. Some days that produces five chapters. Other days it's one verse, sat with for twenty minutes. Both count, as long as the goal stays *ta'am* — actually tasting what's there — rather than simply finishing.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Two believers each commit to a one-year Bible reading plan — roughly three chapters a day. One treats it as a checklist: read the assigned chapters, check the box, move on with the day, whether or not anything landed. Six months in, the habit feels like homework and the temptation to quit is constant. The other reads the same plan but stops the moment something catches — some days that means finishing all three chapters with room to spare; other days it means one verse and twenty minutes of sitting with it, leaving the rest of the day's reading for tomorrow. The first reader is optimizing for completion. The second is optimizing for *ta'am* — actually tasting what's there. Both read the same words. Only one is actually feeding on them.

WHAT ABOUT …

Doesn't a reading plan or a discipline of obedience turn this into performance?

This is a fair concern, especially after twenty-six sessions built almost entirely on grace rather than earning God's favor.

Scripture is unambiguous that none of this is how salvation works: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8–10). Notice the order in that last sentence. Good works — reading, obeying, worshiping, listening — come *after* being made God's workmanship, not before, and never as the price of admission. God Himself names what He actually wants from the relationship: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6) — relationship, not performance.

The corrective test is simple, and worth applying honestly: are you reading, obeying, and worshiping to *earn* something from God, or because you already *have* everything from Him and want to actually know Him? A reading plan reduced to checking a box has drifted toward the first. The same reading plan,

held loosely enough to abandon on a day when one verse is doing more work than three chapters would, is still living in the second.

It's worth naming the opposite error too, since grace can be misapplied in both directions. "Faith, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17) — grace was never meant to produce a believer who reads nothing, obeys nothing, and worships nothing, on the theory that discipline itself is suspect. That's not resting in grace. It's using grace as a reason to stop growing. The four rhythms this session has built aren't a performance trap on one side or an optional extra on the other — they're simply what a genuine relationship with God produces, the same way affection between two people naturally produces time spent together rather than either earning the relationship or proving it's unnecessary.

I AM NOT SAYING

— that every reading, worship, or listening session will produce a dramatic, felt experience of God's presence. Some days *ta'am* — tasting — will feel exactly like that. Many days it won't, and Scripture never promises otherwise; faithfulness on the ordinary days is what makes the *mathētēs* pattern this session opened with actually true of you, not the emotional intensity of any single sitting. Nor am I saying obedience earns or maintains your standing with God — Session 4 already settled that on the cross, permanently, and nothing in this session revisits it.

I AM SAYING

— that all four rhythms this curriculum has built are meant to become an actual daily and weekly pattern, not four separate topics you learned about and set down. *Hypakouō* ties listening and obeying together at the level of the word itself. *Ta'am* invites you to taste Scripture rather than only study it. Neither replaces grace. Both are what a life built on grace actually does next.

One more honest word, since this is likely not your first attempt at building habits like these. If you've started a reading plan before and abandoned it by February, or committed to a listening practice that quietly faded after a few weeks, this session isn't asking you to try harder through sheer willpower this time. "The one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6) — the work being finished is God's, not merely yours, and a habit that restarts for the fourth time isn't a failure this verse has any trouble with. Consistency matters. So does grace toward your own uneven track record in building it.

The Turn

You don't need a fifth discipline. You need these four — worship, listening, obeying, feeding on the Word — actually woven together into something you live rather than something you learned.

Notice how naturally they chain into each other once you stop treating them as separate categories. Feeding on the Word gives you something to meditate on. Meditation positions you to actually listen. Listening produces something specific to obey. Obedience, done as service to Christ rather than a rule kept, becomes worship — which sends you back to the Word, hungry for more. None of that requires four separate blocks on a calendar. It requires one honest look at an ordinary day and a willingness to let each rhythm feed the next one, the way *mathētēs* itself describes: not a single decision, but a continuing.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Picture an ordinary Tuesday. Where, realistically, could each of these four rhythms actually fit into a day that already exists, rather than a day you'd need to invent?

The Experience · [Feeding Yourself]

This is a guided practice applying the four postures — receptively, expectantly, meditatively, personally — to a single, short passage, right now.

Find a quiet few minutes. Read Psalm 34:1–8 slowly, once through.

Receptively. Before reading again, ask: am I reading because it's expected of me right now, or because I actually want to hear something? Sit with the honest answer for a moment.

Expectantly. Read the passage a second time, slower, genuinely expecting the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to something specific — a word, a phrase, a single verse.

Meditatively. Whatever caught your attention, stop there. Don't move on. Say it over to yourself two or three times. Let it sit rather than rushing to the next verse.

Personally. Ask directly: what does this specific phrase mean for me, today, in whatever I'm actually facing right now — not in general, not for someone else.

Close by praying Psalm 34:8 back to God as your own invitation: "Father, I taste and see that You are good. Thank You that this isn't information I'm reviewing, but an actual meal You've set in front of me."

Before you close this session, do one more thing: pick a realistic time and place for this same four-step pattern to happen again tomorrow. Not an ideal schedule you'll abandon by Thursday — an actual, protected window in the day you actually have. Write it down. *Hypakouō* applies here too: hearing this instruction and not scheduling anything specific is, in this session's own terms, not yet obedience.

BIG IDEAS

1. *Akouō* — listen — is Scripture's own foundational word for hearing God; listening isn't one of four equal rhythms, it's the precondition the other three depend on. Jesus said He could do *nothing* on His own initiative, only what He first saw the Father doing (John 5:19–20) — total dependence, not occasional consultation.
2. *Mathētēs* — disciple — describes continuing in Jesus' teaching, not a single moment of belief; this whole session is about what "continuing" actually looks like.

3. *Hypakouō* — obey — is built from "hear" plus "under"; Scripture's own vocabulary treats listening and obeying as nearly the same word. Luke 6:47–49's two builders hear the identical words — the only difference between a standing house and a ruined one is whether hearing became doing.
4. *Ta'am* — taste — invites direct, personal, experiential contact with Scripture, not merely study of it; Ezekiel's scroll was sweet in his actual mouth.
5. Good works follow being made God's workmanship, never precede it (Ephesians 2:8–10) — every rhythm in this session lives inside that order, not ahead of it.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don't need a fifth discipline. Weave worship, listening, obeying, and feeding on the Word into the ordinary week you already have, and let continuing — not a single powerful moment — be what makes you a disciple.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for every discipline this curriculum has given me — and for the grace that means none of them earn what I already have in You. Weave them into an actual life. Let me be found, not just once, but

> *every ordinary day, continuing in what You've taught me. In Jesus' name, amen.*

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Jeffrey Kranz, *The Beginner's Guide to the Bible* (overviewbible.com).
A great starting point for readers newer to Scripture — an accessible, well-organized overview of the whole Bible's shape.

SUBSTANTIAL

Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (1991).
A widely used, practically oriented treatment of exactly this session's four rhythms and others — a natural next step for building any of them into an actual habit.

ACADEMIC

Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (1988).
A rigorous theological and philosophical treatment of why spiritual disciplines actually form character, from one of the most respected voices on Christian formation.

Jon Mark Ruthven, *What's Wrong with Protestant Theology? Tradition vs. Biblical Emphasis* (2022).
A provocative, book-length case that an intimate, conversational listening relationship with God — not correct information about Him — is Scripture's own central and recurring theme. This session's Listening section builds on his core argument.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read John 8:31–32. *Continuing in His teaching, not a single moment of belief, is what makes a disciple. Where has your own continuing been strongest? Weakest?*

DAY 2

Read Romans 6:16–17 and Luke 6:47–49 together. *Hearing that becomes doing is the difference between a standing house and a ruined one. Where in your life right now is that gap the widest?*

DAY 3

Read Psalm 34:1–8. *Taste and see — not study and conclude. Read this slowly enough to actually taste it today.*

DAY 4

Read Ephesians 2:8–10 and Hosea 6:6 together. *Good works follow grace; they never earn it. Where has a discipline started feeling like a performance rather than a response?*

DAY 5

Read Romans 12:1. *"Reasonable service" — an ordinary Tuesday, offered as worship. What would that actually look like in your own week?*

DAY 6

Read John 10:27 and John 5:19–20 together. *Jesus' entire ministry ran on listening first, acting second. Practice both today on one specific thing you sense God has already said.*

Pick one of this session's four rhythms — worship, listening, obeying, feeding on the Word — that's weakest in your own life right now, and build one small, realistic habit around it this week.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

Kingdom Lifestyle

“Twenty-six sessions in — what happens to everything you’ve learned next: filed away, or built into an actual rhythm?”

THE OFFERING

An ordinary Tuesday, offered to God rather than only a supervisor or a client, already counts as worship — it was never confined to a sanctuary or a session.

Romans 12:1
Colossians 3:23–24

THE DEPENDENCE

Jesus said He could do nothing on His own initiative, only what He first saw the Father doing. Listening is the precondition the other three rhythms depend on.

John 10:27
John 5:19–20

THE DOOR

To obey is, at the level of the word itself, a form of hearing — hearing that actually answers the door rather than just registering the knock.

Romans 6:16

THE TASTE

Scripture doesn’t merely ask to be read. It asks to be tasted — direct, personal contact, not secondhand description.

Psalm 34:8

THE TURN

Continuing in His teaching, not a single moment of belief, is what makes a disciple — not a decision, but a continuing.

John 8:31

SO NOW

ORDINARY, NOT RESERVED FOR SUNDAY

Worship was never confined to a sanctuary — an ordinary Tuesday, offered to God, already counts.

Romans 12:1

FIRST, NOT THIRD ON A LIST

You cannot obey a voice you haven’t heard — listening is the precondition, not one of four equal disciplines.

John 10:27

HEARING THAT ANSWERS, NOT JUST REGISTERS

Scripture’s own vocabulary treats listening and obeying as nearly the same word.

Romans 6:16

TASTED, NOT ONLY STUDIED

Ezekiel’s scroll was sweet in his actual mouth, not merely correct in his mind.

Psalm 34:8

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don’t need a fifth discipline. Weave worship, listening, obeying, and feeding on the Word into the ordinary week you already have, and let continuing — not a single powerful moment — be what makes you a disciple.

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Next · Session 28, The End of the Story. You now have a lifestyle built to last, not just a set of things you once learned. Session 28 turns to where the whole story you've been living inside is actually headed.

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THE END OF THE STORY

Kingdom Essentials: The Prize

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Two Ways to Read a Deadline

03 The Question Jesus Actually Answered

04 One Coming, Not Two

05 Where the Story Doesn’t End

06 A Kingdom That Advances, Not Retreats

07 The Turn

08 The Experience · [Occupied Till He Comes]

09 Six-Day Practice

The Question

> *“Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your **coming** (παρουσία) and of the end of the age?”*
>
> MATTHEW 24:3

Twenty-seven sessions have built a Kingdom worth living for. This one asks the question every story eventually asks: how does it end?

Definition — Eschatology

From Greek *eschatos* (“last”) + *logos* (“word,” “study”) — literally, the study of last things. Every Christian has an eschatology, whether or not they’ve ever used the word: some settled conviction about how history resolves, what happens when you die, and what Jesus meant when He promised to come again.

Most believers inherited their eschatology the way they inherited their politics — absorbed from a novel, a movie, a pastor, a chart taped to a Sunday school wall — without ever tracing it back to a text. That's dangerous precisely because this is a subject Scripture speaks to directly and often, which means an inherited view can feel biblical while resting on very little Bible at all.

This session stakes a position rather than surveying every option evenhandedly, for the same reason every contested session in this curriculum has: Sessions 5, 10, 13, 15, 20, 21, and 22 didn't present four views on the gifts, authority, and healing and leave you to pick one. They made an argument from the text and showed their work. This is that kind of session — on the subject where getting it wrong costs the most, because it's the one subject that reaches all the way to how you spend the rest of your life.

Definition — Preterism and Futurism

Preterism (from Latin *praeter*, "past") reads most of the judgment language in Matthew 24 and Revelation as already fulfilled in the first century, chiefly in Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70. *Futurism* reads that same language as describing events still ahead of us today. This session argues a preterist reading of Matthew 24 and most of Revelation — specifically *partial* preterism, a term Section 4 below defines carefully, because the word "preterism" alone gets confused with a more radical position this session does not hold.

> **OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)**
>
> *Father, I've inherited more assumptions about the end of the story than I've ever tested against Your Word. Give me the courage to let Scripture correct what a chart or a movie taught me instead. Show me not just when the story resolves, but what You want me doing while it does. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Two Ways to Read a Deadline

Every prediction with a timestamp can be read one of two ways: as addressed to the person who first heard it, or as addressed past them to someone else entirely.

Get that choice wrong and every other conclusion inherits the error.

> *"I tell you the truth, this **generation** (γενεά) will not pass away until all these things take place."*
>
> **MATTHEW 24:34**

WORD STUDY

γενεά *genea* G1074

"generation" · Matthew 24:34

Range. Thayer's gives *genea* four related senses: a birth or begetting; a family line; the whole body of people living at a given time; or an age, roughly thirty years. The New Testament's most common use — including every other time Matthew uses the phrase "this generation" (11:16; 12:41–42, 45; 23:36) — is the third sense: the specific cohort of people alive together, right now, in front of the speaker.

The sense here. Jesus has just finished pronouncing woe on "this generation" of scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:36, in the same breath, to the same audience, with no chapter break in the original text. Matthew 24 is Jesus still answering the disciples who are standing in front of Him. "This generation" means exactly what it meant three verses earlier: the people alive during His own ministry.

Why it carries the argument. If *genea* means the generation alive when Jesus spoke, then whatever He says will happen "before this generation passes away" has to happen within roughly forty years of A.D. 30 — not two thousand. That single word decides whether the rest of Matthew 24 is describing your newsfeed or describing Jerusalem's own lifetime. I take *genea* at its plain, most

common sense here, which is the reading every other use of the phrase in Matthew already supports.

Here is where I land, and why: reading “this generation” as anything other than the people standing in front of Jesus requires importing a sense the word rarely carries anywhere else in Matthew, purely because the alternative is uncomfortable. That’s the definition of reading meaning into a text rather than out of it — precisely the discipline this curriculum has insisted on since Session 1.

The same discipline applies to when Revelation itself was written, which matters more than it sounds like it should. Revelation 1:1 opens by promising John’s readers “what must happen very soon” and Revelation 22:10 explicitly refuses to seal the book, “because the time is near” — the opposite of Daniel 12:4, which seals its own prophecy precisely because its fulfillment lay centuries off. Revelation 11 describes a Temple still standing, being measured, with an outer court still in Gentile hands — a strange detail for a book written decades after Rome burned that Temple to the ground in A.D. 70. And Revelation 17’s seven kings, when you count reigning Roman emperors in order, land squarely in the reign of Nero, around A.D. 64–66 — several years before the Temple fell, not decades after. Every early external testimony that’s cited for a later date traces back to one ambiguous line in Irenaeus, written more than a century after the fact, which may describe when John’s *vision* was remembered rather than when he wrote it down.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Imagine finding a letter addressed “to my grandchildren,” warning them urgently that a specific relative’s house — described by name, by location, by the year the mortgage would be paid off — would burn down “before this generation of grandchildren has grown old.” If you later confirmed that exact house had, in fact, burned down within your grandparents’ own lifetime, in the location the letter named, you wouldn’t conclude the letter was actually about some other house burning down in your own generation instead. You’d conclude the letter meant precisely what it said, to precisely the people it was written to — and that its precision is the reason to trust the person who wrote it.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where did your own picture of “the end times” actually come from — a specific set of passages you traced yourself, or something absorbed secondhand from a book, a movie, a chart, or a pastor?

The Question Jesus Actually Answered

Matthew 24:3 records one question with three parts, and getting the parts untangled is most of the work.

The disciples ask: when will the Temple fall (which Jesus had just predicted in 24:2), what is the sign of Your *coming*, and what is the sign of the end of the age? Western readers default to hearing all three as one long-range question about the end of physical history. But the disciples had just watched Jesus pronounce the Temple's destruction moments earlier — they weren't suddenly changing the subject to ask about a Second Coming they didn't yet believe was coming, since Matthew 16:21–23 shows them still resisting the idea that Jesus would even die.

> *"the Son of Man **arriving** (ἐρχόμενον) on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"*
>
> **MATTHEW 24:30**

That image is a direct echo of Daniel:

> *"I was watching in the night visions, 'And with the clouds of the sky one like a son of man was approaching. He went up to the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him.' To him was given ruling authority, honor, and sovereignty. All peoples, nations, and language groups were serving him. His authority is eternal and will not pass away. His kingdom will not be destroyed."*

> **DANIEL 7:13–14**

Notice the direction of travel in Daniel's own vision: the Son of Man goes *up* to the Ancient of Days, not down to earth. Daniel is describing an enthronement, not a landing. Jesus is telling His disciples that the "sign" confirming His enthronement — His entry into the Kingdom Daniel foresaw — would be the very judgment He'd just finished predicting on Jerusalem: the sun-and-moon language of verse 29 is the Old Testament's standard idiom for authorities being deposed (compare Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4, both about the fall of literal nations, not the physical cosmos), and "the sign of the Son of Man" appearing in heaven is heaven's own confirmation that judgment had landed and the throne had changed hands.

Definition — Parousia

Greek for "coming" or "presence," this session's most load-bearing word, treated fully below. It matters here because Matthew 24:3's "sign of your coming" and 1 Thessalonians 4:15's "the coming of the Lord" translate the very same Greek word — which is exactly why the two passages can't describe two separate future events without real exegetical strain.

The word study belongs in the next section, where the stakes are highest. For now, the claim this section makes: Jesus set His own deadline — "this generation" — for a Temple-judgment He'd already announced, and roughly forty years later, in A.D. 70, Roman legions under Titus did exactly what He said they would. A Bible whose specific, dated predictions keep quietly getting pushed forward whenever the deadline passes is a Bible skeptics can dismiss. A Bible that meant what it said, when it said it, and was proven right on schedule, is a Bible you can trust with everything else it says — including what it says about your own future.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If Jesus' "this generation" deadline was fulfilled exactly on schedule in A.D. 70, what does that do to your confidence in whatever else He's promised you personally — for your family, your calling, your own future?

One Coming, Not Two

Here is the question most American readers actually came to this session wanting answered: what about the Rapture?

> *"Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly* ***caught up*** **(ἁρπαγησόμεθα)** *together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord."*
>
> **1 THESSALONIANS 4:17**

WORD STUDY

ἁρπάζω *harpazō* G726

"caught up" · 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Range. Thayer's defines *harpazō* as "to seize, to carry off by force" — snatching something suddenly and decisively, whether by a thief, a wild animal, or God Himself rescuing someone from danger (as in Acts 8:39, where the Spirit "snatches" Philip away). The Latin Vulgate translates this same verb *rapio* here — the actual source of the English word "rapture," which never appears as a noun anywhere in the Greek New Testament.

The sense here. The verb itself carries no information about *when* this catching-up happens relative to any tribulation — it describes only the manner (sudden, forceful) and the direction (up, to meet the Lord). Every detail about timing has to come from context, not from this word alone.

Why it carries the argument. The entire pretribulational Rapture doctrine rests on reading a *timing* into a word that

only describes a *manner*. Once you ask 1 Thessalonians 4:17 what it actually says about timing — rather than what a chart says it says — you find the answer sitting one verse earlier.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. ἁρπάζω.

That answer is *parousia* — the same word Matthew 24:3 used for Jesus' "coming."

WORD STUDY

παρουσία *parousia* G3952

> **"coming"** · Matthew 24:3

Range. Thayer's gives *parousia* two senses: a simple, literal presence or arrival (used of ordinary people in 1 Corinthians 16:17 and 2 Corinthians 10:10), and — its specialized New Testament sense — "the future, visible return from heaven of the Messiah." The word carries the definite article in Greek almost everywhere it names Christ's return: *the* parousia, not *a* parousia among several.

The sense here. 1 Thessalonians 4:15 places "the coming [*parousia*] of the Lord" as a single, definite, already-understood event — one the Thessalonians had clearly already been taught about, since Paul assumes it needs no further introduction.

Why it carries the argument. If *parousia* names one specific, singular event, then 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 is describing that one event, not a separate secret rapture staged years ahead of a later, public Second Coming. The passage's own sequence makes the same point without needing the vocabulary argument at all: the dead in Christ

rise *first* (4:16), then those still alive are caught up *together with them* (4:17) — one resurrection, one gathering, one arrival, not a preliminary evacuation followed later by a second, different return.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. παρουσία.

Here is where I land, and why: I don't think Scripture teaches two future comings of Christ — a quiet one to remove the church, and a later, public one to judge the world. I think it teaches one *parousia*, at which the dead in Christ are raised, those still living are caught up to meet Him, final judgment falls, and the Kingdom is consummated — all at once, all in the future, all still ahead of us. Paul's very next chapter confirms it's the same single event under a different name:

> *"For you know quite well that the **day of the Lord** will come in the same way as a thief in the night. Now when they are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction comes on them… But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the darkness for the day to overtake you like a thief would."*
>
> **1 THESSALONIANS 5:2–4**

Paul switches pronouns deliberately across these verses — "you" (5:2) to "them" (5:3) back to "you" (5:4) — distinguishing believers, who are never surprised by this day because they're watching for it, from unbelievers, who are. That switch only makes sense if believers are *present* for the day of the Lord, alert and unsurprised, rather than already removed from the planet before it arrives.

What About … the Rapture Books I Grew Up On?

"I've read the *Left Behind* series. I've heard sermons my whole life about being caught up before the Tribulation. Are you telling me all of that is simply wrong?"

I'm not telling you it's simply wrong to expect a rapture — Scripture plainly teaches one, and this session isn't asking you to stop hoping for it. I'm telling you the specific *shape* most American Christians were taught — a secret, silent removal of believers years before a separate, visible Second Coming — is a genuinely recent theological invention, not the historic Christian position. Marvin Rosenthal, himself no preterist, put it bluntly after reviewing the movement's own

foundational apologetics: “Not once, among fifty arguments, does this godly Christian leader cite one biblical text that explicitly teaches pretribulation rapturism — not once… There simply is no explicit exegetical evidence for pretribulation rapturism” (*The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, 1990). The pretribulational framework traces to John Nelson Darby’s teaching in the 1830s and reached mass popularity only after the Scofield Reference Bible (1909) — roughly 1,800 years after Paul wrote the passage supposedly teaching it.

The Rapture you were taught to fear missing and the Rapture 1 Thessalonians 4 actually describes may be the same event, differently timed. Both are real. Only one is what the text itself says.

Where this stays unresolved: Scripture nowhere gives an exact date, and this session isn’t offering one either. What it corrects is the shape of the event, not its reality.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> A pretribulational chart typically draws two separate lines: a dashed line marking a secret, silent rapture, followed by a gap of several years, followed by a solid line marking a second, visible Second Coming. But 1 Corinthians 15:51–54 places “the last trumpet” at the very moment believers are changed and raised — and Revelation 8–11 places an entire series of trumpet judgments *after* that. If the “last trumpet” of 1 Corinthians 15 is genuinely last, it cannot sound before a sequence of trumpets that, on the two-line chart, still lies years in the future. One line, drawn honestly from the actual sequence the text gives, fits the evidence better than two.

Where the Story Doesn’t End

A reader who has followed this argument this far has a fair question, and it deserves a direct answer before this session goes another sentence further.

What About … Doesn’t This Mean Everything Already Happened?

“If Jerusalem’s fall in A.D. 70 fulfilled the great tribulation, and ‘this generation’ has already passed, and even the Rapture and resurrection are wrapped into the coming Jesus described — how is any of this still future? Are you saying Jesus already came back and nobody noticed?”

No — and this is the single most important line this session draws. There is a much more radical position, usually called *full* or *hyper*-preterism, which teaches that the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment all *already* happened, spiritually, in A.D. 70 — leaving nothing bodily or visible still ahead. That is not this session’s position, and I want to be as direct about that as I

possibly can: numerous denominations and confessional bodies across very different traditions have formally rejected full preterism precisely because it abandons the creeds' plain confession of a still-future, bodily resurrection and a final judgment — a confession this session fully affirms.

Partial preterism — this session's actual position — holds that Matthew 24 and most of Revelation's judgment language describe events genuinely fulfilled in the first century, while the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment of Satan and the wicked, and the new heavens and new earth remain genuinely, bodily, visibly future. Revelation 20:10 puts Satan's own final judgment *after* whatever the millennium is — and every serious futurist and preterist reading of that chapter agrees Satan's end still lies ahead of us. Some things this session argues already happened. The things that matter most for your own hope — your own resurrection, your own final vindication, a renewed creation — have not.

Where this stays unresolved: Scripture doesn't hand us a precise date for that final resurrection, any more than it hands us one for the *parousia* itself. "Concerning that day and hour no one knows" (Matthew 24:36) applies here with its full force.

I AM NOT SAYING

- I'm not saying the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the final judgment have already happened. Those remain genuinely, bodily, visibly future — the historic Christian hope, fully intact.
- I'm not saying Bible prophecy is unimportant, or that getting the timing of Matthew 24 right is more valuable than the character it's supposed to produce in you.
- I'm not saying every futurist reader is deceived, or that this is a salvation issue. Faithful believers hold real, differing positions here, and I've tried to represent the strongest form of the view I'm arguing against rather than the weakest.

I AM SAYING

- I am saying "this generation" (Matthew 24:34) most naturally means the generation Jesus was speaking

> to, and that its fulfillment in A.D. 70 is real, historical, and checkable.
> - I am saying the *parousia* — Christ's return, the resurrection of the dead, final judgment, and the new creation — is a single future event still ahead of every one of us, and worth living toward with full seriousness.

A Kingdom That Advances, Not Retreats

Every eschatology quietly teaches an ethic, whether or not it says so out loud. If you believe the world is scripted to get worse until Jesus rescues you out of it, you plan differently than if you believe the King already reigns and His Kingdom is advancing through you.

What About … If the Kingdom Is Already Winning, Why Does the World Still Look So Broken?

"You're telling me Christ already reigns and His Kingdom already advances. I look at the news and I don't see it."

That reaction is honest, and worth taking seriously rather than talking past. Part of the answer is genuinely empirical, not merely theological: Jesus described the Kingdom as starting "the smallest of all the seeds" before becoming "the greatest garden plant" (Matthew 13:31–32) — a *gradual* growth model, not an instant one, and gradual growth looks like decline if you only measure this week's headlines against last week's. Global literacy has climbed from roughly one adult in ten in 1800 to nearly nine in ten today. Extreme poverty has fallen from the near-universal condition of humanity to under ten percent of the world's population. Christianity remains the largest religion on earth and is growing faster than the world's population, with its center of gravity shifting toward Africa and Asia — hardly the profile of a Kingdom in retreat, even if the West's own share of that story feels discouraging.

But the deeper answer is the one Paul actually gives for how long this takes:

> *"Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he has brought to an end all rule and*

> *all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 15:24–25**

Christ reigns *now*, from the Father's right hand — that's not future, it's already true, established at His ascension. But "until" is doing real work in that sentence: the reign is present, its full and final consummation is not, and the gap between those two is exactly where you and I are living. The world looks unfinished because it is. It does not look abandoned, because the King who will finish it already sits on the throne.

Where this stays unresolved: Scripture doesn't tell us how long "until" lasts, or exactly what "every enemy under his feet" looks like from the inside of a single lifetime. What it does promise is the direction: not stalled, not reversing — advancing, toward a certain end.

WORD STUDY

πραγματεύομαι *pragmateuomai* G4231

> **"do business"** · Luke 19:13

Range. Thayer's defines *pragmateuomai* as "to be occupied in anything; to carry on a business" — a commercial term for active trading, used only this once in the entire New Testament.

The sense here. In the parable of the minas, a nobleman leaves ten servants with money and one instruction before departing "to a distant country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return" (Luke 19:12): *pragmateusasthe*, "do business," until I come back.

Why it carries the argument. The parable's shape is this session's whole argument in miniature. The nobleman *does* return (v. 15) — the future coming still stands, undiminished. But the instruction for the waiting in between isn't "hide" or "watch the sky anxiously." It's a

command to actively trade, invest, and produce — with an accounting to follow when he returns. Partial preterism doesn't remove the "not yet." It relocates the waiting room from a bunker to a workbench.

Source. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, s.v. πραγματεύομαι.

Voices

"One particular theme — the Gospel Victory Theme — is quite dominant in the entire prophetic Scriptures; its omission in much modern eschatology is to be lamented. Its replacement with a defeatist scheme for Christian activity has paralyzed the Christian cultural enterprise, emptied the Christian worldview of practical significance, and given the Christian a sinful comfort in lethargy."

— Greg Bahnsen, theologian, House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology, 1998

Here is where I land, and why, one more time: I think an eschatology that expects the Kingdom to advance produces a fundamentally different disciple than one that expects the world to spiral toward evacuation — and I think the second view, however sincerely held, has quietly trained a generation of believers to disengage from culture, education, government, and long-term investment, on the theory that "it's all going to burn anyway." Scripture never asked you to wait that way.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where has a "things are only getting worse" assumption — biblical or simply cultural — trained you to withdraw, delay, or disengage from something God actually put in front of you to build?

The Turn

Every eschatology is a theory about waiting, and there are only two ways to wait for a king who is coming back.

The first is evacuation: the world is a sinking ship, and the mission is getting people off before it goes down. It produces anxiety, date-setting, and a quiet withdrawal from art, education, government, and long-term investment — because none of that matters if it's all about to burn. The second is occupation: "**do business (πραγματεύσασθε)** until I come back" (Luke 19:13) — the King does return, the "not yet" fully stands, but the waiting itself is active, productive, accountable labor, not a holding pattern.

You've spent twenty-seven sessions building an actual life in this Kingdom — its identity, its authority, its disciplines, its mission. This session doesn't add anything to that list. It answers a question underneath all of it: whether the story you're building that life inside of is winding down or advancing. If Jesus kept His A.D. 70 deadline exactly on schedule, and if He already reigns and His Kingdom already grows, then the only sane response to "how does it end" is to keep building — with more confidence, not less, because you now know the ending was never in doubt.

> *"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be firm. Do not be moved! Always be outstanding in the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 15:58**

Paul writes that sentence immediately after fifty-seven verses on the resurrection — doctrine, in one breath, becoming ethic. That's the whole argument of this session, compressed into a single verse: what you believe about how the story

ends determines whether you build or wait, and Paul's own resurrection chapter ends in a summons to labor, not a summons to stand still and watch the sky.

The Experience · [Occupied Till He Comes]

This is a guided exercise applying Luke 19:13's instruction — *pragmateusasthe*, "do business" — to one specific area of your own life, right now.

Find a quiet few minutes and a pen.

Name the posture. Think honestly about one area of your life — your calling, a relationship, a long-term goal, your engagement with your community — where you've been living with an evacuation posture: anxious, waiting to be rescued, reluctant to invest because "it might not matter soon" or "things are only getting worse anyway." Write down that one area, specifically.

Name the King's return. Remind yourself, in writing, that the King genuinely does return (Luke 19:15) — this isn't asking you to stop watching for Him, only to stop waiting *instead of* working.

Name one occupation. Write one concrete, realistic action you can take *this week* in that same area — an investment, a conversation, a commitment, a plan — that only makes sense if the Kingdom is actually advancing and your labor in it actually counts.

Pray it. Close with this, in your own words: "Father, You are already reigning, and Your Kingdom is already advancing. Where I've been waiting for rescue, put tools back in my hands. Let me be found doing business when You return — not because I earn Your Kingdom by working, but because I already belong to a King who is worth investing everything in."

If naming one occupation felt harder than it should — not because you're unwilling, but because you genuinely don't know what you were made to build — that's a different, deeper question than this session can answer, and an honest one. Go Deeper below points to a full course built specifically to answer it.

BIG IDEAS

1. *Genea* — "this generation" (Matthew 24:34) — most naturally names the people alive during Jesus' own ministry; its fulfillment

in Jerusalem's fall, roughly forty years later in A.D. 70, is real, historical, and checkable.

2. *Parousia* — Christ's singular, still-future coming — ties the resurrection, the "rapture," and final judgment into one event, not two staged comings separated by years.
3. Partial preterism is not full preterism: the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the new heavens and new earth remain genuinely, bodily, and visibly future.
4. Christ reigns now, from the Father's right hand, and His Kingdom advances through history until every enemy is under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:24–25) — present reign, future consummation, both true at once.
5. *Pragmateuomai* — "do business" (Luke 19:13) — is the King's own instruction for how to wait: not evacuation, but active, accountable occupation until He returns.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

The King already reigns and His Kingdom already advances — so occupy until He comes back, rather than waiting for a rescue that was never the plan.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You that Jesus kept every deadline He set, exactly on schedule, in real history. I don't want to spend the rest of my life waiting to be rescued from a world You've already put me in charge of building. Root out every trace of evacuation-thinking in me,

and put tools back in my hands. Make me a witness and a worker in the Kingdom that is already advancing, until the day it's finished. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Jonathan Welton, *Raptureless* (2012).
The most accessible entry point in this session's own source material — a readable, pastoral case against the pretribulational rapture aimed at ordinary believers, not scholars.

SUBSTANTIAL

Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (2019).
A thorough, still-readable case-by-case rebuttal of dispensational "end times" predictions, engaging the popular Rapture teaching this session addressed directly.

ACADEMIC

Kenneth Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (2010).
The rigorous scholarly case for Revelation's early date — the single piece of evidence this session's whole argument leans on most heavily, argued here at full academic depth.

FORTHCOMING FROM THIS CURRICULUM

Kingdom Eschatology (forthcoming).
This session made its case in miniature, compressing a 14-week argument into one session. The full course does the rest of the work this space couldn't: a complete, verse-by-verse exegesis of Daniel, the Olivet Discourse, and Revelation, built to take the futurist hermeneutic apart piece by piece and demonstrate the partial-preterist reading's consistency across the entire

apocalyptic corpus — not just the two claims this session had room to argue.

Kingdom Purpose (forthcoming).
This session ends by telling you to occupy until He comes — to build, not wait. It doesn't tell you what to build. This companion course takes up that exact question: how a believer discovers their own unique Kingdom purpose, the practical follow-through to Session 8's foundation and this session's charge.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Matthew 23:37–24:14. *Notice there's no chapter break in the original text — Jesus is still speaking to the same audience, about the same subject, He'd just raised in chapter 23. What changes if you read these as one continuous conversation?*

DAY 2

Read Matthew 24:29–35. *"This generation" (v. 34) is doing enormous work in this passage. Read it as addressed to the disciples standing in front of Jesus, not to you directly — then ask what that means for you anyway.*

DAY 3

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. *Notice the sequence: the dead in Christ rise first, then the living are caught up together with them. One event, one gathering — not two.*

DAY 4

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. *Paul switches from "you" to "them" and back to "you" across these verses. Who is*

surprised by the day of the Lord, and who isn't — and which one are you?

DAY 5

Read Daniel 7:13–14 and 1 Corinthians 15:24–25 together. *The Son of Man's Kingdom is both already given and not yet fully consummated. Sit with both halves of that tension rather than resolving it too quickly.*

DAY 6

Read Luke 19:11–27 and Acts 1:6–8 together. *Two conversations, one question: when does the Kingdom fully arrive? Notice that Jesus never answers the calendar question in either one — He answers with a calling instead.*

Name one place in your own life you've been living with an evacuation posture, and do one specific, concrete act of occupation there this week — an investment, not a retreat.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I'd genuinely like to hear it — email me.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Arc and timing. This is one of the longest reads in the curriculum and covers more genuinely new ground per section than almost any other session — expect the room to need more time on Sections 2 and 3 (the Olivet Discourse and the Rapture) than on the closing application. If you're running short on time, protect the Rapture section and the two *What About*s over the empirical-evidence material in the final section — those are where the room's actual questions will be.

Where the room predictably stalls. Someone will ask, sincerely, whether this makes the Second Coming less real or less urgent. Have 1 Corinthians 15:24–25 and the *Where this stays unresolved* notes ready — the answer is that the Second Coming is *more* certain, not less, because the same Jesus who nailed His A.D. 70 deadline is the one who promised this one. Someone else will push back with a specific proof text this session didn't cover (2 Peter 3, the Antichrist material in 1 John or 2 Thessalonians, the Millennium in Revelation 20). Be honest that this single session cannot cover the entire eschatology corpus — that's what Go Deeper is for — and resist the urge to litigate every text in the room tonight.

Group discussion questions.

1. Before tonight, where did your picture of "the end times" actually come from — a text you'd traced yourself, or something absorbed from a book, a movie, a chart, or pastor?
2. If someone challenged you, "Doesn't believing Jesus already fulfilled Matthew 24 make

Christianity less urgent?" — how would you answer, in your own words, after tonight?

3. Name one sphere of your life — family, work, neighborhood, city — where you can "occupy till He comes" (Luke 19:13) this month, rather than waiting for rescue.

What never to do. Don't let this session become a referendum on someone's specific denomination or their favorite prophecy author. The goal is a text-traced conviction the reader can hold with humility, not a debate to be won in the room.

The End of the Story

"How does the story you've been living inside actually end?"

THE DEADLINE

"This generation" meant exactly what it said. Jesus' own dated judgment on Jerusalem landed exactly on schedule, roughly forty years later, in real history.

Matthew 24:34
Daniel 7:13–14

THE COMING

Parousia names one singular event — the dead in Christ rise first, then the living are caught up together with them, not a secret evacuation staged years ahead of a separate return.

1 Thessalonians 4:17
1 Thessalonians 5:2–4

THE BOUNDARY

This isn't full preterism. The resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the new heavens and new earth remain genuinely, bodily, visibly future.

Revelation 20:10

THE ADVANCE

Christ reigns now, from the Father's right hand, and His Kingdom advances through history until every enemy is under His feet.

1 Corinthians 15:24–25

THE TURN

"Do business until I come back" — the King's own instruction for how to wait: not evacuation, but active, accountable occupation.

Luke 19:13

SO NOW

FULFILLED, NOT POSTPONED

Jesus' own dated deadline for Jerusalem's judgment landed exactly on schedule, in real history.

Matthew 24:34

ONE EVENT, NOT TWO

The dead in Christ rise first, then the living are caught up together with them — one gathering, not a preliminary evacuation.

1 Thessalonians 4:17

STILL FUTURE, NOT ALREADY FINISHED

The resurrection, final judgment, and new creation remain genuinely, bodily, visibly ahead.

Revelation 20:10

OCCUPYING, NOT WAITING

Christ already reigns and His Kingdom already advances — the waiting itself is meant to be active, accountable labor.

1 Corinthians 15:24–25

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

The King already reigns and His Kingdom already advances — so occupy until He comes back, rather than waiting for a rescue that was never the plan.

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Next · Session 29. You now know how the story you’re living inside actually resolves. The final session turns to what that means for the rest of your one life.

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KINGDOM PURSUIT

Kingdom Essentials: The Prize

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Reasons to Pursue

03 Keys to Pursuing

04 The Kingdom Secret

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · [Commitment]

07 Six-Day Practice

The Question

> *“After removing him, God raised up David their king. He testified about him: ‘I have found David the son of Jesse to be **a man after my heart**, who will accomplish everything I want him to do.’”*
>
> **ACTS 13:22**

Twenty-eight sessions have given you more theology, more identity, more authority, and more practice than most believers ever accumulate in a lifetime. This last one asks the only question all of it was ever actually for: not what do you know, but what do you want?

David is the Bible’s own answer to that question, and Scripture doesn’t flatter him to get there. He committed adultery, then murder to cover it. He failed as a father, badly, more than once. And yet God’s own verdict on his life is “a man after my heart” — not a man without failure, but a man whose deepest, most consistent appetite, failures included, was for God Himself. Session 2 opened this entire curriculum with a subsection called simply *The Pursuit*. Twenty-seven sessions later, this closing session finally answers the question it raised: pursue what,

exactly, and why does it matter more than everything else this series has taught you?

CONSIDER THIS

If someone had to name your single most consistent appetite over these last twenty-nine sessions — not your best intention, your actual, consistent want — what would they say it was?

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You have taught me so much across this journey. Don't let it end as information I finished. Let it end as an appetite I can't put down. Show me what David knew, and make me, whatever my own failures, a person after Your own heart. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reasons to Pursue

Every one of the last twenty-eight sessions has quietly assumed something this one finally says outright: pursuing God isn't one more spiritual discipline alongside the others. It's the reason any of the others are worth doing at all.

> *"O God, you are my God. I long for you. My soul thirsts for you, my flesh yearns for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water… My soul* ***pursues*** **(דָּבְקָה)** ***you****; your right hand upholds me."*
>
> **PSALM 63:1, 8**

WORD STUDY

דָּבַק *dabaq* H1692

> **“pursues”** · Psalm 63:8

Range. BDB defines *dabaq* as “to cling, cleave, keep close” — a primitive root describing something impinging on and adhering to another thing, extended figuratively to pursuing closely enough to catch. Session 20 gave this same word its first full treatment in this book, anchored on Genesis 2:24 and Ruth 1:14: the word behind an ungodly soul tie, two people bonded together in a way Scripture treats as genuinely serious.

The sense here. David uses the identical verb — not a softer synonym — for what his own soul does toward God. *Dabaq* isn’t a word Scripture reserves for warning; it’s a word Scripture also uses for the single healthiest attachment a human soul can have.

Why it carries the argument. Session 20 asked what you’re wrongly clung to. This session asks the same question pointed the other direction: is God the object your soul actually clings to, the way Session 20’s *dabaq* described an unhealthy tie clinging? Scripture’s own vocabulary suggests the *capacity* for this kind of attachment isn’t the problem — misplacing it is. Rightly placed, on its rightful object, *dabaq* stops being a bondage word and becomes a psalm.

Source. BDB, s.v. דָּבַק.

Voices

“Because we are the handiwork of God, it follows that all our problems and their solutions are theological.”

— A.W. Tozer, pastor and author, The Knowledge of the Holy, 1961

Every genuine problem you’ve ever had traces back, eventually, to your relationship with God — which means pursuing Him isn’t a separate item competing with the rest of your life for attention. It’s the most practical thing you could possibly do with any of it. It’s also, by David’s own repeated testimony, the most dependable: “For you are my rock and my fortress” (Psalm 31:3), true on the days it felt true and — just as often, reading his own Psalms honestly — on the days it plainly didn’t.

CONSIDER THIS

Here’s the diagnostic, as bluntly as it can be put: show anyone your calendar, your checkbook, and your social media feed, and you’ve shown them who or what you actually worship. What occupies the majority of your thought life? Where does your time actually go, not where you wish it went? Answer those three honestly before reading further.

Not every pursuit earns that description. Scripture names the alternative bluntly:

> *“Their idols are made of silver and gold— they are man-made. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see, ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell, hands, but cannot touch, feet, but cannot walk. They cannot even clear their throats. Those who make them will end up like them, as will everyone who trusts in them.”*
>
> **PSALM 115:4–8**

An idol, in this Psalm's own logic, isn't only a statue on a shelf. It's anything you've quietly made the object of the appetite this session is describing — anything you've come to *dabaq*, cling to, instead. And the warning in the passage's last line is worth sitting with rather than rushing past: you become like whatever you pursue. An idol that can't see, hear, or feel eventually produces worshipers who can't either — numb to exactly the things a living relationship with a living God was supposed to keep alive in you.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Naming it honestly: what has most often served as the "idol" competing for the pursuit this session describes — not necessarily something dramatic, just whatever your actual attention and appetite have defaulted to?

Keys to Pursuing

If pursuing God is the appetite underneath everything else this curriculum taught, this section asks the practical question: pursue Him *how*?

> *"My aim is **to know** (γνῶναι) **him**, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death."*
>
> **PHILIPPIANS 3:10**

WORD STUDY

γινώσκω *ginōskō* G1097

> **“know”** · Philippians 3:10
>
> **Range.** Thayer’s defines *ginōskō* as “to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of” — knowledge built through discriminating, personal experience rather than secondhand report. It’s the New Testament’s ordinary word for relational, experiential knowing, distinct from simply possessing correct facts about someone.
>
> **The sense here.** Paul has just spent three verses listing his own genuinely impressive theological credentials — his pedigree, his training, his righteousness under the law (3:4–6) — and calls all of it “liabilities” and “dung” (3:7–8) compared to one thing: *ginōnai*, to know Christ. He isn’t devaluing correct doctrine; he held plenty of it. He’s naming something correct doctrine was always meant to produce and never meant to replace.
>
> **Why it carries the argument.** Session 24 already gave this series’ fullest treatment of relational knowing through the Hebrew word *yada* (Jeremiah 9:24) — the same distinction this word draws in Greek. Paul, the most theologically trained man in the New Testament, spent his whole ministry building doctrine and still called knowing Christ personally the one thing worth having. Twenty-eight sessions of this series’ own doctrine were always meant to end exactly here, not stop short of it.
>
> **Source.** Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, s.v. γινώσκω.

Scripture ties this knowing to a specific promise, not a vague feeling: “May grace and peace be lavished on you as you grow in the rich knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Peter 1:2) — grace and peace don’t merely accompany this knowledge, they grow *with* it, in proportion to it. Jesus names the actual mechanism in His own words to His disciples: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7) — *remaining*, the same continuing pattern Session 27’s *mathētēs* word study already named, is how pursuit stops being a single decision and becomes an actual life.

Notice, too, that Jesus doesn't leave "remaining" undefined. He ties it to something specific: His words remaining *in you* — not merely heard, but kept, returned to, actually digested. Session 27 already built the practice this describes in full: *ta'am*, tasting Scripture rather than only studying it. This closing session doesn't add a new key to pursuing God. It names what should now be obvious: every rhythm this curriculum has already given you — feeding on the Word, listening, obeying, worship — was never a separate curriculum from the pursuit. It was always the *how*. And Jesus names what remaining produces, in the very next line: "you bear much fruit and show that you are my disciples" (John 15:8), and again, "I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that remains" (John 15:16). Pursuit that stays only internal — a private appetite with no fruit anyone else ever sees — isn't yet the whole pattern Jesus describes. The fruit is what makes the pursuit visible, to you and to everyone watching.

Voices

"I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished."

— George Müller, missionary and orphanage founder, personal journal, 1841

Müller — a man whose actual, documented ministry fed and housed thousands of orphans without ever soliciting a donation — didn't discover this principle as a retreat from active ministry. He discovered it as the thing that made his active ministry sustainable for over sixty years. Pursuing God first wasn't Müller's escape from the work. It was Müller's engine for it.

What About … Doesn't Reducing Everything to "Just Pursue God" Undercut Twenty-Eight Sessions of Careful Doctrine?

"This book has spent twenty-eight sessions building careful arguments — word studies, exegesis, contested positions staked and defended. Now the last session

says the point was just to *want* God more? Doesn't that make all the careful work beside the point?"

No — and Paul himself is the strongest possible answer to this exact objection, since nobody in the New Testament built more careful doctrine than he did. He doesn't say his theological training was worthless; he says it became a *liability* only in the sense that clinging to it *instead of* Christ would have cost him the very relationship it was supposed to serve. Jesus makes the same point even more directly: "Now this is eternal life — that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life isn't defined here as possessing correct information about God, even though correct information about God is exactly what makes that knowing possible rather than a knowing of the wrong god entirely. Every word study, every contested position, every hard exegetical case this series has made was never competing with pursuing God. It was building the accurate map so the actual journey wouldn't go somewhere wrong.

Where this stays unresolved: Scripture doesn't give a formula for how much doctrine is "enough" before pursuit can properly begin. Paul kept building doctrine his entire ministry and never treated the pursuit as something doctrine eventually gets to graduate away from.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Picture two believers, each faithful to church attendance for thirty years. One can recite the correct position on nearly every doctrine this curriculum has covered — the Trinity, the gifts, healing, eschatology — and rarely misses a Sunday. Ask what changed in his actual relationship with God over those thirty years, though, and the honest answer is: not much. The other holds her doctrine more loosely in places, has genuinely wrestled rather than simply accepted some of it, but has spent thirty years actually talking to God, actually expecting Him to speak back, actually letting what she's learned change what she wants. The first has more correct answers. The second has *ginōskō* — she actually knows Him. Both attended the same sermons. Only one was pursuing what the sermons were pointing to.

Before you answer the question below, it's worth having the whole list in front of you rather than trying to recall it from memory. The Mission: His Story, Kingdom Life, The Nature of Man, Kingdom Invitation, Kingdom Partnership, Kingdom Violence, Kingdom Conflict, Kingdom Purpose. The Power: Kingdom Voice, Kingdom Power, Kingdom Identity, Kingdom Warrior, Kingdom Authority, Kingdom Prayer, Power of the Tongue. The Preparation: Kingdom Faith, Kingdom Transformation, Freedom & Forgiveness, Agreements & Strongholds, Bondage, Demonization, Kingdom Health. The Prize: The Trinity, The Unknowable God, Knowing God, Kingdom Stories, Kingdom Lifestyle, The End of the Story.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Scanning that list: which of those twenty-eight sessions changed what you *know*, and which ones changed what you actually *want*? Are those the same list?

The Kingdom Secret

Every reason to pursue God, and every key to actually doing it, converges on one claim this curriculum has been building toward since Session 2's opening subsection named it directly: *the pursuit*.

> *"I have asked the Lord for one thing— this is what I desire! I want to live in the Lord's house all the days of my life, so I can gaze at the splendor of the Lord and contemplate in his temple."*
>
> **PSALM 27:4**

Here is the secret, and it is simpler than twenty-nine sessions might lead you to expect: the prize was never the things pursuing God gets you — the healing, the breakthrough, the authority, the identity, the gifts, even the correct eschatology. Every one of those things is real, and this book has argued hard for every one of them. But David doesn't ask God for one thing *and then* list the things he actually wants. The one thing *is* the whole list: to live in God's presence and gaze at Him. The blessings this curriculum has taught you to expect were never the point pursuit was pursuing. God Himself was always the point, and the blessings were what happen to a soul that finally wants Him more than it wants His hand.

Jesus makes the identical claim about ordinary life's real necessities — food, clothing, the things Matthew 6:25–32 spends eight verses admitting are genuinely

worth worrying about: “But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). The word this session has built its title around is the very word the NET translators chose for what Jesus commands here. Not seek as one competing priority among several — *pursue*, the same single-minded chase David describes in Psalm 27:4 and 63:8. Jesus doesn’t promise the food and clothing instead of the pursuit. He promises them as what follows it, the way Session 25’s own material on God’s goodness already argued: God is never stingy toward a soul actually chasing Him.

I AM NOT SAYING

- I’m not saying your pursuit of God is what earns or maintains your standing with Him. Session 4 already settled that on the cross, permanently, and nothing in this closing session revisits it.
- I’m not saying the twenty-eight sessions of doctrine, healing, authority, and practice this book has taught were only a means to an end that makes them disposable once you’ve “arrived” at pursuit. You never arrive; the pursuit is lifelong, and the content stays load-bearing the whole way.
- I’m not saying you should feel guilty for having wanted God’s blessings honestly, or that wanting them was somehow a lesser motive than a mature believer should have outgrown.

I AM SAYING

- I am saying God Himself, not merely what knowing Him produces, is this series’ actual subject, and the whole curriculum was always aimed here.
- I am saying a soul that pursues God for His own sake, the way Psalm 27:4 describes, ends up receiving everything the earlier chase after blessings alone could never actually deliver.

This is also, not coincidentally, where the story Session 28 traced finally lands:

> *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: ‘Look! The residence of God is among human beings. He will live among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them.’ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will not exist any more—or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the former things have ceased to exist.”*
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> **REVELATION 21:3–4**

The whole biblical story this curriculum has walked you through — from Genesis 1:26–28’s opening mandate to fill and rule a good creation, through the Fall, through Israel, through Christ, through the Church, through Session 28’s own account of how the story resolves — ends exactly where David’s one request in Psalm 27:4 was always pointed: God dwelling with His people, permanently, with nothing left to separate the pursuit from its object. The story that opens with God walking with man in a garden closes with God living among His people in a city. Everything in between, this entire twenty-nine-session curriculum included, was the long argument for why that ending is worth everything it costs you to pursue it now.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If Revelation 21:3–4 is genuinely where the whole story ends — God dwelling permanently with His people, every tear wiped away — how does knowing that change what you’re willing to pursue between now and then?

The Turn

You have finished a curriculum. You have not finished the pursuit, and that distinction is the entire point of this closing session.

Nothing about reaching Session 29 changes what David already knew three thousand years before any of this was written: the appetite for God Himself, not merely for what He gives, is the one pursuit that never runs out of road. Every discipline the last twenty-eight sessions built — worship, listening, obeying, feeding on the Word, praying, occupying until He comes — was never meant to end when the reading did. It was meant to become the ordinary shape of an ongoing chase after a God who is Himself the prize, for the rest of your life.

There's a real risk, reaching the last page of a twenty-nine-session series, of treating the closing session the way you'd treat a graduation: a finish line, a sense of completion, a box checked. David never once, across a lifetime that included this series' exact themes — authority, warfare, worship, catastrophic failure, forgiveness, and restoration — treated the pursuit as something he'd finished. He was still writing psalms about wanting God more in what were almost certainly his final years. The turn this session asks of you isn't from ignorance to knowledge. You've already made that turn, twenty-eight times over. It's from knowledge to appetite — from having finished learning about the Kingdom to actually, hungrily, wanting the King.

The Experience · [Commitment]

This is a guided closing exercise applying Psalm 27:4's "one thing" to your own life, at the actual end of this curriculum.

Find a quiet few minutes and a pen.

Look back. Briefly page back through whatever notes, journal entries, or memories you have from these twenty-nine sessions. Don't try to summarize all of it. Just notice: what's the one moment, one verse, or one session that actually changed something in you?

Name your one thing. Write your own version of David's Psalm 27:4, as honestly as you can: "I have asked the Lord for one thing — this is what I desire…" Finish it in your own words. Let it be about God Himself, not only what you want Him to do for you.

Name your next step. Not a grand resolution — one specific, realistic, concrete thing you'll do this week that moves you toward the one thing you just named. Write it down.

Pray it. Close with this, in your own words: "Father, twenty-nine sessions have taught me so much about You. Don't let that be where this ends. Let this be where

the actual pursuit begins — not for what You give, but for You. Make me, whatever my failures, a person after Your own heart."

BIG IDEAS

1. *Dabaq* — pursues, clings — is the same word Session 20 used for an ungodly soul tie; rightly placed on God, the identical capacity for attachment becomes a psalm instead of a bondage.
2. *Ginōskō* — to know — describes relational, experiential knowing, not merely correct information; Paul, the most theologically trained man in the New Testament, called all his own credentials "liabilities" compared to this one knowing (Philippians 3:7–10).
3. Idols aren't only statues — Psalm 115:4–8 warns that whatever you actually pursue instead of God, you eventually resemble.
4. The Kingdom Secret: the blessings this curriculum taught you to expect were never the point of pursuit. God Himself was always the point (Psalm 27:4).
5. The story that opens with God walking with man in a garden (Genesis 1:26–28) closes with God dwelling permanently among His people in a city (Revelation 21:3–4) — the whole Bible is the argument for why pursuing Him now is worth everything it costs.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

The prize was never what pursuing God gets you. The prize is knowing Him. Keep pursuing — for the rest of your life, not just the length of this series.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for every session, every argument, every practice this curriculum has given me. Don't let any of it end here, filed away as something I once studied. Let it end as an appetite I keep feeding for the rest of my life. Whatever my failures — and David's example says they don't disqualify me — make me a person after Your own heart, pursuing You, until the day the pursuit ends the way the whole story ends: with You living among Your people, and nothing left to chase, because I finally have all of You. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (1948).
The classic this session's own title echoes — short, warm, and devotional, written specifically to stir the appetite this session has been describing.

SUBSTANTIAL

John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (1986).
A sustained, practically-minded argument that pursuing your own deepest joy and pursuing God's glory are the same pursuit, not competing ones — a natural next step from this session's Kingdom Secret.

ACADEMIC

Augustine, *Confessions* (c. 397 AD).
The foundational text behind this entire tradition of thought — "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is

restless until it rests in You” — read at full theological and literary depth.

FORTHCOMING FROM THIS CURRICULUM

You’ve now finished all twenty-nine sessions. Four standalone companion courses continue the pursuit this closing session has been describing — each takes up ground Kingdom Essentials could only gesture at.

Kingdom Guide (forthcoming).
Session 1 named it directly: this whole curriculum leans on Scripture as reliable testimony without stopping to make the full case for why. This course makes it — composition, transmission, canon, and the reasoning behind trusting the book you’ve spent twenty-nine sessions inside of.

Kingdom Stewardship (forthcoming).
Session 5’s George Müller illustration and Session 8’s Parable of the Talents both gestured at this territory — managing what’s actually been entrusted to you — without developing it fully. This course does.

Kingdom Purpose (forthcoming).
Session 8 opened the question of your unique Kingdom purpose; Session 28 pointed here for the practical follow-through. This closing session’s “one thing” and that course’s “what, specifically” are two sides of the same pursuit.

Kingdom Eschatology (forthcoming).
Session 28 made its case in miniature for the story this closing session ends with (Revelation 21:3–4). The full course argues it exhaustively, verse by verse, across Daniel, the Olivet Discourse, and Revelation.

Six-Day Practice

DAY 1

Read Acts 13:22 and 1 Samuel 13:14 together. *"A man after my heart" — not a flawless man, a man whose deepest appetite was for God. Where is your own appetite for God most alive right now? Weakest?*

DAY 2

Read Psalm 63:1–8. *"My soul pursues you" — the same word (dabaq) Session 20 used for an unhealthy attachment. What has your soul most consistently clung to this year?*

DAY 3

Read Philippians 3:7–10. *Paul calls his own impressive credentials "liabilities" next to knowing Christ. What credential, achievement, or correct opinion have you been quietly clinging to instead?*

DAY 4

Read Psalm 115:4–8. *"Those who make them will end up like them." What have you pursued that has quietly made you more like it — less able to see, hear, or feel what actually matters?*

DAY 5

Read Psalm 27:4. *Write your own version of David's "one thing" prayer, if you haven't already in this session's Experience.*

DAY 6

Read Genesis 1:26–28 and Revelation 21:1–5 together — the whole Bible's opening and closing scenes. *The story that began in a garden ends in a city, with God dwelling among His people. Sit with the whole arc of Scripture this curriculum has walked you through, one more time, before you close the book.*

This is the last Six-Day Practice in this curriculum. Don’t let it be the last week you practice pursuing Him.

If something in this session stuck with you, confused you, or hit harder than you expected, I’d genuinely like to hear it — email me.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Arc and timing. This session isn't in the risk map's list of encounter sessions, but it carries its own kind of weight simply by being last. Protect real time for The Experience — the "one thing" declaration and the next-step commitment are the actual point of the evening, more than any single argument in the earlier sections. If you're short on time, trim Reasons to Pursue's Psalm 115 material before you trim the Experience.

Where the room predictably goes. Expect at least one person to feel the weight of "finishing" more than the weight of "continuing" — genuine fatigue after twenty-nine sessions is normal, not a sign anything failed. Name that directly rather than pushing past it: finishing a book and finishing a pursuit are different things, and this session's whole argument is that only one of them just happened. Expect, too, that David's failures named early in this session may open a door someone needs — someone in the room may be carrying real guilt over exactly the kind of failure David's own story includes. Have Session 4's material on grace ready to reference; this isn't the session to introduce the gospel from scratch, but a reminder of where it already lives in this curriculum is often exactly what's needed.

The closing moment. Consider giving people real silence during The Experience's "name your one thing" step rather than moving the group through it quickly — this is the one moment in twenty-nine sessions built specifically to be sat with, not discussed immediately. If your group has met consistently across this whole curriculum, this is also a natural point for a genuine closing word from you as the leader: not a summary of

content, but an honest word about what you've watched happen in the room over this journey.

Group discussion questions.

1. Looking back over all twenty-nine sessions, what's the one thing that actually changed — not what you learned, but what you now want?
2. David's failures are named directly in this session. Does that make "a man after God's own heart" easier or harder to believe applies to you too?
3. What's one concrete way this group can keep pursuing together, now that the sessions themselves are finished?

Kingdom Pursuit

“Twenty-eight sessions have taught you what to know. What do you actually want?”

THE APPETITE

The same word Scripture uses to warn against an ungodly soul tie is the word David uses for what his own soul does toward God. Rightly placed, it stops being a bondage word and becomes a psalm.

Psalm 63:8
Psalm 115:4–8

THE KNOWING

Paul called his own impressive credentials liabilities compared to one thing: knowing Christ, relationally and experientially, not merely correct information about Him.

Philippians 3:10

THE ONE THING

The blessings this curriculum taught you to expect were never the point of pursuit. God Himself was always the point.

Psalm 27:4

THE MAP

Every word study and contested position this book has argued was never competing with pursuing God. It was building the accurate map so the journey wouldn’t go somewhere wrong.

John 17:3

THE TURN

God dwelling permanently among His people, every tear wiped away — nothing left to separate the pursuit from its object.

Revelation 21:3–4

SO NOW

RIGHTLY PLACED, NOT WRONGLY DIRECTED

The same capacity for attachment Session 20 named as a soul tie becomes a psalm the moment it’s aimed at God.

Psalm 63:8

RELATIONAL, NOT MERELY CORRECT

Paul called his own theological credentials liabilities next to actually knowing Christ.

Philippians 3:10

GOD HIMSELF, NOT HIS BLESSINGS

David doesn’t ask for one thing and then list what he wants — the one thing is the whole list.

Psalm 27:4

THE MAP, NOT THE JOURNEY

Every careful argument this book has made was building the map, never competing with the pursuit itself.

John 17:3

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

The prize was never what pursuing God gets you. The prize is knowing Him. Keep pursuing — for the rest of your life, not just the length of this series.

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This is the last session. Twenty-nine sessions ago, this curriculum opened by telling His Story. It closes by asking what you'll do with your one life inside it. Keep pursuing — the forthcoming Kingdom Purpose course and the full eschatology course, referenced above, are two ways to keep going deeper. The pursuit itself doesn't have a Session 30. It just continues.

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