ON HIS MIND

WEEK 1: YOU WERE MADE BY GOD & FOR GOD

by Jason St. John

Ephesians 1:4 (MSG) – Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. **This is our memory verse for the week! Want a lock screen for your devices? Click HERE.*

In grade school, I received a hand-made quilt from one of my extended family members as a gift. I was immediately disappointed that it wasn't a cool game or a pack of baseball cards. Another time, Jill came home with a quilt from her grandmother, and I wondered why she would want something like that. I know, how sentimental of me! Years later, I have hardly any toys from my childhood, and we still have that quilt. I even used it earlier this winter when it got cold. There is something comfortable about having things that tie us to our past.

This year, two different people have given us handmade gifts. I must be maturing (a great relief to Jill, I'm sure) because those gifts mean something different to me now than they would have decades ago. When we received them, we talked about how they had us on their mind as they made it. They prayed for us and asked God to bless us. Those gifts become tangible reminders of love and prayer.

In today's verse, we see that God has had us in mind since before the beginning of time. Think about that. I used to gloss over that idea, but what an incredible and comforting thought!

I hope we all understand and truly appreciate the power of this love. This was put on even greater display when Jesus proved we were the focus of His love by entering into this world and going to the cross for us. Why? So that we could be made whole and holy through His love.

What a beautiful and meaningful thought. God loves us and has His mind on us, and He continues to do so. Let's take a few minutes to reflect on that today.

Prayer: God, thank you for knowing and loving me and having me on your mind since the beginning. Amen.

LOVE IS STRANGE

WEEK 1: YOU WERE MADE BY GOD & FOR GOD

by Ben Bandy

1 John 4:7-8 (NLT) – Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

As the old saying goes, Love is strange. Many things about God have puzzled people throughout the history of the Church. One of the most puzzling has been the unconditional and undeserved love of God. In a culture of transactions, it feels strange to receive something you haven't earned or bought.

Growing up, I had two loving parents at home – which is a blessing few can claim. As most teenagers do, I went through a phase of rebellion and disrespect toward my parents. I came home after curfew, did things I shouldn't have, and ran with the wrong crowd, all to the disappointment of my parents. One night, I was at a friend's house too late. My curfew was midnight, and I was there until 3 AM. I remember seeing a single light on in the house as I slowly rolled down my long gravel driveway. I could see my dad in the window waiting for me to get home. As soon as I walked through the door, he rightfully let me know how disrespectful it was and grounded me.

The next morning, I woke up to a gentle knock on my door followed by my dad entering my room. I was worried he had more to say or was going to add to my grounding sentence, but with tear-filled eyes, he apologized to me. See, my dad had a dad who would scream at him and hit him, and it ruined their relationship. In a moment of frustration, my dad lashed out but quickly realized after I had gone to bed that he didn't want to be like his dad.

Love is strange, and that's what my dad showed me that night. My parents love me no matter what; it cannot be earned or bought. In this way, they have given me a glimpse of God's love. An unconditional, undeserved love from a God who made me.

Prayer: God, teach me to love like you. Amen.

PAYPHONE PENNIES

WEEK 1: YOU WERE MADE BY GOD & FOR GOD

by Kevin McCormick

Matthew 10:29-31 (NLT) – What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.

Have you ever felt unseen before? We tend to become very good at the practice of blending in. We drive the same speed as those around us, we wear similar styles of clothing, and we use similar phraseology. While there are benefits to blending in, one downside is that we can feel lost in a sea of sameness. Today's verses from Matthew remind us that God sees us, recognizes us, and pays attention to us.

When I was a kid growing up in Ames, Iowa, I had the habit of checking the coin return slots on payphones around town. There was one specific payphone outside the Kwik Shop on the corner of Lincoln Way and Shelton Avenue that I passed frequently. One day, after purchasing a 25-cent Zebra cake from the store, I began my half-mile walk home. As I passed the payphone outside, I slipped my finger into the coin return to see if any change had been forgotten by the previous caller. These were high-stakes moments for me! If I felt a coin inside, my heart would jump, and I would hope for a silver coin rather than a copper one. A quarter would fill me with joy – that could buy a lot for a 9-year-old in the early 90s! But if I pulled out a penny, I was deeply disappointed. My mind would ask, What good is a penny?

When I feel like a penny, I'm thankful to have a God who sees me as a quarter. When I feel worthless or forgotten, I'm thankful to have a God who receives me with joy and calls me His own. If a sparrow who falls to the ground is not forgotten, then thank God, I'm not either.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may we remember that we are never forgotten, but always noticed and seen by you. Amen.

THIS OLD HOUSE
by Kevin McCormick

2 Corinthians 5:1 (NLT) – For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.

As a kid, I grew up in a home that was nearly 100 years old. For the most part, I never paid attention to the age of my home. It held my family and my bed, and that was all that mattered. But there were other times when the age of my home became unavoidably evident. It was the sweltering summer heat on the second level due to its lack of central air conditioning. It was the flaking plaster walls that were constructed before the days of modern drywall. It was how we laid our gloves that were wet from playing in the snow on the radiators as there was no forced air to heat the home. During those moments when my home felt so old, I would find myself thinking, I wonder who the president was when this house was built? (Spoiler: it was Woodrow Wilson.)
My mom still lives in that house, and it is now 109 years old.

While that century-old house will always have a warm place in my heart, it is also a stark reminder that our current form of living is only temporary. Not only are our homes getting older, but our bodies are too. Has the reality of age struck you recently? Maybe it was a doctor's appointment that was anything but routine. Maybe it was a diagnosis that you thought was still years down the road. As Paul pens his letter to the Corinthian church, he is reminding them that the problems of our present age are only temporary. Whether it's drafty windows in a 100-year-old house or it's a medical diagnosis that has you scrambling to find a new way to live, be encouraged that our hope does not rest in our present circumstances, our hope rests in the promise of a future with our Creator God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we rejoice in this life that you give us while holding tightly to the future promise of perfection that awaits in the age to come. Amen.

CHAPTERS OF LIFE

by Jennifer Lightle

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT) – Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

Isn't it amazing to know that God is the author of our story? As the author, He writes the beginning, middle, and end. We just trust that it's going to be a good one because He is a good and perfect God.

In most great books, there is character development, a main plot and plot twist, a climax, and a resolution. Then, when you think it's over, here comes the sequel – in this case, Heaven! When God writes our story, each chapter takes us through a series of highs and lows filled with purpose, training, perfecting, and blessings. God makes everything beautiful in His own time. And in the end, he doesn't just give us a conclusion, but Happily Ever After spent with Him.

Ten years ago, I experienced one of the hardest chapters of my life. Fertility issues resulted in two miscarriages. I had so many questions that amounted to, Why me? I didn't understand why it was happening to me. However, the pain from loss brought me closer to God than ever before. I decided I would reject the doctor's diagnosis as the final word over my life, and instead put my faith in God. Fast forward 4 years, I shared about my infertility issues at a women's Bible study. With permission, the host of the study laid hands on me and prayed over me with everyone gathered around. Just two months later, I found out I was six weeks pregnant and later gave birth to a healthy baby girl!

You see, God wants us to enjoy the beautiful things that He has given to us in every chapter of our lives. He wants us to leave our future for Him to worry about. We can find security in knowing that everything God does is perfect, purposeful, and beautiful, and He has made us perfect and purposeful!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to live by faith in Your Word and trust You, the Author and Creator of our stories. Amen.

If you have a story of something God has done in your life, please consider sharing with us. We would love to hear from and celebrate with you! CLICK HERE TO SHARE

AN ART CLASS WITH GOD

WEEK 1: YOU WERE MADE BY GOD & FOR GOD

by Tracy Weedman

Colossians 1:16 (MSG) – For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him [God] and finds its purpose in him.

Do you ever marvel at the creativity of God? I have been captivated by so much of His creation. His hand is in everything. The ocean, the mountains, a snowflake, a fire, the stars, the clouds, the wind, and so many amazing sunsets. All the animals, birds, insects (I know, gross, but the ladybug? The dragonfly? They are harmless and pretty cute and so incredibly different!). I've even studied the bark on a palm tree and was in awe at the way it crisscrossed into a pattern up the tree. You could say God speaks to me through nature and His creation.

You would think there would be a few duplicates in all that He created. Make one mountain, copy it, paste, paste, paste, and suddenly we've got the Rockies. But that's not what God did. Every mountain is unique. Every zebra with all its stripes; each one is unique. We are all made in the image of God, and we have differences, some big and some small, that make us the unique individuals God created us to be. Every single one of us, every person, is unique. Made on purpose, for His purpose.

What is the purpose of our unique creation? Relationship! That's it. Relationship with God, our Creator, and with others, who He created. Our differences and our personal experiences maximize our ability to connect in different ways with different people to share the love of Christ. That's why we're here! Every talent we possess, every strength, every gift, and every relationship is from God and for God. Let's make sure we use our lives to point others to Jesus!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to be confident in our unique abilities and who we are in You so we may share Your love with the people You put in our path. Amen.

BUSY WORK

WEEK 2: YOU WERE MADE TO WORSHIP

by Chris Buford

Colossians 3:23 (GNT) – Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people. **This is our memory verse for the week! Want a lock screen for your devices? Click HERE.*

I stood staring at the 5-gallon buckets full of seemingly random screws, nuts, bolts, washers. "Everything has a place, and everything belongs in its place," my boss's words echoed in my mind. The task set before me was to sort each screw, nut, bolt, and washer so they were organized. Meanwhile, the sweltering heat inside the unconditioned warehouse made me want to throw it all away and head home early. How could anyone find value in these buckets of junk? This was the epitome of "busy work," and my teenage mind knew it.

Unfortunately for me, my boss was also my dad. There was no running from this. Even the retreat of home couldn't hide me from this one. So, I put my head down and begrudgingly began the task of sorting the endless pile of fasteners. My hands were at work, but my heart and spirit rebelled.

Colossians chapter 3 ends with a reminder to slaves in the Church that "whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people." There isn't enough time or space to discuss the implications and nuances of slavery in the ancient world in this devo. Still, let's discuss how, as believers whose lives are "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3), we are to follow our earthly masters as if we are working for the Lord.

Work is a gift given to us from the beginning when God commanded Adam and Eve to tend the garden. Work not only provides us with income but with purpose and meaning. It is a way for us to give back to society. It's a way to worship God.

When I remember that even mundane tasks are a way to worship God, I can't help but work with all my heart. Imagine a world where everyone worked with the zeal of working for God. What a beautiful place that would be! Let's make the world a little better with our work.

Prayer: Lord, remind me that work is good and that I worship you with my work. Amen.

LOVE GOD FIRST

WEEK 2: YOU WERE MADE TO WORSHIP

by Jill St. John

Matthew 22:37 (NLT) – Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."

In today's verse, Jesus gives us the most important commandment: love God first.

Commandment isn't a super common term that we hear in our daily lives. However, a synonym for commandment is rule, and rules are everywhere! We have rules for board games and on the sports field; there are rules of the road and in our homes, to name a few.

When our kids were young, we had house rules, as most families do. Things like: be kind; don't hit; share; get along; obey your parents. Our kids got along fairly well for the most part. It was probably because our son was almost always willing to let his older sister decide what they would play, which was almost always Polly Pockets. Alec did not usually want to play Polly Pockets, but instead of arguing to play with his toys, he would sit with Ezri and the tiny dolls. Then he would put a Polly on a T-Rex (or in its mouth), and pretty soon, the Polly Pockets would be dueling it out in a war formation along with dinosaurs and army guys. Our son knew that if he went along with his big sister's idea, he had a much better chance of staying within the rules of them getting along, being kind, and things not coming to blows. Deep down, he loved his sister and wanted to spend time with her and have fun together. (They're still pretty fond of each other!)

What if we took a similar approach with God: surrendering to His way instead of arguing first or even refusing Him? God might ask us to do something that wouldn't be our first choice, and I've been reminded recently that God's ways and thoughts are higher (Isaiah 55:9). It is so rewarding and fulfilling to live a life that puts and keeps Him first because we love Him and choose to worship Him.

Where in your life today could you put loving God first?

Prayer: Lord, please help us love You above all other people and things. Amen.

LIVING SACRIFICES

WEEK 2: YOU WERE MADE TO WORSHIP

by Jordan Reed

Romans 12:1 (NIV) – Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

What does it look like to offer your body as a living sacrifice to God? In high school, we would yell, Sacrifice the body, during football whenever someone had to lay out to make a catch, knowing it would hurt. Is that what we are to do for God – sacrifice in a way that will physically hurt?

Today's verse gives us some clues as to what exactly we're urged to do. It says to offer your bodies, which isn't just referring to our physical bodies but rather to our entire selves. We are asked to sacrifice body, mind, and heart. Then, it informs us what we're asked to do. Holy means something that is set apart for God. When we offer our bodies as living sacrifices, we are telling God that our whole selves are available to Him.

There's also a practicality to living out this form of worship. It's not just an attitude – it requires action. Consider what the early Church Father John Chrysostom said: "How is the body to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look on no evil thing, and it has already become a sacrifice. Let the tongue say nothing filthy, and it has become an offering. Let your hand do nothing evil, and it has become a whole burnt offering." We offer ourselves as living sacrifices through daily choices and momentary decisions. It requires intentional action.

But perhaps the most important part is the idea that we should offer our sacrifice in view of God's mercy. May we never forget that what we offer pales in comparison to the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross. We could spend a thousand years offering all we have to God and never come close to repaying what Jesus did for us. In view of God's mercy, may we gratefully and joyfully offer our bodies as living sacrifices, as an act of true worship.

Prayer: Father, please give me the discipline today to worship you as a living sacrifice. Amen.

POWERFUL GOD

WEEK 2: YOU WERE MADE TO WORSHIP

by Marqus Rose

Psalm 139:1-3 (NIV) – You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

God is powerful! How powerful is He? According to David's words, God has the power to know all about us. Everything.

That may seem like underwhelming evidence of His power, but do you know everything about anyone? Do you know what calms them, motivates them, and energizes them? Do you know their every action and intention? Do you know every step of what they've been through – tragedies, trials, tribulations, and triumphs? If I'm being honest, I don't know anyone that well, but God knows each of us like that! He is omniscient, which means He knows everything there is to know about everything and everyone, including you and me. That's powerful! That's the sentiment David captures in today's verses.

And it still doesn't capture the fullness of God's power! God possesses the power to know us fully and completely, and He still desires to lavish us with His love. He isn't put off by what He knows about us. He doesn't turn away because of what He sees in us. He doesn't withhold His love from us, even when we withhold our love—our worship—from Him. He desires for us to know Him and experience His unimaginable love. It's difficult to comprehend!

God's love is overwhelming. Even knowing everything, He relentlessly pursues us. No matter what we have done or what life has done to us, God knows it all and still chooses to love us.

No matter what you're facing today, remember that God knows you, and He wants to show you His love. Take a moment to consider the full extent and power of God's love for you. How can His love lead you to worship Him today?

Prayer: Father, thank you for knowing me fully and still loving me. Help me to rest in Your love and respond in faith and worship. Amen.

PRACTICING PERFECT PEACE

by Sara Keleher

Isaiah 26:3 (NLT) – You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!

Isaiah was a prophet who warned God's people about judgment but also foretold the coming of the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). He spoke to the people of that time but also speaks to us as we wait for the fulfillment of his words that "The Lord will wipe away the tears from every face…" (Isaiah 25:8).

How do we find peace when we live in a world filled with international conflicts, divisive politics, cancer diagnoses, natural disasters, and terrorism? Perfect peace doesn't mean that all our circumstances are perfect. Instead, it is found when we trust God and keep our thoughts fixed on Him.

Ballet dancers practice a technique called "spotting" when executing multiple turns. They move their head and their body at different rates. Their head moves faster through the spin so their eyes can remain on a focal point for most of the turn. This helps the dancer avoid getting dizzy as they are spinning.

Isaiah gave us a similar technique. We are to fix our thoughts on God to help us have peace in a chaotic world. There are several ways we can fix our thoughts on God throughout the day. Some of my practices include starting the day with prayer and the Word before looking at a screen or listening to Scripture songs in the car or while doing chores (I use listentoverses.com). If I feel anxious, I stop, close my eyes, take a deep breath, and focus on God's presence. I end my days with prayer and reflection; repenting and remembering when I saw God at work or felt His presence that day.

Try something new to fix your thoughts on God today – an act of worship with our minds. As you practice, I pray you will begin to experience God's perfect peace!

Prayer: God, help me to keep my thoughts on You this week, and when I feel anxious, remind me that I can trust in You, my Prince of Peace. Amen.

LIMITLESS
by Ben Bandy

WEEK 2: YOU WERE MADE TO WORSHIP

1 John 4:19 (NIV) – We love because he first loved us.

Since the dawn of time, humans have interacted with each other transactionally. Our lives, whether we are aware or not, are loaded with transactions. Think about it. Do we watch Netflix to unwind? Transaction. We pay Netflix to stream millions of shows, movies, and content into our homes. Do we go grocery shopping? Transaction. We pay the store to stock their shelves with items we don't have access to at home. Our lives can be summarized by the age-old phrase, "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours."

The love Christ has for us is profound. We find Scripture littered with verses talking about God's great love that is limitless—no strings attached. God's love for us is so great that He loved us even before we had the capacity to love. We are purposefully and intentionally made by God. No matter how our lives unfold or where we started, we are fully and completely loved by God.

Here's our part. We are loved in a way we can never replicate, but as image-bearers of the ultimate source of Love, we have a duty and responsibility to reflect His love to others. It takes a supernatural reset of our understanding to be able to live in a way that gives others a glimpse of Jesus' heart. Luckily, according to Scripture, when we meet Jesus, we are made new. This is a change as dramatic as moving from death to life.

One of Jesus' last remarks on the cross displayed His transcendent, limitless love. Jesus looked at the crowd of people who had tortured Him, nailed Him to the cross, and mocked Him, and He uttered a plea of forgiveness to God the Father on their behalf. They could not even begin to understand what they were doing. Like us, they needed God's great love to make them new.

Jesus' love was not and is not transactional; it's limitless. Let's run after that kind of love.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to love like you, In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you have a story of something God has done in your life, please consider sharing with us. We would love to hear from and celebrate with you! *CLICK HERE TO SHARE*

MONDAY-SATURDAY

by Todd Fleury

Romans 12:1 (MSG) - So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.

Long story short, I grew up in the church but hit a rough patch between the ages of 12 and 17. God's relentless and gentle love never stopped chasing me. Jesus extended His invitation of love and offered relationship again, and I accepted. I was 17 years old when Jesus changed my life for good. One of our youth group leaders became my mentor. He wasn't educated, wasn't polished, wasn't cultured, wasn't well-read or sophisticated. He was a tradesman: a pipe fitter. His handshake was like a pair of vice grips, and his palms resembled 80-grit sandpaper.

He and his wife invited a group of young people (including me) into their lives. I saw how he treated his wife, how he sang on Sunday, how he ran his business, how he served his church, how he loved his neighbors, how he stewarded what was entrusted to him, how he interacted with others. He taught me that we don't just worship God on Sunday; we worship God every day and with all we do – not just with the songs we sing.

Our witness is solidified when what we do and say every day matches what we profess on Sunday. Bible scholar William Barclay says, "A person may say, 'I am going to church to worship God,' but they should also be able to say, 'I am going to the factory, the shop, the office, the school, the shipyard, the garage, or the garden to worship God.'"

This act of worship is our sacrifice. Our sacrifice to God cannot be partial, restricted, or selective but must be entire and complete—all of us, all the time. According to our Bible verse today, that type of sacrifice and commitment is our only reasonable response to what Jesus has sacrificed for us.

Prayer: Lord, may I commit all that I do as worship unto You. Amen.

FICKLE FORGIVENESS

WEEK 3: YOU WERE MADE TO BECOME LIKE JESUS

by David Vanderpool

Ephesians 4:32 (ESV) - Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. **This is our memory verse for the week! Want a lock screen for your devices? Click HERE.*

One of the hardest things we do is learn to forgive one another. We generally agree with the idea of forgiveness, but our actions tend to be fickle. As time goes by, we are reminded of the hurt or the offender offends again or someone convinces us to reconsider. Like most things in relationships, forgiveness is messy.

In his book, "The Pursuit of God," A. W. Tozer quotes Hebrews 12:2 (…fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith) and makes this observation: "From all this, we learn that faith is not a once-done act, but a continuous gaze of the heart at the triune God." He makes the point that following Jesus is anchored in the process of keeping our eyes on Him. "Faith looks out (at Jesus) instead of in (at ourselves), and the whole life falls into line."

Often, forgiveness is hindered by our constant self-assessment of how we were hurt, taken advantage of, or betrayed. We spend much time and effort with our eyes turned in, on ourselves. Yet, in today's Scripture, Paul asks us to consider the process by which "God in Christ forgave you." And He continues to forgive, even as we struggle to bring stubborn aspects of our character under submission to Him! God forgives us despite our failures!

In the relationships of our lives, it is best to "forgive as God forgives you." Not demanding appropriate penance, but rather, being tender of heart, simply forgiving when asked. Working with God in this manner keeps the potential for relationship alive, which will, through love, provide the healing that makes room for restoration.

Prayer: Jesus, teach me to keep my eyes on You, learning to readily forgive others, so I can be made more like You. Amen.

GROW UP
by Jason St. John

Ephesians 4:15 (MSG) – God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do.

While I was a youth pastor, we had a White Elephant Christmas Gift Exchange with the Evangel Students (a long time ago). One year, I wanted to give a nice salt and pepper shaker – the kind that was glass with 3/4 salt on the bottom and 1/4 pepper on the top. But to make it white elephant, I saved my shaving clippings for about six months, and when the time came, I meticulously put the clippings into the pepper part of the shaker. I wrapped it with joy, hoping the right student got the gift.

That night, mine was one of the last gifts to be chosen, and much to my dismay, it went to a first-time guest! He opened the gift, figured out what it was, and since there weren't many shavers in the group, everyone knew it was me. Then, this middle schooler looked me in the eye and said, "Real mature, I bet you think that's funny!" In other words, Grow Up!

God loves us to have fun in life, and He also wants us to grow up in Christ – to become more and more like Him. Becoming more like Him is one of our main missions in life.

As we go through life, are we reflecting Him more and more? Are we showing His love more and more? When we do, we begin to become more like Him in how we respond, interact, plan, dream, live, everything. Our entire lives become integrated! When we share the gift of Christ with others, we share the Truth with a love that reflects Christ – unlike my gift to that poor young man in youth group!

Prayer: Jesus, help me to become more and more like you and to show and share Your love to those around me. Amen.

FOR HIS GLORY
by Yolanda Reid

WEEK 3: YOU WERE MADE TO BECOME LIKE JESUS

Romans: 8:28 (NLT) – And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

I gave my life to the Lord at a young age, but like many others, I struggled to build a true relationship with Him. Over time, I found myself navigating life as a young mother, pouring every ounce of effort into raising two beautiful daughters, who depended on me for love, security, and guidance. Yet, despite my best intentions, I often fell short of the outcomes I had hoped for.

It was at my lowest point in a moment of spiritual brokenness that I cried out to Jesus. In His faithfulness, He met me where I was and began to turn things around for my family. This was the essential moment that began a new chapter in my walk with Christ.

Perhaps you find yourself in a season of uncertainty with your finances or health, or maybe your best-laid plans have gone awry. As believers, we are reminded to trust God completely and walk by faith – becoming more like Him – even when the road ahead seems uncertain. He promises to guide us, to shape even our struggles into something beautiful, and to fulfill His plans for us. No matter what challenges we face, we can hold on to the truth that God's plans for our lives are always for our good and His glory.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your unfailing love and perfect plans for my life. May every challenge I face draw me closer to You and bring glory to Your name. Amen.

If you have a story of something God has done in your life, please consider sharing with us. We would love to hear from and celebrate with you! *CLICK HERE TO SHARE*

FOOL'S HOPE

by Chris Buford

Romans 5:3-5 (TPT) - But that's not all! Even in times of trouble we have a joyful confidence, knowing that our pressures will develop in us patient endurance. And patient endurance will refine our character, and proven character leads us back to hope. And this hope is not a disappointing fantasy, because we can now experience the endless love of God cascading into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who lives in us!

In The Lord of the Ring's Trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien, a group of unlikely heroes are tasked with a secret mission to destroy an evil ring, which will, in turn, destroy the powers of darkness and bring peace to their world. The odds are stacked against them from the beginning for this task, and none of them are quite sure they can accomplish the mission.

Toward the end of the saga, as all hope seems lost and evil is poised to gain victory, one of the heroes asks their wise leader, Gandalf, "Is there any hope?" And he replies, "There never was much hope, just a fool's hope."

Hope has been used by politicians, businesses, news organizations, and other cultural influences to present the idea that the future can be better than the present, and collectively, we have the power to make it better. But just as fool's gold can lead a prospector to trust in the wrong thing, the idea that we can make a better future within our own power is a fool's hope and ultimately leads us to more disappointment.

In a counter-cultural thought, Paul writes to the Church in Rome that real hope is found in the redeeming work of Christ, and we can rejoice in that! Then, he goes a step further, saying we can also rejoice in times of trouble because that trouble will refine our character and "lead us back to hope." This is no fool's hope. It is a "hope that is not a disappointing fantasy." It's a hope that leads us back to the "endless love of God."

Real power and real hope are found in Jesus and His redeeming work for us. Let's not trust in the fool's hope of this world and ourselves rather in the hope of Jesus!

Prayer: Jesus, help me to always remember that Your love and redeeming work on the cross is my true hope. Amen.

AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

WEEK 3: YOU WERE MADE TO BECOME LIKE JESUS

by Jordan Reed

2 Corinthians 4:17 (NIV) - For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

When Adam and Eve first sinned in the Garden of Eden, one of the unfortunate consequences was that the perfectly created world now experienced death and suffering. We still bear the weight of their actions. Our world is fallen, imperfect. Still, death occurs, tears fall, suffering happens.

As a pastor, one of my jobs is to meet people in their suffering. This is not a verse I tend to use to comfort those who are suffering. I can't imagine looking at someone who recently lost a close family member and saying, "This is just a light trouble." It would be unthinkable to comfort someone going through a prolonged illness by telling them, "This trouble is only momentary." Because in the moment, these troubles don't feel light, and they don't feel momentary! They are devastating and agonizing.

Yet, this is exactly how Paul describes his troubles in this passage. Namely the fact that he is being "persecuted, abandoned, struck down, given over to death, and outwardly wasting away." These afflictions would be devastating for anyone, but Paul describes them as light and momentary.

How can he say this? Because when Paul put his life on the measuring scales, he placed his immense suffering on one side, but on the other side, he placed the eternal glory that was being achieved through his suffering. When time came for the scales to be weighed, the eternal glory always far outweighed his troubles.

Today, you may find yourself in a season of suffering, and in that season, it is perfectly healthy to grieve and hurt and cry, but you do not suffer without hope! As you look to God, your suffering will be used by Him to achieve for you an eternal glory that far outweighs your light and momentary troubles.

Prayer: Father, please give me today an eternal perspective of my suffering. Amen.

FOCUS ON GOOD

WEEK 3: YOU WERE MADE TO BECOME LIKE JESUS

by Marqus Rose

Philippians 4:8 (NLT) – And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

I used to work in childcare for a large nonprofit in Kansas City. One of my teachers, Vickie Stein, who now attends Evangel, would emphasize a powerful principle: what you focus on is what you will get. Paul understood this truth, which is why he wrote today's verse.

Here was a man who endured immense suffering for preaching the Gospel. He was beaten, whipped, stoned, imprisoned, faced angry mobs, endured sleepless nights, went hungry, was shipwrecked, and left destitute—all for his mission. If anyone had a right to focus on life's hardships, it was Paul. Yet he chose to focus on what was edifying, life-giving, and praiseworthy, and encouraged the Philippians to do the same. By doing so, Paul developed a Godly perspective that shaped his attitude and actions, producing a life of great impact, but this required effort and discipline.

The same is true for us. It doesn't come naturally to focus on what is good, pure, or lovely. It's easier to dwell on negativity and challenges. This is not the easy path, but if we were made to become like Jesus, then it is the necessary one.

You may have every reason to focus on the difficulties of this season, but what can you find in your situation that aligns with today's verse—something true, honorable, pure, praiseworthy? Ask the Holy Spirit to shift your perspective. When you align your focus with God's Word, it changes how you see your circumstances and allows His peace to fill your heart. Let's strive to walk this path together, trusting Him to guide us and make us more like Jesus.

Prayer: Father, no matter my circumstances, thank you for helping me to focus on things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy. Amen.

AN EVIL PLOT WORKED FOR SALVATION

WEEK 3: YOU WERE MADE TO BECOME LIKE JESUS

by Caleb Hilll

Genesis 50:20 (NLT) – You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

In 2004, just after my salvation, a former acquaintance from my old life of drug addiction was actively seeking my destruction. Despite his intentions, the Holy Spirit reminded me that he was lost and the Lord's will for him was salvation! I began praying for him.

After 6 months of praying, I heard news that this young man, who was 18 or 19 years old at the time, was in a coma after suffering a brain aneurysm. The doctors determined he was either going to die in the coma or survive in a vegetative state.

After hearing the news, a friend from church who was unaware of my past with this young man invited me to visit him while still in the coma. With his loved ones in the room, I had the chance to pray for him. As I quietly prayed for forgiveness and made amends for my past wrongs toward him, I had a picture of him playing basketball again - something he loved to do. At the time, nothing seemed to happen, but as the weeks and months passed, I heard news that God miraculously brought him out of the coma, and he had normal brain function unlike the specialists had expected. About 1 ½ years later, I saw him at the gym where he glorified Jesus for his miraculous healing and said, "Maybe we can play basketball together sometime!" Today, he volunteers his time ministering to the elderly in the assisted living facility where God brought him out of his coma.

This story is just one example of how God can use what others intend for harm for His good. Let us pray for our enemies and look for God's Goodness to prevail amid others' evil intentions.

Prayer: Father, thank you for meeting us in our sin and saving us! Please meet our enemies today and save them. Amen.

CURB APPEAL WON'T CUT IT

WEEK 4: YOU WERE MADE FOR COMMUNITY

by Nicole Werth

John 13:35 (NLT) – Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.
**This is our memory verse for the week! Want a lock screen for your devices? Click HERE.*

Shortly after my husband and I purchased our home, the dumpster showed up in our driveway and shocked the entire cul-de-sac. You see, we purchased a home that few had ever been inside. Even those who knew the previous owners didn't realize what poor shape it was in or that they were heavy smokers who never opened the windows. They heard reports of a remodel or repairs while chatting at the mailbox, but they never saw the evidence of progress. No matter how much curb appeal, the outside appearance didn't match the inward reality.

Our home situation is a good metaphor for how NOT to operate as followers of Jesus. The previous owners picked a great paint color, maintained the landscaping, and installed shutters and flower boxes. They focused on the outside of the house, which attracted THIS buyer, but the inside was enough to send a less motivated person packing. Unfortunately, we can see this same concept in the Church. We can market church and Jesus by sprinkling our conversations with words like love, grace, forgiveness, and mercy, but those who cross the threshold may see a completely different house.

In John 13:35, Jesus is talking to His disciples on the night He would be betrayed. After sharing a meal and washing their feet, He encourages them to display this same love and care for one another so their "love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." If we hope for those who don't know Jesus to have a life-changing encounter with Him, curb appeal won't cut it. They need to be able to witness – through each of us – the deep love, care, commitment, and unity that comes with being adopted into the family of God. Let's love one another in a way that the inside reality exceeds the outside appearance so those we are trying to reach don't run for the doors.

Prayer: Lord, let me love my brothers and sisters in Christ in a way that attracts those outside of your family and proves that I am yours. Amen.

BODY OF CHRIST COMMUNITY

WEEK 4: YOU WERE MADE FOR COMMUNITY

by Jill St. John

Romans 12:4-5 (TLB) – Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body... we belong to each other, and each needs all the others.

C.S. Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains." In this season of battling cancer yet again, I sense God shouting the very loving and strong message of this verse: we are all one Body in Christ... and each of us needs all the others! I am accustomed to being self-sufficient with a very full schedule. In my "normal" life, I do a lot of going and doing. Often, I am going and doing for others. However, in this season of preparing for, undergoing, and recovering from surgeries and treatment, I am going and doing far less. Instead, I have needed others to go and to do for me – whether it is grocery shopping, cooking, laundry, or the work of the ministry. And it is good.

Things are done in a different timeframe than I would do them, and that is so good. Things are done differently than I would do them, and that is so, so good. Things are done from a different perspective than mine, and that is so, so, so good!

The same word in Romans 12 describing us as one in Christ is used in John 13:35: "By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" (NIV). The idea is that the love of God is reciprocal or communal. The only way to know and experience the fullness of God's love is one with another, in Body-of-Christ-community, aka: church! As the Lord is shouting in this season of pain, it is ringing with the most beautiful clarity. I hear it to my core: I need my brothers and sisters, and I am thankful to be in the best church family!

Prayer: Father God, thank You for setting up Your church as a body where each part needs all the other parts – please help me do my part and to rejoice as others do theirs. Amen.

Do you have a story of something God has done in your life? We would love to hear from and celebrate with you! *CLICK HERE TO SHARE*

YOU JUST HAVE TO BE THERE

WEEK 4: YOU WERE MADE FOR COMMUNITY

by Jordan Reed

Hebrews 10:25 (NLT) – And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

"You just had to be there!" In our digital age, this is a phrase we hear less and less. Nowadays, we can do our shopping, watch nearly any movie, go to a doctor's appointment, talk to a friend face-to-face, attend a college class, eat freshly cooked food from a restaurant, buy a car, or work a full day – all without leaving the couch. What used to have to be done in person can now be done digitally, and while many of these advancements are convenient blessings, there are still some things where we "just need to be there." If this verse in Hebrews is any indication, then meeting together with other believers – going to church – is one of these necessary things.

Online church is a wonderful blessing. When weather doesn't permit, sickness occurs, or if you want to rewatch a message, it's available online. But it is no substitute for meeting together.

One of the reasons we know this to be the case is because of the word encourage in this verse. The author of Hebrews tells us to "encourage one another," and the implication is that this can only be done by meeting together! Our English translation, encourage, for the word used here doesn't do it justice. The word means to encourage, rebuke, warn, and comfort one another. These things cannot be done online alone; they are actions that can only be done well and fully in person.

When we think about missing church or "neglecting to meet" with our fellow believers, often we think through an individualistic frame: "I don't need to go to church this week. I'm good. I'm too busy." But when we think this way, we neglect the fact that the church needs you! You are needed to encourage and comfort your fellow believers. This can only be done by showing up. You just have to be there.

Prayer: Father, please forgive me for the times I have neglected meeting with others at church. Today, I commit to being there. Amen.

TEAMWORK
by Todd Fleury

WEEK 4: YOU WERE MADE FOR COMMUNITY

Ephesians 4:16 (NLT) - He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

How effective is a physical body if the bicep is strong but the lower back is weak? It might look impressive at the beach but won't get much work done on the farm. How efficient is a sports car that has a beautiful paint job but a neglected engine? Looks good in the showroom but ineffective on the street. How successful is a restaurant if the chefs are Michelin-star rated but the hosts have manners like Gordan Ramsay? It may not have many repeat customers.

The beauty and success of teamwork relies on each team member doing their part for a unified purpose. This principle has both positive and negative consequences. When we all work together, we succeed. Unfortunately, everyone suffers when we don't.

A prime example of this is the 1980 Men's USA Olympic Hockey Team. A group of amateur college kids beat Sweden, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union (who had won the past 4 Gold medals), and Finland to win the gold medal. The greatest upset in sports history was called "The Miracle on Ice." This display of teamwork, according to Sports Illustrated, ranks as the #1 sports moment of the 20th century. (Side note: Miracle is a must-see movie!)

1 Peter 4:10a (NIV) - Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others…

God would like all of us to do our part and to use the gifts we've been given to make a difference in our communities and our world. What you do matters!

Prayer: God, thanks for entrusting us to be on your team. We submit ourselves to you and ask that you make us useful for your cause. Give me the willingness and availability to meet a need and encourage others around me today. Amen.

BE THE CHANGE

WEEK 4: YOU WERE MADE FOR COMMUNITY

by Kevin McCormick

Galatians 6:10 (MSG) – Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith.

Have you ever looked around at all the need in the world and felt overwhelmed? Perhaps it's global poverty, climate change, contaminated water, or some other need affecting a measurable percentage of our planet. Maybe you have a heart to help, but the vastness of the problem keeps you frozen, not knowing where to begin.

My 13-year-old son has recently become interested in the terrorist attacks of 9-11. After finding the right Netflix documentary, we hunkered down for six episodes, followed up with some heavy conversations. One of the men interviewed in the documentary was an EMT worker who woke up late that morning. He described feelings of panic as he realized the magnitude of what had happened. He wasn't sure what he was going to do, but he knew he needed to get to Ground Zero to start helping. Tragically, there were very few people pulled from the rubble who survived, but he was there to be the first face some of them saw.

In today's verse, the words of Paul to the Galatian church can give us a starting point for doing good in the face of great need. He tells the Galatians, and us, to work for the benefit of all and gives marching orders on where to begin: with the community of faith. When we see large-scale issues, maybe our first plan of action should be to address the ways those issues are playing out with those closest to us. We live in an increasingly polarized society; perhaps the solution is for us to get out of the Facebook comment section and instead to gather with believers to share a meal and discuss the ways we might unintentionally (or intentionally) contribute to these issues. It is the ripple effect of small changes that will give way to widespread change.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, in the face of great need, give us the wisdom to start small so that large-scale change can result. Amen.

LOOK OUT
by Ben Bandy

Philippians 2:4 (NLT) – Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

Scripture is filled with instructions about being selfless. As humans, we are inherently selfish, and our desires are at the center of our world.

Over the holidays, my wife and I visited my parents and sisters. One of my sisters has two little ones. First, a three-year-old girl who is petite, smells good, loves to dance and sing, and is the epitome of a girly girl. She will grow up to play a Disney princess. And then a boy, and when I say he is a menace, I mean MENACE. He is a 45-pound one-and-a-half-year-old who thrives on wrestling, yelling, and stealing from his sister.

On Christmas day, while the kids were opening presents, my nephew made it an objective of his to swipe all the other kids' presents from them simply because he was bigger and stronger. I repeatedly watched as my nephew selfishly walked to the other kids and pulled their toys. He looked over each toy and would either throw it on the floor or try to run away with it. My nephew can't go to the bathroom on the toilet or strap his own shoes, yet his selfishness was on full display. We are all born selfish.

We have a charge from Scripture to look out for other people – our community. Including today's verse, there are forty-seven verses in Scripture that reference helping those in need, clearly demonstrating it is important to God. If that alone doesn't justify the need to help others, look to the life of Christ. There is one place in Scripture where Jesus describes His own heart. Mind you, Jesus is God; He has seen it all, was always there, and will always be. Yet, the two adjectives Jesus used to describe His heart were gentle and lowly. He took an interest in others. Jesus on the cross is the personification of laying aside a person's wants and desires to serve others. Let's be like Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, help me be aware of the needs of those around me and use me as your agent of relief. Amen.

BETTER TOGETHER
by Ryan Sieh

WEEK 4: YOU WERE MADE FOR COMMUNITY

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NLT) – A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

Being open and vulnerable is not always easy for me. I am the oldest child in my family and had a lot of responsibilities. For better or worse, I learned how to keep myself together. When asked how I'm doing, it's easier for me to respond with a generic I'm great rather than the truth. I would rather do anything else than be honest and say I don't have everything under control. Maybe you can relate. Admitting weaknesses and asking for help is not easy.

If we look deeper, we find that what keeps us from asking for help is good, old-fashioned pride. Our Western culture glorifies independence, but God created us to be dependent on Him – and dependent on others too. Asking for help isn't just biblical, it's beneficial! In Ecclesiastes 4, Solomon is telling the story of a man who toiled under the sun and was depressed because all his work was meaningless. He explains that when we have a friend by our side, everything changes: *"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble" (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10)*. Finding friends to be honest with about our struggles sets us up for greater success than we would have alone.

We can go to church every weekend and not let anyone know us. We can fake our answers when people ask how we're doing and not have anyone to help when we fall. Or we can admit that we need help.

Choose to let people know you because when you do, you will gain so much more than you realize. Join a Group, find a place to be honest, and see how God helps you overcome things you never thought you could. We are all better together.

Prayer: Lord, I need you. Help me to give up my pride for the sake of community. Amen.

CRAZY VALUABLE

by Jason St. John

WEEK 5: YOU WERE MADE FOR SERVING OTHERS

Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV) – For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. **This is our memory verse for the week! Want a lock screen for your devices? Click HERE.*

In Greek, the word workmanship means masterpiece. You are God's masterpiece. That's incredible!

When something is declared a masterpiece, that means it has immense value. I remember a teaching from Rick Warren; he shared that two things determine the value of something.

The first is who made it. On the open market, what's more valuable: a Picasso or a drawing by Pastor Jordan? As much as we love Jordan, we know the answer to that. A major league baseball has very little value: about $7 bought in bulk. But I have one signed by Stan Musial – a Cardinal's Hall of Fame player. Because his autograph is on it, it is worth around $400. His autograph created the value.

Who created you? God did. You are made in His image with his signature. That means you are valuable.

The second thing that determines value is what someone is willing to pay. How much is your house or car worth? It's worth what someone will pay for it. In our society, some people will buy anything, like the guy who bought a banana duct-taped to a wall as art for $6.2 million – and then ate it! Something is worth whatever someone is willing to pay. That's crazy incredible!

How much are you worth? Jesus said, I'm willing to die for you. That's also incredible and seems crazy, but it's true! You are so valuable to God that He created you, Jesus died for you, put His Spirit in you, and wants you to be with Him in eternity.

That's how valuable every person is to God. It's why we are to treat people with value. It's why we were created to serve those around us who may not know the value they have. Let's put God's work on display this week!

Prayer: God, help me know my value and show others their value by how I serve them. Amen.

DO IT NOW

by Cindy Hopkins

Proverbs 3:28 (NIV) – Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you"– when you already have it with you.

Al and his wife loaded up their young kids in the family car and headed out for a day full of errands and appointments. As he navigated the busy streets, Al noticed a city bus pulling away from the bus stop ahead, followed by a man who had just come around the corner running after it. With only a moment to make his decision, Al pulled to the side of the road and offered the man a ride. They had never met the man; he looked a little unique and dressed a little differently than they were accustomed. However, the family quickly made room for one more in the car and began to get to know their grateful new passenger.

How often do we miss an opportunity to be a blessing to someone because we're too busy or it's just not convenient at the time? Maybe serving others means we will have to do something a little uncomfortable, or maybe we will have to interact with someone outside our normal group. God often brings situations into our days that allow us to represent Him to the world around us. If we anticipate God working through us each day, perhaps we will be ready for what He has for us. As today's verse suggests, let's be quick to recognize these open doors and act immediately instead of finding an excuse to put off taking action. Who knows if we will get another chance?

Prayer: Lord, please help me to be aware of the ways you are at work around me and give me a heart that is willing to help at a moment's notice. Amen.

PRIORITIES
by Kass Finklea

Hebrews 6:10 (NLT) – For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers, as you still do.

Have you ever wondered if we can be Christian disciples – followers of Jesus – if we don't serve others? When we look to Jesus, we see that throughout His ministry, He healed, listened, and cared for others. He even changed the Greatest Commandment to include loving God above all and loving others equally. The early church flourished because Christians sacrificed for others in need, recognizing that faith without action was dead. Even Old Testament laws commanded believers to care for the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. Serving others is intrinsic to God, and to follow Him requires loving others.

Even so, it's difficult for us to prioritize serving others. Today's verse encourages us that God will not forget our efforts. The Bible tells us to do all things as if we are serving the Lord. The struggles of humanity grieve God while our actions of loving and helping others soothe His heart. Our expressions of service should come from our overwhelming gratitude for the salvation and grace of God. If we are singularly focused on ourselves, not prioritizing others, it's time to evaluate our hearts of gratitude.

In addition to pleasing the Lord, we benefit from serving others. Timothy mentions a "crown of righteousness" to those who follow the Lord, signifying recognition and appreciation from God for a life dedicated to serving him and others. In Matthew, Jesus promises a "great reward" in Heaven for our efforts on earth. The greatest reward we can hope for is the joy and fulfillment we get from a life of serving. Serving allows us to experience a closer relationship with Him. Even in Heaven, serving will continue in a different form. Our self-sacrifice and focus on others are simply training us for an eternal life with Him.

Prayer: Lord, give me Your Heart for loving and serving others. Amen.

PERFECT CONDITIONS

WEEK 5: YOU WERE MADE FOR SERVING OTHERS

by Chris Buford

Ecclesiastes 11:4 (TLB) – If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done.

At the beginning of every year, millions of people create a New Year's Resolution. Whether it's a physical goal, a spiritual discipline, or any other goal, the New Year brings renewed desire to better ourselves... and then reality hits. The bills begin piling up, the weather keeps us indoors, cold and flu season keep us down, and just like that, millions of people drop their resolutions.

Studies show as many as 80% of Americans quit their New Year's Resolution by the end of January. There is even an annual "holiday" to celebrate quitting New Year's Resolutions – January 17th is known as National Ditch Your New Year's Resolutions Day. For all the reasons to quit a resolution or any commitment to better ourselves, the one I hear and have used most is something along the lines of, "It's just not the right time."

The idea is that we need something in our lives to be better to commit fully to our resolutions. A better job, fewer responsibilities, more support from family and friends. In today's verse, the writer encourages us to take a different view of the challenges of life, saying, "If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done."

In a time and culture where it's easy to blame external forces for our situations, these words remind us that we only control our own actions. While our environment may play a heavy factor in the results, nothing is more important than our action or inaction.

The hard truth of this life is that nothing is ever perfect. The weather will never fully cooperate. Our closest friends and family will disappoint. An emergency will take us by surprise. Murphy's Law never seems to fail. Yet through it all, we're called to keep going because what we do and how we do it is more important than what is happening around us.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to start something new even in difficult circumstances. Amen.

CAN I REALLY DO THAT?

by Kyra Storms

1 Timothy 1:12 (NLT) – I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do his work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve him.

God calls us to things greater than ourselves to accomplish His purpose. Sometimes, we think He's selected the wrong person. It seems He may have more faith in us than we do in ourselves. We think, You want me to do what?

There's a Bible story about a timid young man named Gideon. While hiding in fear of the Midianites and threshing wheat, the Lord called him to deliver the Israelites. (See Judges 6-7) Gideon doubted himself, but more importantly, he doubted God and His ability to accomplish this great feat through Gideon. Have you ever felt like that? I have.

Years ago, my son was arrested and went to prison. I didn't know how to survive. I didn't know how to advocate for him; it seemed like all his rights were forfeited as he entered those prison gates. I sensed God calling me to begin a ministry for other women and families who found themselves facing similar situations. God was asking me to encourage them to look to Him and to teach them how to advocate for themselves and their loved ones. I felt like Moses when he told God why he wasn't equipped for the job to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Yet just like God brought Aaron alongside Moses to speak, God brought another gifted and experienced leader alongside me who had already started this type of ministry. We were able to walk together, to combine forces, and still to this day bless many more people.

Praise Jesus that He doesn't allow our lack of knowledge or inexperience to stop His plans. He wants to serve His people through us. It's important to know God can and will, but we must be obedient and just do it!

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the opportunity to serve your people. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me! (Philippians 4:13) Amen.

Do you have a story of something God has done in your life? We would love to hear from and celebrate with you! *CLICK HERE TO SHARE*

I WANT TO BE LIKE YOU

by Rachel Hosterman

Matthew 20:28 (TLB) – Your attitude must be like my own, for I, the Messiah, did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for many.

I grew up in church with some of the best examples of Christ-like living. My papa was one of them. He wore a suit with his cowboy hat every Sunday, and during the week, he wore his cowboy hat with coveralls. He was a good ol' boy. People would call him "The Tootsie Roll Man" because he would always have Tootsie Rolls in his pockets, and those pockets were never empty! He always had enough! He drove our church bus to pick kids up around the neighborhood. He took students on all the trips to all the church activities. I got to watch, and sometimes serve alongside, a real-life, living-and-breathing example of Jesus. I never once heard him grumble. Helping others in and outside the church truly energized him.

When my papa passed away, his funeral was like nothing I had ever seen. Hundreds and hundreds of people kept pouring into his memorial service, sharing their beautiful stories of how his life of love and service touched theirs. I'm talking, it had been decades since some of these folks had their last encounter with him. Yet, his love and service touched them so profoundly they just had to come pay their respects.

I realized that day – and I've since tried to live like it – love and service in Christ are the same thing. If we truly love others, we serve. When we serve, we are loving. That's what Jesus did. He never served without loving, and He didn't love without serving. You can't have one without the other.

Prayer: Father, help me to love serving others and to serve lovingly today. Amen.

I CAN SAVE THIS ONE

by David Vanderpool

WEEK 5: YOU WERE MADE FOR SERVING OTHERS

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NLT) - So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.

The story is told of a young boy who walked out on a beach the morning after a storm only to see the sand strewn with thousands of starfish that had been stranded far from the water because of the surge. Seeing the helplessness of the starfish, he began to pick them up one by one and carry them back to the ocean. As he moved back and forth, his efforts were observed by an older gentleman, who eventually approached him. "You won't be able to save them all," the old man said dismissively. "Maybe not," the boy spoke as he bent down to pick up another starfish, "but I can save this one!"

Sometimes, the work we do in the name of Jesus seems overwhelming and futile in comparison to the abundance of need, but Jesus makes it clear that every small act we do for others is empowered by His Spirit to impact that life at that moment. No effort is wasted in God's Kingdom. Each act of love is multiplied across the service of many believers to keep the enemy at bay and advance the Gospel through a wide variety of methods. Every "cup of water" given in His name is effective. Our serving becomes a joy because we know Who works in us and through us for His good, pleasure, and purpose. If I persist in serving others despite circumstance or discouragement, Jesus will be faithful to touch lives in ways I cannot and bring lasting change as they yield to Him.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to serve others with all my heart so you can minister to their unseen needs in the hidden parts of their heart. Amen.

HIS LETTER

by Jill St. John

WEEK 6: YOU WERE MADE TO BUILD GOD'S KINGDOM

John 17:18 (NLT) – Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. **This is our memory verse for the week! Want a lock screen for your devices? Click HERE.*

Sent and sending reminds me of a letter. I grew up on a farm, and I used to love riding my green Schwinn bike down the quarter mile of gravel road to the mailbox. My Schwinn was decked out with a white wicker basket with flowers on the front so I could tote the mail back to the house from the mailbox – along with frogs or flowers that I might find along the way.

Think about how it feels to get a letter – not a bill or junk mail – but a good old-fashioned letter with your name handwritten on it! A letter is a message written with care, sharing newsy information and goodwill from one person to another. The letter is put into an envelope and sealed; the information written in a given order. The recipient's address in the center, a stamp in the upper right corner (73 cents as of this writing), and the return address in the upper left.

Jesus, praying in today's verse, is proclaiming that just as God the Father had sent Him into the world, Jesus is sending them (His disciples) into the world. And He is still sending us, His disciples, into the world. We are His message of love and Good News – His letter written on and through us to those in our lives and all we encounter in our world.

Each of us is as distinctive as a letter written – different colors of ink on a variety of paper and envelopes. Even stamps are unique (like these fun ones!), and they are not inexpensive. You see where we're going with this – the price Jesus paid is the ultimate. He gave His precious life so that we might be saved and share with others the best message ever.

Maybe we are out of the practice of writing and sending letters in the mail, but Jesus is inviting us to be the carriers of His Good News that He is sending through us to the world!

Prayer: Jesus, please help me be a joyful, effective messenger of Your Good News. Amen.

FINISH THE WORK

by Marqus Rose

Acts 20:24 (NLT) – But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.

There are three distinct moments in my life when I realized there was something on this earth that I was willing to die for. The first was when I was standing at the altar about to say "I do" to my wife. The second was when I saw the face of my son for the first time, and the third was when I held my baby girl for the first time. In those moments, it was clear that, with no hesitation, I would give my life for them.

Paul felt this way about fulfilling his call to share the Gospel with everyone. Even if it meant facing persecution, hardships, or death. If it built God's Kingdom, his life was an acceptable trade-off. If it advanced God's Word, he would face trials. If people encountered the Living God in this dying world, he would present himself as a living sacrifice and go.

What motivated Paul to finish the work God set before him? Simply put, his mission drove him, and his ministry fulfilled him. In Romans 12:1, he talked about a proper response to all that God has done: to live a life of sacrificial service to God. In Paul's words, that was an acceptable act of worship.

What work has God called you to finish? What's your motivation when it gets difficult? Are you willing to give up everything, maybe even your life, for the Good News of God's grace?

Prayer: Lord, ignite in us the same passion and devotion that you gave Paul. May we live lives of sacrificial service so that Your name is known, Your love is shown, and Your Kingdom is built. Amen.

LESSONS FROM RECESS
by Nicole Werth

WEEK 6: YOU WERE MADE TO BUILD GOD'S KINGDOM

John 15:16 (NLT) – You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.

Were you ever picked last for a team at recess? I have elementary-aged children, and I think those of us who have been scarred by this experience have outlawed the practice! Few things were worse than waiting in line to hear your name called, listening to the dialogue of who can't kick or always misses, or hearing the resignation in the captain's voice – I guess we got Nicole… Maybe it was just me. If a captain (who wasn't my best friend) ever picked me first, I think I would have followed him or her to the ends of the earth!

For those of us who have ever hoped to make the cut or just not be picked last, Scripture offers good news on many levels! God knows our anxieties and our human desire to be desired. He created us, and He hard-wired us to be wanted and valued. He litters His Word with verses like today's, where Jesus reminds His disciples, "You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit." While these words were spoken to the disciples, as followers of Jesus, they apply to us today. What good news that Jesus picked us for the team – before we showed any promise, any faithfulness, or anything that would catch a human's eye! He chose us for a purpose before we even knew Jesus was the captain of a team! The best part: He assigned us a specific position and trusts us to get the job done. What's the position and purpose Jesus expects us to fulfill? To be part of the most important job on earth – producing "lasting fruit" or good works that bring people into the Kingdom of God.

Knowing that Jesus believes in us enough to choose us first and assign us an important job makes me want to storm the field. Who's with me?

Prayer: Lord, empower me to fulfill the role you have appointed me in building Your Kingdom. Amen.

WHO CAN YOU BRING TO JESUS?

WEEK 6: YOU WERE MADE TO BUILD GOD'S KINGDOM

by Sara Keleher

John 1:41-42 (NIV) – The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

Andrew was a "bringer," but before him, there was John. John baptized Jesus. The prophet Isaiah spoke of him as a "voice calling in the wilderness" (John 1:23) pointing people to Jesus. Andrew was one of John's disciples. One day, as Jesus was walking by, John told Andrew, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (vs 36). Immediately, Andrew began following Jesus, spending the day with him. Andrew was so excited to have found Jesus that he went to find his brother, Simon, to bring him to Jesus. Andrew was a bringer.

Are you a bringer? Sometimes, we complicate sharing the Good News of Jesus, thinking we must know all about the Bible or be a "spiritual giant" to lead someone to Christ. Andrew didn't know much about Jesus; he'd only spent a day with him! Yet Andrew could be a bringer.

Often, we underestimate the power of bringing. My friend, Charity, brought me to her youth group, where I heard God wanted to have a relationship with me. She brought me into her home, where I saw her live dependent upon God. After some time, I made a personal decision to follow Jesus. Charity was a bringer.

When Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, something amazing happened: Jesus changed Simon's name. Jesus told Simon his new name would be Peter (which means rock). Over time, Jesus and the Holy Spirit changed Peter from a scared follower to a bold preacher!

Who are you bringing to Jesus? Who can you invite to church or your Group? You don't have to be a Bible expert to be a bringer! You don't change them; the Holy Spirit does that. Just bring them to Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, show me someone I can bring to you. Amen.

Do you have a story of something God has done in your life? We would love to hear from and celebrate with you! *CLICK HERE TO SHARE*

COMMON GROUND

by David Vanderpool

WEEK 6: YOU WERE MADE TO BUILD GOD'S KINGDOM

1 Corinthians 9:22 (TLB) - When I am with those whose consciences bother them easily, I don't act as though I know it all and don't say they are foolish; the result is that they are willing to let me help them. Yes, whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him.

Every weekend of the summer months in Knoxville, Iowa, the downtown square would host a gathering of bikers featuring motorcycle vendors, music, beer & food tents, demonstrations, and more. To connect with the community, our church sponsored a tent highlighting some giveaways and conversations that could lead to sharing Jesus. One night, as I walked around looking at the wide variety of motorcycles on display, I stopped to comment on a "shiny" bike and asked its owner about a small medallion affixed to the gas tank. "That means my bike has been 'blessed,'" he said as he explained about the yearly blessing bikers received from a local priest in Des Moines. I responded, in a humorous fashion, "That's cool – so if you wreck, your bike is 'blessed,' but what about you?" We both laughed at the irony, but we were able then to talk about Jesus and the blessing He brings through salvation.

The world is full of unique individuals with unique stories sharing common experiences, which, if discovered or created, can become bridges for ministry. If we make the effort, we can find ways to touch lives through a conversation or an act of kindness. Either way, we are establishing common ground from which we can share the Good News of what Jesus has done for us and wants to do for them! Building bridges is not just for resolving conflicts; it is a way to lovingly influence others, creating a point of contact that can open their eyes and hearts to the love that Jesus has for them.

Prayer: Lord, help me keep my eyes and ears open for ways I can connect with others so they can see You. Amen.

BRING, GO, GIVE

by Jason St. John

WEEK 6: YOU WERE MADE TO BUILD GOD'S KINGDOM

Mark 16:15 (NLT) – And then he told them, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.

When Jesus gave this command to go and share the Good News, He purposely said "go" because our natural inclination is to stay. As we learned on Sunday, sharing the Good News involves bringing, going, and giving so others can go.

I remember one of the first times I brought someone to Jesus. Our church had a concert for students. I invited thirty of my fifth-grade classmates. Surprisingly, almost all of them came! Even more shocking, most of them gave their hearts to the Lord! What happened next was clunky at best, but I know seeds of the Gospel were planted that night.

Each quarter, I have the privilege of "going" (via Zoom) to preach to an unreached village in Pakistan. Local pastors visit different villages, and I'm one of the speakers sharing the Gospel. Dozens give their lives to the Lord each time. I have this unique opportunity because I have helped others go and have gone on short-term trips myself.

My parents always taught me to give: first, a tithe of everything I made; then, an offering to missions. When I tithe at Evangel, 10% goes to missions. When I give to Kingdom Builders, it gets the Gospel to the front lines. Giving so others can go is a great joy in my life.

Our prayer is that this 40-day journey has served as a stepping stone into a greater spiritual future for you. You never know where these first steps will lead! We hope you are bringing, going, and giving. Only eternity will reveal the impact Evangel has made in sharing the Good News of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, give us the courage to share the Good News so we can see people, those we love and those we don't yet know, be part of Your Kingdom. Amen.

Thanks for joining us for these 40 DAYS ON MISSION! If you would like to continue daily devos with us, our new Bible Reading Plan starts on Monday. CLICK HERE to join us.