

THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

4 week study guide

THE
MOODY
CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

—Jesus (John 10:10)

Abundant life! I don't know about you, but I like the sound of that. A life rich in meaning, full of purpose, thick with substance, durable and flourishing—that's the kind of life I want. It's the kind of life that deep down we know we were made for. And it's the kind of life Jesus is offering those who will follow Him.

Jesus is inviting you on the journey of a lifetime to know God, feed your soul, grow in love, and change your world. It's a spiritual journey of abundant life—the life you and I were made for—and it all starts when we respond to Jesus' invitation to follow Him. So, what are you waiting for? The journey of a lifetime awaits! Jesus is calling, “Come, follow me!” (Luke 18:22).

But how do we get there? And how should we prepare?

I remember my first winter ascent in the Olympic Mountains. Our journey was to climb the mountain in four stages, each hike with its own skills to master. We began our journey at low elevation in the rain and mud where waterproof boots are crucial. As we gained elevation, the temperatures fell below freezing and we transitioned to snowshoeing. Crossing the timberline, the snow became harder, compacted by the wind, and we needed traction chains for our boots. When it came to the final ascent, we used crampons and axes to climb the ice at the top. It was one journey with four stages, and we had to be prepared for each stage along the way.

Your journey with Jesus is a bit like my winter mountain climb. Don't worry, you don't have to go buy a bunch of mountaineering equipment, it's not that kind of a journey. But it is one journey made up of four stages, each with its own skills to master.

We'll spend the next four weeks gearing up for this adventure of following Jesus. On the following pages, you'll find an overview of each stage of the journey. The journey of a lifetime with Jesus awaits. Let's follow Him!

—Pastor Philip Miller

The Four Stages

Whether you are brand new to following Jesus or have been following Him most of your life, we hope this guide will help you along your way. It's easy to use! Simply read one chapter a day, five days a week, for the next four weeks. Here are the four stages of the journey we'll cover together.

KNOW GOD – Jesus initiates a relationship with His disciples. Jesus came to Earth to make God known, and here Jesus, the Son of God, is reaching out to people like you and me, inviting us to get to know Him, to follow Him. He wants a relationship with us. We were made to come alive in worship of God. *Jesus is inviting you to know God through worship.*

FEED YOUR SOUL – Following Jesus is a life-transforming journey, and it is not a journey we take alone. Jesus is creating a community of disciples who will together learn how to look to Jesus for the nourishment of their souls. Our souls are starving for truth and life-giving relationships, and Jesus is creating a community of disciples where our souls can be fed. *Jesus is inviting you to feed your soul through community.*

GROW IN LOVE – Jesus says that if we follow Him, He will make us into a new kind of person. This journey will deeply reform the character of our inner life. Jesus intends to make us like Himself. Jesus came to serve and give Himself away for others. And He invites us to grow in love as we give ourselves away as well. We are most fulfilled when we live for others. *Jesus is inviting you to grow in love through service.*

CHANGE YOUR WORLD – Jesus intends that His followers become “fishers of men.” It’s a metaphor, playing on the previous occupation of many of Jesus’ first disciples who were in fact fishermen. Jesus was speaking to their—and our—newfound purpose in life. Jesus is calling us to join Him in His rescue mission of bringing abundant life to the people around us. If you want to really change your world for eternity, there’s no greater opportunity than to join what Jesus is doing to redeem the world and renew people’s lives. *Jesus is inviting you to change your world through mission.*

Day 1 | **Alive in Wonder**

Read

Colossians 1:15–20

*All things were created
through him and for
him.*

I will never forget the first time I saw the Milky Way. I was camping with my brothers, and woke up for some reason in the wee hours of the morning. I couldn't go back to sleep, and so I just decided to get up and walk around. I unzipped the tent and found myself speechless. Stretching across the wilderness sky was a haze of galaxies I had only ever seen in pictures. It

took my breath away. Such grandeur! Such majesty! Such splendor! I felt small, insignificant, yet utterly alive!

I believe we're wired for grandeur. We're made to get lost in something bigger than ourselves. We're designed to come alive in joy as we marvel upon greatness. It's why we go crazy at sporting events, get lost in great literature, and find ourselves swept up in meaningful art. We're actually most human, most alive, most real, when we're lost in the grandeur of something bigger than ourselves.

And the greatest grandeur in all the universe is God Himself. Our souls were made to come alive in knowing God and delight in joy as we worship Him forever. We were made by Him and for Him. Until we know Him, we're only a shadow of who we were meant to be. And we are most fully human when we lose ourselves in the grandeur of God.

Most of us think the way to a meaningful life is to make much of ourselves. But the ironic truth is that in losing ourselves in the grandeur of God, we actually get ourselves back. Our most meaningful life is found not when we're enamored with ourselves, but when we're swept up in the glory of God. The soul gazing upon itself grows ever smaller with time, while the soul entranced by the glory of God grows forever larger. We were made to come alive, knowing God and worshipping Him forever.

Your Journey

Describe a time you felt “alive in wonder.”

What is the connection between joy and worship?

What would it look like to lose yourself in the grandeur of God?

In light of what you’ve learned today, what is your next step?

Day 2 | Two Ways to Reject God

Read

Luke 15:11–32

Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.

Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!

At first glance, we think the villain of the story is the younger brother who squanders his life away, and the hero is the older brother who keeps his nose clean. But in the end, it's the younger brother who is at home in his father's loving embrace, and it's the older brother standing outside, obstinately refusing his father's invitation. Jesus is showing us there are actually two ways to reject God.

The first way to reject God is by being very bad. This is the path the younger brother takes. It's the path of irreligion. He takes his life and all the good gifts his father gave him, and spends them on himself. He squanders his life away and ends up in the gutter. When we think of people who reject God, this is the picture we often imagine. It's someone who stiff-arms God and goes off to find themselves, living life their own way and ending up in a world of misery. And the good news is that

when we “come to ourselves,” repent, and come home, the Father is waiting with open arms, ready to forgive and grace us with a welcome home party we can't even imagine!

But there's a second way to reject God, and it's by being very good. It's the path of religion. Even though the older brother never left home, at the end of the story we realize his heart has been far from home the whole time. He's not been living as a son, but as a slave. He doesn't have a loving relationship with the father. He's bitter, angry, and entitled. He's self-righteous to the core. He's like the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They tried to be good enough to earn God's favor, and fooled themselves into thinking they'd done it. But no one is good enough: “None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10–11).

The only way to a relationship with our Heavenly Father is by grace. We need to be rescued! Older brothers reject God by holding on to their goodness to avoid the humiliation of being rescued. Religion like that is a self-salvation project and it breeds a heart of self-righteous pride. Older brothers must learn to repent of the

Know God through Worship | Week 1

self-righteous pride that lies beneath all their goodness and realize they too need the mercy, forgiveness, and grace of their Heavenly Father. The good news is that the Father pursues older brothers, and stands ready to forgive and extend grace with a welcome home party we can't even imagine!

The younger brother teaches us that all the badness in the world can't keep us from the grace and love of our Father. The older brother shows us that all the goodness in the world will never open the door to our Father's house. And the earthly father shows us the heart of God whose grace relentlessly pursues His children, longing to welcome us back home.

Your Journey

Which son's journey connects most closely with your own?

Which is harder to repent of: sin or self-righteousness?

What is your own experience of "coming home" to the Father?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 3 | The Good News of Grace

Read

Ephesians 2:1–10

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

Whenever our family remodels a part of our home, we love to take before and after pictures. It helps us see just how much change has taken place.

Sometimes it's hard to believe the pictures are of the same place!

In our passage today, the Apostle Paul is giving us pictures of our lives before and after Christ has entered in. Before Christ, we were dead in our sins, swept along by our culture, under the rule of Satan, addicted to our appetites, and under the judgment of God. It's a tragic picture, but it's the only world we knew apart from grace.

But then God enters into our stories. He sent His Son, Jesus, to live a perfect life, die in our place and for our sake on the cross, and rise again from the dead to make us right with the Father. It's the greatest renovation in history! In mercy and love, God raised us from being dead in our sins and made us alive in Christ, tethering our lives to Him in glory forever. And all of it is by grace through faith. We didn't work ourselves into salvation. Salvation came down to us as a free gift of God for those who believe!

The good news of Jesus, the Gospel message, is both humbling and encouraging at once. The Gospel first tells us we are far more sinful than we ever dared realize. We are hopelessly sinful in need of a Savior. The Gospel then tells us that in Jesus Christ we are far more loved than we ever dared hope. By grace through faith in Christ, we are beloved children of God, now and forever. So, the Gospel both humbles us to the ground and encourages us to the skies. It helps us live with humble courage. We have nothing to fear, nothing to hide, and nothing to prove. And we are loved more than we know.

That's the ultimate before and after picture!

Your Journey

What three words would you use to describe your life before Christ?

What three words would you use to describe your life after Christ?

How has grace changed your life?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 4 | **Grace Grows Us Up**

Read

Titus 2:11-14

*For the grace of God
has appeared, bringing
salvation...training
us...to live...godly lives.*

Not only is it grace that brings us into a relationship with God, it is grace that grows us up in our life with God as well. The Christian life is, from beginning to end, all of grace. Grace brings us in. Grace grows us up. And grace takes us home. It's all of grace.

Some people make the mistake of thinking that grace gets us in the door with God, but then it's up to us to earn our keep. We trust in grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for our acceptance before God, but then rely on ourselves to maintain acceptability with God. But that never works. The same grace that gets us started will lead us home if we let it run its course.

Notice in today's passage that the same grace bringing salvation for all people also trains us to avoid ungodliness and live godly lives of purity and good works! We don't graduate from grace. The whole of our salvation from beginning to end is by grace through faith in Christ. We need the Gospel every day of our lives!

So how does grace change us into people of godliness? Simply put, grace changes our hearts which then changes our behaviors. Grace is an inside job. Think about it: When we realize how deeply sinful we are, then experience the life-changing grace and forgiveness and love of God, it marks us deeply on the inside. Grace sweeps us off our feet. We're not our own anymore. We're "a people for his own possession" (1 Peter 2:9), and we long to please the One who has set His pleasure upon us. We want to give our lives in love for the One who, in love, gave His life for us! Grace wins our hearts for God. And grace turns us good.

It's important to realize that grace is not opposed to effort, it's opposed to earning. Walking in holiness takes effort because our ungodly habits run deep. It's going to take real effort to learn to walk by the Spirit in the unforced rhythms of grace. But we must not fall into the trap of earning. We never earn anything when it comes to God. It's all grace from start to finish.

Your Journey

How has the grace of God changed your heart?

How has the grace of God changed your actions?

In your own words, what's the difference between earning and effort?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 5 | For the Praise of His Glory

Read

1 Peter 2:9–10

That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

As we move through this first phase of the journey of a lifetime, Jesus is inviting you to know God through worship. We were made to know God and come alive in worship, but we have rejected God in our own way and find ourselves in need of forgiveness and grace. The good news is that Jesus is the way home. When we admit we are sinners, believe in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection on our behalf, and commit our lives to following Him, we are reconciled to God. We can know Him as Father

and worship Him in joy as His beloved children forever!

Don't you see how Jesus is bringing us back to ourselves? We were made to know God and come alive in worship. We are most human when we are caught up in grandeur. And in Jesus, we're swept up in this beautiful love story of redemption that changes everything about us. To use Peter's language, we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." God has chosen us in Jesus, "that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." That's the language of worship, praise, and proclamation! Our lives—created in love, redeemed by grace, and fueled by mercy—can't help but overflow in wonder, awe, and praise.

Jesus is inviting you on the journey of a lifetime, and it begins by knowing God through worship, which is why we gather at The Moody Church each Sunday. We pray for a fresh glimpse of the Gospel of the grace of God, because it's the good news of Jesus which changes us into the people we were always meant to be. And as we get to know our God more, we can't help but respond in wonder, awe, and praise, because to know God is to come alive in worship of Him.

Your Journey

What does it mean to you to know that God has chosen you for Himself?

How has Jesus made it possible for you to come alive in worship?

If someone regularly skips Sunday worship, how are they missing out?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 1 | Soul Food

Read

Psalm 63:1–8

*My soul will be
satisfied as with fat
and rich food, and my
mouth will praise you
with joyful lips.*

In this Psalm and throughout the Bible, God is described as refreshing water and satisfying food. He is a replenishing drink of water in the middle of a parched desert. He is a lavish meal that satisfies with joy. He is our nourishment, our strength, and our portion. We are invited to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). When Jesus came, He offered Himself as the “bread of life” (John 6:35) and invites us to come to Him for “living water” (John 7:37–38). What are we to make of all this culinary language?

Well, it turns out that this language is an echo of our created design. God made humans as physical and spiritual beings. We are made from the dust of the earth and are animated by the breath of God (Genesis 2:7). We have bodies and souls. And as a result, we have appetites and needs in both the physical and spiritual dimensions of our being. Just as our bodies hunger and thirst for physical food and drink, our souls hunger and thirst for spiritual food and drink. Just as we cannot live unless we are nourished and sustained physically, we cannot live unless we are nourished and sustained spiritually.

When it comes to our spiritual appetites and needs, God Himself is the source of our spiritual life. He gives us life, breath, and everything else. That’s why God invites us to drink deeply of His presence and feast upon His goodness. He is our life, our strength, our portion, and our joy. Without Him, we’re spiritually starving and parched. And nothing else can take His place because our souls were made for Him and Him alone.

On this journey of a lifetime, Jesus is inviting His disciples to discover how to truly feed their souls. He’s teaching us to hunger and thirst for all that God is for us in Christ. He’s forming a community of disciples who will together help each other “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Jesus is inviting you to come to the table!

Your Journey

What does soul hunger and thirst look like in your life?

Why do you think God chooses to compare Himself with food and drink?

What would a healthy spiritual meal plan look like for your soul?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 2 | Broken Cisterns

Read

Jeremiah 2:11–13

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

In today's passage, God is confronting His people, Israel, for forsaking Him and worshipping idols instead. The language is picturesque. They've abandoned their only true source of life-giving water in the desert. In a desert culture, water is life. If you have a spring of living water, you'll be able to flourish for years. God is saying, "I am your fountain of living waters, your spiritual nourishment, your life and joy." And yet, Israel turned aside to false gods. Instead of looking to God for

their spiritual life, they looked everywhere else. They hewed out cisterns—water storage containers—of their own, trying to get their own water elsewhere. But their cisterns are broken and leaking. Their water is never enough. The soul is made for more than idols.

God's people were to look to Him alone as their source of life. In Him, they would find their significance, security, and satisfaction. He was to be their God. But Israel doubted whether God was enough for their souls, and fell for the lie that significance, security, and satisfaction could be found elsewhere. And so, they ran after idols instead.

In the ancient world, there were "gods" for everything: career, romance, fertility, commerce, family, war, crops, health, and more. If we think idolatry is confined to bowing down to statues, we'd be mistaken. Whenever we look to anything other than God for our soul's significance, security, or satisfaction, we're living in functional idolatry. Instead of bringing our soul's deep needs to God to be met, we end up trying to get our soul's needs met elsewhere. We abandon the fountain of living waters and hew out broken cisterns for ourselves. It never works.

Instead of looking to God for our significance, we might find our identity in career, romance, popularity, or family. Instead of looking to God for our security, we may be tempted to rest our souls in money or strength or relationships. Instead of looking to God for our satisfaction, we might seek ultimate joy in sex, food, or travel. In idolatry

Feed Your Soul through Community | Week 2

we take a good thing God created and enshrine it as an ultimate thing. Whenever we place our ultimate soul's hope for life in anything other than God, we abandon the fountain of living water for broken cisterns. And the tragedy is we're left feeling insignificant, insecure, and unsatisfied. As St. Augustine famously put it, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

Your Journey

Which soul appetite for significance, security, or satisfaction is strongest for you?

Where are you most tempted to hew out broken cisterns in life?

What would it mean to look to God as your significance, security, and satisfaction?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 3 | Bread from Heaven

Read

John 6:32–40

*I am the bread of life;
whoever comes to me
shall not hunger, and
whoever believes in me
shall never thirst.*

Jesus had just fed five thousand people in the desert with the bread and fish He multiplied from a boy's lunch. The people were amazed. No one since Moses had given them bread in the wilderness like this. They felt they'd hit the jackpot! If Jesus could feed them like that every day, they could quit their jobs and lead lives of luxury. They wanted more bread from Jesus!

Then Jesus offered them the true bread from Heaven; He offered them Himself. You see, Jesus knew their real and deeper need wasn't physical bread for their stomachs, but spiritual bread for their souls. The bread He multiplied was a sign of the abundant provision He came to offer in Himself. And if they would come to Him, He would give them something far more substantial than a bite to eat—He would satisfy the hunger of their souls. Jesus is the true bread of Heaven. Jesus is the true living water. He offers Himself for our hungry and parched souls.

When Jesus went to the cross, He hung there for hours, famished and parched. He even cried out in thirst (John 19:28). Don't you see? Jesus was famished on the cross that our souls might be satisfied forever. Jesus was parched so that His living waters might quench our spiritual thirst. He offered Himself in our place and for our sake that we might have eternal life in Him.

In many ways, our spiritual lives are like coming to a lavish feast. God Himself is our portion and the satisfier of our souls. Jesus offers the life of God to us and has given us a seat at the table. The Holy Spirit stirs up our appetites for the goodness of the meal. As we look around the table, we find we are not alone. We are surrounded by a family of God's children who gather with hungry souls around this table of grace. The best meals are shared, after all. It's a community feast—and our hungry souls are invited to dig in.

Your Journey

In what ways is your soul hungry or thirsty?

What is the significance of Jesus' hunger and thirst on the cross?

Why is the "community" aspect of the feast important?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 4 | **Abide in Me**

Read

John 15:1–11

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

Jesus is a master teacher, and His analogies are brilliant in their insight. In our passage today, Jesus is showing us just how spiritually dependent we are on Him. We're like a branch of a grapevine. The grapes grow on the branch because it is connected to the life of the vine. If the branch separates from the vine, it dies and cannot bear fruit. The fruit only comes through a life-giving, abiding connection with the vine.

Jesus is telling us that's how our spiritual lives are. We can only bear spiritual fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23) if we have a life-giving, abiding connection with Christ Himself. He is our life. And it is only in our connection with Him that we are spiritually alive.

So how do we abide in Jesus? That's really the key question, and the good news is we don't have to guess at the answer, because Jesus unpacks it for us. He invites us to have "my words abide in you" (v. 7), and to "abide in my love" (v. 9), and to "keep my commandments" (v. 10). So, abiding in Jesus means dwelling in His Word, resting in His love, and walking in obedience. The more we soak in the truth of His Word, the more we abide in Him. The more we drink in the wonder of His love, the more we abide in Him. The more we follow Him in obedience, the more we abide in Him.

God's Word. God's Love. God's Way. This is the abiding life.

Your Journey

Why will self-help never work in our spiritual lives?

How does God's Word help us abide in Jesus?

What is the relationship between abiding in love and walking in obedience?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 5 | **Speaking the Truth in Love**

Read

Ephesians 4:11–16

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

The Apostle Paul uses the analogy of a body to describe how followers of Jesus belong to one another in the family of God. Just like a human body has many different, mutually interdependent parts that are essential for the life of the whole, so God's people are united together for life. We were never meant to do the Christian life alone. We need each other more than we realize.

No one in the body is the same, but everyone has a place, a calling, and a gift to share “for building up the body of Christ” (v. 12). We need each other. If one person is missing, everyone is missing out.

The goal of all of our mutual interdependence as a body is to grow to maturity, “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13). That growth to maturity will be marked by unity of the faith, knowledge of the Son of God, and resilience in the truth (vv. 13–14). And it happens by “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (vv. 15–16).

So how does Jesus grow us up to become like Himself? He enfolds us in a community of fellow believers who speak the truth to one another in love. Truth and love together under the leadership of our Jesus. That's what our souls are so desperately hungry for.

Jesus is inviting you on the journey of a lifetime. The first step is to know God through worship. The second step is to feed your soul through community. Every week, dozens of our church's Communities meet with the goal of speaking the truth to one another in love under the leadership of Jesus. It's where we can get real and learn together what it means to follow Jesus. Community is where we feed our souls.

Your Journey

When have you experienced the most spiritual growth?

Who are you “speaking the truth in love” to on a regular basis?

Why is community essential for spiritual growth?

In light of what you’ve learned today, what is your next step?

Day 1 | **Made for Love**

Read

Matthew 22:35–40

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

God created us to be His image bearers (Genesis 1:27). Because God is love (1 John 4:8), to bear His image is to live in love, just as He Himself is love. In other words, we were made for love—not power, survival, ego, or hoarding—we were made from love and to love and for love.

At the back end of the universe is a Triune Community of Loving Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who eternally exist in the mutually indwelling bonds of self-giving love for one

another. One God in three persons, united in co-eternal love. In creation, that eternal triune love burst forth in overflowing joy and the universe was born. In love, the triune God brought us into this world as His special creation, His image bearers, that He might share Himself with us. We were made to be loved by Him. And we were made to love Him back with every fiber of our being.

Alive in the love of our triune God, we were also made to love one another and, in love, care for the good creation God gave us as a gift. We were made to love each other deeply. To serve one another as neighbors, brothers, sisters, and fellow image bearers. We were made to lovingly steward all of the good gifts God gave us, serving one another with the resources of creation.

In our innocence, before everything went so terribly wrong, we were created for loving service of God and one another. Our souls were made to be most alive through self-giving love of others, because that's the very kind of self-giving love God has in Himself. We exist because of the self-giving love of our triune God. And we exist to extend that same self-giving love to others. We were made for love.

Your Journey

What difference does it make that we were made for love?

What is the connection between loving God and loving others?

How does your soul long for the beauty of self-giving love?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 2 | Love Caved in Upon Itself

Read

Luke 12:13–21

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? —Matthew 16:26

God created us to return His self-giving love by loving Him back with every fiber of our being, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. But in our sinful, fallen condition, our love turns in upon itself and we become lovers of ourselves. Our souls, created to face outward in self-giving love, in self-absorption cave in upon themselves. Made to serve God and others, we now serve ourselves.

In case that feels like an overstatement, just think of the last group photo you were in. When you got to see the picture, who did you look at first? And what makes it a good picture? It comes down to how you look. See, we tend to look to ourselves first. It's our automatic instinct, the impulse of our sin-cursed souls. We love ourselves.

In many ways, the core of humanity's problem comes down to disordered love. We were created to love God with all that we are and live in self-giving love for our neighbor. But we enthrone ourselves as the chief object of our love, and our souls cave in upon themselves. We become small, selfish, and self-absorbed. Everything starts to become about us. It's our career, our goals, our family, our relationships, our ambition, our needs, our story, and our lives. And whatever success or fame or wealth or achievements we amass in this life, we can never offset the incurvature of our self-loving souls. What good is it if a person gains the whole world and yet forfeits their soul?

Our souls were made for self-giving love, and yet in self-love have caved in upon themselves. Left to ourselves, the incurvature of our souls will only grow, and we increasingly diminish. Our soul's only hope is a radical reversal of the situation. How do we learn to love again?

Your Journey

Where do you notice this incurvature of the soul in others?

Where do you notice this incurvature of the soul in yourself?

Is there a situation in your present life where you find it difficult to love?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 3 | **The Servant of All**

Read

Mark 10:35–45

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

I love this passage because of its sheer humanity. James and John ask to be big shots in the Kingdom of God, and all the other disciples are indignant at their nerve, jealous that they didn't think to ask first. Every one of them is jockeying for position. Their self-love is on full display. And Jesus sees the incurvature of their souls.

Jesus calls His disciples to a new kind of greatness. It's not the greatness that seeks to lord over others or wield authority. It's not a greatness driven by ego and ambition. It's the greatness of self-giving love and sacrificial service. It's the greatness of Heaven itself.

Jesus set aside His glory to come rescue us in His love. He came humbly and low. He came to be the servant of all. He came to wash His disciples' feet. He came to wash away our sin. He came to give Himself away in love and service to bring many sons and daughters to glory. He came in self-giving, sacrificial love. He came for us.

When we realize the extent to which Jesus was willing to empty Himself, the cost He was willing to bear, the service He was willing to render that we might be welcomed home to God, it simply melts us out. Jesus, the rightful King, made Himself a servant of all, so that we might become royal sons and daughters of God. In self-giving love, Jesus gave up His life, so that self-loving, self-absorbed people like us might be brought home into the love of God.

To be so loved, in the midst of our self-absorption, changes us. To open our hearts to the self-giving love of God is to be wrecked, undone, and reformed. As the hymnwriter puts it, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." To be lavished with the self-donating love of God is to be changed on the inside. We begin to love in return. We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). God is loving us into loveliness.

Your Journey

Who has modeled for you a life of humble, self-giving love?

What does the self-giving love of Jesus mean to you personally?

How has the self-giving love of God changed your heart?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 4 | Love One Another

Read

John 13:1–17, 34

Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

Aside from the cross, there is no more gripping moment revealing the servant-hearted nature of Jesus than when He kneels and washes His disciples' feet. The task of foot washing was reserved for the very lowest of slaves. Feet that shared the roads with horses and donkeys were filthy and repugnant. No one wanted to wash feet.

But Jesus rose, took off His robe, wrapped a towel around His waist, and washed His disciples' feet. The Lord of Heaven and Earth, the King of kings, wiped manure from their soles. And the very next day, He went to the cross to wipe manure from their souls. Jesus is the servant of all. He gives Himself away in love. He loved them to the very end.

It is with Jesus' foot-washing love in the background, and His self-sacrificing love in the foreground that He offers His new commandment of love, "Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (v. 14). In light of Jesus' self-sacrificing, self-giving, self-donating love for us, He calls us to love one another. Our love expressed for others is to match His love expressed for us. We are to serve one another, sacrifice for one another, give ourselves away for one another. As Christ has loved us, so we also are to love one another.

The only way we can learn to walk in love like this, is if we abide in Christ and live from the power of the Holy Spirit, because love is a fruit of the Spirit. He alone can guide us into Jesus' way of love. We love because God first loved us. When we abide in the love of God, we learn to live in love, becoming people of love, and extend love to one another.

Love serves. Love kneels. Love sacrifices. Love gives itself away.

Your Journey

How does the foot-washing love of Jesus stir your heart?

In what ways has the love of God changed you?

What is the connection between love and service?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 5 | **A Community of Love**

Read

Philippians 2:1-13

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

In this beautiful passage, Paul calls us to live with one another with the kind of selfless love that is reflective of Christ. On the basis of our standing in Christ and participation in the life of the Holy Spirit, we are called to serve one another in humility and love. We're to look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Jesus, by rights, could have held onto His heavenly glory, but instead emptied Himself and made Himself nothing, becoming a servant of all, even laying down His life on the cross in loving self-giving for us. Because of His humility, He has been exalted on high. We are called to follow Him—to take up our cross, deny ourselves, and humbly serve one another as we follow Him. This is what it means to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. God is at work in us cultivating this life of self-giving love. He is the one who enlivens our will to love, and He is the one who empowers our works of love. God is making us like Himself, the people of love we were always meant to be. He's restoring the image of God in us. He's once again loving us into loveliness.

How do we walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us (Ephesians 5:2)? We serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13). We look to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4). In humility, we consider others more significant than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). We grow in love through service.

Jesus is inviting you on the journey of a lifetime. It's an invitation to know God through worship, feed your soul through community, and to grow in love through service. We grow in love by giving ourselves away in the service of others. That's why there are so many opportunities to serve every week at The Moody Church. Those serving opportunities are not busy work or simply volunteer tasks, they are training opportunities to become a person of love like Jesus. We grow in love as we give ourselves away in service of those around us. Service is the forge in which God transforms us into people of love.

Your Journey

Who has modeled loving service to you?

What happens in your own heart when you serve others?

How does service grow us into people of love?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 1 | Vice-Regents of Creation

Read

Genesis 1:26–31

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion.

God created humanity as His image bearers.

In the Ancient Near East, divine images were a cultural fixture. People worshipped what we now call idols: crafted statues made to represent their gods. Wherever the image of a god was placed, be it in a household, a temple, or a field of battle, the presence of the image represented the dominion of the deity. The divine image laid claims of rulership over the sphere in which it was present.

So, when Genesis tells the story of how God created humanity and called them His image bearers, commissioning them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over all created things, people of the Ancient Near East would have been familiar with these categories. Wherever God's image bearers go, they go as representatives of God Himself. Wherever the image is present, it represents the dominion of God laying claim to that sphere over which His will is then exercised.

But instead of inanimate statues, God's image bearers are living beings. They have their own agency and will. As image bearers, we are more than just symbols of the rule of God, we are, in fact, agents of the rule of God. We are vice-regents of creation. To bear the image of God is to extend the rule and reign of God through our own lives as stewards of all creation. We're ambassadors of the King!

We were created to rule over all creation on behalf of the Ruler of all the universe. Our creation mandate is to bring the gracious rule of God to every square inch of creation, so that His perfect will might be done "on earth as it is in heaven." Beginning in Eden, and multiplying to the ends of the earth, we were made to come under the rule of God, and through our lives, exercise the reign of God for the flourishing of all creation to the very ends of the earth!

Your Journey

Where do you see evidence in your own life that you were made to rule?

What does it mean to bring our lives under the reign of God?

How might we extend the reign of God through our lives?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 2 | Hijacked Kingdoms

Read

Genesis 3:1–7

*You will not surely die.
For God knows that when
you eat of it your eyes will
be opened, and you will
be like God, knowing
good and evil.*

The third chapter of Genesis is where everything goes terribly wrong. The perfect world was shattered as Adam and Eve decided to believe the great lie that they'd be better off as their own gods, and so ate the fruit in disobedience of God's one and only command, plunging human history into a sin-cursed, pain-ridden, death-swallowing existence. It's the moment everything came falling down.

Notice, at the core of Adam and Eve's sin was a desire to be like God. Instead of embracing their created design to be image bearers, coming under and extending the reign of God wherever they went, Adam and Eve wanted to be gods unto themselves. Instead of images of God, they wanted to become like God and rule themselves. Genesis 3 is nothing short of mutiny. The image bearers of God revolt against His Kingdom rule and carve out their own little kingdoms for themselves outside of Him. And over these hijacked kingdoms, they fancy themselves king and queen.

But here's the problem: human beings make lousy gods. We were never meant to rule by ourselves. The weight of running our own kingdoms brings massive anxiety, loneliness, selfishness, and aggression. We ruin ourselves and everyone around us when we live as orphans pretending to be gods, cursed in the very center of our dominion. And we're not even free. Our co-conspiracy with the serpent brings us under his diabolical rule. Our life as "our own gods" turns out to be tormented by sin, death, and Satan. What looked so good, turned out so very bad. Ruling as god over our own hijacked kingdoms turns out to be a lot harder than we realized, and much more than we can handle on our own.

Your Journey

How does Adam and Eve’s rebellion violate their role as image bearers?

Where do you see evidence that “human beings make lousy gods”?

In what ways have you tried to be the god of your own life?

In light of what you’ve learned today, what is your next step?

Day 3 | **A Better Adam**

Read

Matthew 4:1–11

You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.

Paul refers to Jesus as the “second Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45). Just as Adam represented humanity and plunged us all into death, Jesus came to represent humanity and make a way for us all to live again. Jesus is the “new Adam,” who prevailed against the temptation of the serpent, and chartered a new life for humanity in Himself.

In the wilderness, Jesus faced the temptations of Satan. Just like with Adam, the core of the temptations came down to whether Jesus would live as a vice-regent of God. Would He live under God’s rule and extend the reign of God wherever He went, or would He hijack His own life like Adam did, and live apart from the rule of His Father. Jesus prevailed where Adam failed. Jesus, the perfect image of God, chose to live under the reign of God, bringing His own life and kingdom under His Father’s perfect rule.

We see the same resolute submission just before Jesus went to the cross, as He prayed with tears in Gethsemane. There Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). Jesus submitted His own little kingdom in life to the Father’s perfect will. Instead of hijacking His life for Himself, He was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. And in going to the cross, Jesus broke the power of sin, death, and Satan, and three days later rose victorious as King of kings and Lord of lords. Now He is exalted at the Father’s right hand and will one day return as the King of all the earth. You see, Jesus is the perfect image bearer who will bring the rule of God to every square inch of creation.

What Adam fouled up in rebellion, and what we’ve been complicit in by our own sin, Jesus is setting to rights. He’s the new and greater Adam. He’s the firstborn of a new creation. He is seated at His Father’s right hand where He shall rule and reign until His enemies are made His footstool. Then He shall return and the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever!

Your Journey

How is the second Adam better than the first?

How does Jesus fulfill the creation mandate of being an image bearer?

How does King Jesus win our hearts allegiance?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 4 | **Ambassadors for Christ**

Read

2 Corinthians 5:17–21

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

Jesus is the new Adam, the perfect image of God, the firstborn of a new creation. Instead of hijacking His own life for Himself, He brought Himself under the rule of God, and through His life, extended the reign of God wherever He went. In Christ, the universe is being set to rights. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Everything belongs to Him.

And we are ambassadors of this crucified, buried, risen, and exalted Christ! We who have been reconciled to God through Jesus, are now entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Jesus is the King. And we are representatives of His rule and reign sent out into the world with the good news that all people everywhere can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ who died in their place and for their sake, bearing all their sin and shame, and rose again to make them right with God. If only people would admit their sin, believe in Jesus, and commit their lives to Him, they too can be reconciled to God.

But don't you see, as ambassadors of King Jesus, we're being welcomed back into our original assignment as image bearers. We are being sent out into all the world under the rule of the King to extend His reign wherever we go! And as more and more people come to faith in Jesus and surrender their lives to Him, the reign of God is once again multiplying throughout the earth. And as we are increasingly conformed to the image of Christ as we live in obedience, our lives display His rule, reign, and glory wherever we go! So, whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we do it all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17), the King we serve with our lives and our kingdoms.

Your Journey

What does it mean to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ?

In what ways are ambassadors and image bearers similar?

What does it look like to live as an ambassador for Christ?

In light of what you've learned today, what is your next step?

Day 5 | Salt and Light

Read

Matthew 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth....You are the light of the world.

As we've seen, in our role as ambassadors for Christ, we are actually fulfilling the creation mandate of being God's image bearers. We're coming under the rule of God and extending His reign into all aspects of our lives wherever we go. We're bringing our little kingdoms under the Kingdom of God, so that in us and through us God's will is increasingly done "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls this kind of living being "salt and light." In Jesus' day, salt was both a preservative and a seasoning. As a preservative, salt served as a kind of antiseptic that kept decay from setting in. It was used to preserve meat without refrigeration, and it was used to clean wounds. As a seasoning, salt was used to draw out the flavor in a meal. Light in Jesus' day was both a deterrent and a beacon. Light serves as a deterrent, keeping evil away. It's why we have security lights to this day. Light also serves as a beacon. If you're lost in the desert in the dark of night and see light shining from a city on the hill, you're saved!

When Jesus calls us "salt and light," He's showing us the role we are to play in the world. Followers of Jesus have a preserving function in the world. We're to arrest decay and bring healing to a broken world. We also serve as seasoning. We're to draw out the flavor and beauty of the world around us. We act as a deterrent to evil, seeking justice and righteousness wherever we go. And we serve as beacons of hope and salvation to a lost and dying world. We shine the light of Jesus in word and deed so that everyone might give glory to our Father who is in Heaven!

Jesus is inviting you on the journey of a lifetime. It's an invitation to know God through worship, feed your soul through community, grow in love through service, and change your world through mission. Every moment of every day, we live as salt and light in the world, ambassadors for Christ, image bearers of God. Wherever we live, work, learn, or play, we go to "be the church" with the words we say and the lives we live. We've been given the greatest commission to go and make disciples of all nations. And it starts in our own neighborhoods. We all want to change our world. Jesus is inviting you to change your world through mission. Will you join Jesus on mission in your world?

Your Journey

In what ways do we serve as preservatives and deterrents?

In what ways do we serve as seasonings and beacons?

What does “change your world through mission” mean in your life?

In light of what you’ve learned today, what is your next step?

WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

When my friends invited me on that winter mountain climb in the Olympic Mountains, I was a bit intimidated. I wasn't sure I had what it takes to complete the journey. I was nervous and doubtful. But then one of the guys took me under his wing and showed me the ropes. He shared his experience, let me borrow some of his equipment, and promised to be with me every step of the way. He became my guide, and it made all the difference in the world.

Jesus is inviting you on the journey of a lifetime to know God, feed your soul, grow in love, and change your world. You might be wondering if you have what it takes to complete the journey. You may be nervous and doubtful. I want to let you know that we here at The Moody Church want to be as helpful as we possibly can. We want to help you know God through worship, feed your soul through community, grow in love through service, and change your world through mission. We'll do our best to guide you on your way, and we pray it will make all the difference in your journey of a lifetime with Jesus.

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP?

We recommend that everyone at The Moody Church gets connected to one of our Communities where you can feed your soul. These are our adult groups that meet Sundays at either 8:30am or 11:30am. They offer everyone a place to build meaningful relationships, grow spiritually, love one another, and engage on mission together.

To learn more, visit moodychurch.org/community.

