

Day 1
May 13



Pray | Thank Jesus for creating a path back to fellowship with God

THE GREATEST DESIRE of our hearts is to be known and accepted

From a very early age, every person exhibits behaviors that demonstrate their need to be recognized, to be known and accepted. Where does that aching need to be known and accepted come from? As Christians, we believe that it is one of many characteristics that results from being created in God's image. Our Creator lives in the joy and strength of an eternal community: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he has created humans with an innate desire for the same.

In the Garden of Eden, God created the first humans and extended his perfect community to include those humans. Those humans were convinced by Satan that their role in this community was less than it could be and made a choice to become their own god. This choice broke that perfect community and created a chasm between God and humans. The Bible unravels the journey of our loving Creator creating a path back to that perfect community. A community where every woman and man is truly known and accepted by God, fulfilling the deepest need of our God-given, image-bearing hearts.



Read | Isaiah 59:2, Ephesians 2:11-13, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

1 Corinthians 1:9 says that God has invited you into fellowship (partnership) with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Have you accepted this invitation? If so, spend a few minutes reflecting on how being in this partnership has changed your life. If you have not yet accepted this invitation, please know that the invitation is for you, too. If you're ready to accept the invitation, now is the best time! Share your thoughts and your heart with God, and then share your decision with a Christian friend or pastor.

"Separation from God is the source of the deepest ache in every human heart." Do you believe that is a true statement? Why or why not?

"Free will" and a desire for community are two aspects of human existence that flow from being created in God's image. Free will made separation from God possible, and because of Jesus' death and resurrection, free will now makes unity with God possible again. Take a few minutes to consider the incredible implications of God creating you with free will, why it had to be that way, and your responsibilities as a possessor of free will.

Day 2
May 14



Pray | For the effectiveness of the church of Jesus Christ

COMMUNITY WITH JESUS opens the door to greater community - his church

In the perfect community that God created in the Garden of Eden, not only were Adam and Eve in perfect communion with God, but also with each other. Impossible to imagine, right? While the most significant result of man's fall into sin was separation from God, a significant secondary result was a separation between humans. Rather than being content to live in perfect community with the one true God, Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation to be their own gods. Conflict and separation were bound to follow.

As we saw yesterday, God's plan to restore his perfect creation begins with closing the gap between himself and us, but it doesn't end there. God also commissioned a community of humans who have renounced their own "godship" and declared that there is only one true God. We call that community "the church." Within that community, true relationships can thrive because they are rooted in a common love for a great God.



Read | [Genesis 3:1-19, Romans 12:9-18](#)



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

The church is made up of imperfect people and is not always perfectly working together to deliver on God's great commission. Take a few minutes to reflect on your view of the church and your engagement with the church. Are there opportunities for you to promote more unity and love as portrayed in Romans 12?

What does renouncing your own "godship" mean to you? Reflect on the area(s) of your life that you struggle to turn over completely to God. Go to God in prayer and ask for his wisdom to see how you can depend more on him in these areas and for the strength to follow through.

Because of your unity under Jesus Christ, your relationships with fellow Christians should be free of the strains and stresses that come with being human. Is that real? Why or why not?

Day 3
May 15



Pray | Thank God for the Bible, his infallible instructions to us

GOD'S COMMANDMENTS EMPHASIZE the importance of our connections to him and our neighbors

The Bible is the story of God's plan to restore his creation here on earth to its original and intended perfection. Relationships and community are the heart of this perfect creation, and so the story of creation restoration begins and ends with relationship restoration. As we've seen over the past two days, our relationships exist in two primary dimensions: think of your relationship with God as the vertical dimension, and your relationship with other people as the horizontal dimension. In our scripture reading today we'll be reading the Ten Commandments given by God to the people of Israel in the Old Testament, and Jesus' summary of the greatest commandments, given to the Jews in the New Testament. As you read those verses today, take special notice of how they bring focus to the importance of both the vertical and horizontal relationships that are so critical to God's plan for his creation and for each of our lives.



Read | [Exodus 20:1-17](#), [Matthew 22:34-40](#)



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

How do you "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind"? Consider going back through the first 4 of the 10 commandments as you frame up your answer.

How do you "Love your neighbor as yourself"? Consider going back through the commandments 5-10 of the 10 commandments as you frame up your answer.

How does looking at God's commandments in light of relationship and creation restoration shape your thinking about how you can apply this to your daily life?

Day 4
May 16



Pray | Ask God to give you a heart of love, not judgment

THE WORLD MAY turn its back on the church; it will not turn its back on love

The church is the community in which a follower of Jesus Christ can be truly known and accepted. In our scripture reading today we see a comprehensive description of the attitudes and behaviors that should be embraced and demonstrated by the church – the church behaving as God intended. We could use the phrase “love in action” to summarize these attitudes and behaviors. When the church is operating in “love in action” mode, it is a community in which people grow closer to God and to each other, and it is a beacon of light and hope in a dark world. When the church drifts away from “love in action” as its core mode of operation, its effectiveness is diminished or lost, and it becomes irrelevant in the world. Because every human being is created in God’s image, they will be drawn to genuine “love in action” and the hope that comes from being part of a community where that can be found. Our challenge is to create and maintain communities that are irresistible, not because of buildings and programs, but because of a genuine, selfless, sacrificial love for God and for our neighbors.



Read | [Romans 12:9-18](#)



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

Love in action takes many shapes. In Romans 12 (verses 16 & 18) we are instructed to live in harmony with each other and in peace with everyone. Take a few minutes to reflect on how you promote harmony and peace within your church, family and community. Are there areas of your life where you need to resolve a conflict to promote peace and harmony? Go to God in prayer and ask for the courage, strength and wisdom to take that next step.

Love in action is characterized by joy, because of hope (Romans 12:12). True joy is a rare commodity in our world today. How does your hope in Jesus Christ bubble over into joy that is visible and impacts those you encounter each day?

Love in action is characterized by “zeal” and “spiritual fervor” (Romans 12:11). These aren’t words that get used too much these days – but they are both words whose pronunciations hint at their meaning: zeal (great energy and enthusiasm), fervor (intense and passionate feeling). How is your zeal and spiritual fervor for Jesus evident in your day-to-day life?

Day 5
May 17



Pray | Ask God for a clear view of your part in the mission of his church

THE GOSPEL OF Jesus Christ unites all believers and gives them a clear mission

As we've discussed this week, when we choose to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and make him Lord, the connection to Jesus and to his church fulfills our desire to be known and accepted. But it doesn't end there. As humans, we also have a deep desire for significance, for our lives to matter. In addition to love and acceptance, becoming part of the community of Jesus Christ also means we have a new purpose for our lives. Remember, you are no longer your own god, so your life is no longer about you. You have a new Lord and master who commands you to put "love into action," and in doing so bring glory and honor to him. The encouragement here is that you are not in this alone. The entire church of Christ shares the same goals and purpose! We serve an amazing God who created us, knows us and loves us. He has prepared a way for us to be accepted, to live a life of significance here on earth, and to ultimately rejoin his perfect community when Jesus returns to establish his kingdom here on earth. Are you in?



Read | [Philippians 1:3-7](#), [2 Corinthians 5:16-21](#)



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

In 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 we see that as followers of Christ we are "Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." Are you comfortable with this role? Take a few minutes to reflect on your thoughts and emotions about this role, as well as whom God has appointed you an ambassador to reach.

In Philippians 1:4-5, Paul says he "prays with joy" for the church in Philippi because of their "partnership in the gospel." This is the true purpose of the church of Jesus Christ, to partner in bringing the gospel to the world. In support of this vision, Five Oaks recently launched the "Impact Journey." If you have not yet gotten your Impact Journey PASSPORT, make sure you get one this weekend at church – you can find them near the Impact Center on the way to the Acorn Café. Pray that God would help you use this as a tool to start/restart/continue your journey to partnering with others to bring the gospel of Jesus to the world.

If you have not yet decided to make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, please know that God loves you and his greatest desire is for you to be connected to him and to his church, and in those connections, find the acceptance and true purpose that your heart desires. If you're ready to make that decision, share your heart and your thoughts with God, and then get connected with a church and some other believers.

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