

NBC

NARRABEEN BAPTIST CHURCH



NEVER
MORE
AT
HOME

COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY

GOD'S FAMILY ON MISSION MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS



INTRODUCTION

Home. Home is the place where everything is in its right place. It's where I can kick my shoes off and relax. It's got its own familiar smell and feel and look that no other place has. It's where you can be yourself. Where your people are. It's where we keep coming back to. Where we feel most comfortable. Where we find joy.

Yet home is also a place of activity. We regularly do things like mow our yards, wash our dishes, take out the rubbish. We engage in these activities because if we didn't, home would not be super pleasant. So we vacuum and paint and renovate and decorate and dust and scrub because home is action, too. Activities done to promote joy.

We are calling this series "Never More At Home". The biblical picture of being part of God's kingdom incorporates both of

these ideas: life in Christ is comfortable, where you can be yourself, where you are with family, where you long to be; and it's activity where you prepare and speak and sing and pray and share and invite.

This year, we want our church community to be Never More At Home. Where we can experience the joy of being at "home" in our relationship with Christ, with one another and with every other aspect of our lives. Through this study we will be examining how we can experience joy and contentment in every aspect of our lives; the feeling and knowledge of being at "home". This study is not meant to merely be questions up for theoretical discussion, but for serious wrestling and purposeful application. Our hope is that everyone who calls NBC their "home" will learn to experience the joy of Christ and live that joy out wherever they are.



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WEEK ONE: WHAT IS HOME?

A BIBLICAL PICTURE OF THE KINGDOM, A BEGINNING

In order for us to get our minds wrapped around the concept of “being at home”, it would probably be helpful to dive into the very first picture of what that concept means. The Bible begins with a story of home. It’s a paradise. Where everything is in its right place. Where there is no division or selfishness or disappointment or hurt. Just joy. With God. With one another. With the world around.

Read Genesis 1:1-25.

What picture does this paint of how life was purposed to be?

Bowel Juice of the Dragon God?

Historians have uncovered a few “origin” texts from ancient cultures which attempt to explain how we (humans) got here. Perhaps the oldest and most well-known document is a Babylonian story called the *Enuma Elish*. Its account goes like this: in the beginning there was nothing but swirling chaos waters. Eventually from those waters, two gods emerged: Apsu (male) and Tiamat (female). These two gods came together and had numerous offspring. However, Apsu could not get to sleep because his kids were too loud, so he decided he was going to kill them all. Finding out about this, his wife Tiamat warns her eldest son, Enki. Enki and his siblings go to war and kill Apsu first. Now upset her lover had been killed, Tiamat then decides to kill her kids too (isn’t this story great?). Tiamat takes the shape of a dragon and seems unstoppable until another one of her kids, Marduk, shoots her with a magical arrow that splits her in two. Her children then meet to decide what to do next and one of them devises a plan to make humans out of Tiamat’s entrails in order to serve the gods and do their work for them so they can get back to relaxing. Many ancient origin stories follow this same pattern: humans are the result of cosmic disorder and are made to be servants of the gods.

How does the Genesis origin story stand out from other ancient origin stories? Does God create haphazardly and accidentally?

Read Genesis 1:25-31.

Where do humans fall in terms of importance in the created world?

What do you think it means that humans are created in the image of God? Why is this repeated three times in verse 27? What's the purpose of that?

An Image Bearer

Maybe ancient (and still some current) cultures made representations of the gods/goddesses out of stone, wood, clay, etc. Many ancient cities would contain statues, coins, paintings and carvings all around the community to remind people that that city was under the protection of that god or goddess (for example the Greek city Athens, was named after the goddess Athena). These images were meant to tell people that that a god or goddess dwells here (at this temple or on this street or over this kitchen). When you see the image, you were meant to see that god. Genesis picks up on this imagery and language...that the Creator God, Yahweh, is known and seen through the things that bear his image. That when you see the image bearer of Yahweh, you were meant to see what God is like and where God "resides".

If this is the case, how is the picture of God places His image in humans not just significant but culturally revolutionary?

What does it mean that YOU (you, personally) are God's image bearer?

Yahweh then gives humans several jobs (verses 28-30). What is the role of humanity in creation according to this passage?

We Rule

The Hebrew words translated as "rule" and "subdue" are positive, not negative terms. We often think of "ruling" and "subduing" as things oppressors do. This is not the case here. To "rule" means to have stewardship over, to have custody of, to take responsibility for. To "subdue" means to manage properly, to take something untamed or wild and control it. In other words, humans are partners with God (not mindless slaves who have to perform to make Him happy) as they care for creation. The role of humans is to share in the responsibility of caring for the world in cooperation with Yahweh. We are royalty (God's children) with responsibility (to be stewards of creation).

Through what we are (God's image bearers) and what we are meant to do (care for God's creation), the world is meant to know that God is King. Every square meter of the earth is meant to reflect the knowledge and glory of God (see Psalm 95:3-5). God then tells humans to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth so that more and more image bearers will point

to God and more stewards will care for His creation – all of which point back to Yahweh as King.

Read Genesis 2:15-25

The story then zooms in on the first man: Adam. He is fulfilling his purpose (being God's image bearer) and his role (caring for the garden). But there is a problem. What is the problem (hint: read verse 18)?

This is the first time in Genesis that the text tells us something was "not good". Throughout Genesis 1, God creates and looks at His creation and says it is "good".

Why is a lone human a problem in God's perfect creation?

Ezer Konegdo

The text uses the phrase "suitable helper" to describe Adam's lack of a companion. Unfortunately, many Christians have taken this English translation too far and imply that the role of women are simply "helpers" of men. In other words, they believe men are important ones and women just help out. This is not the case in the text at all. The Hebrew for "suitable helper" is *ezer konegdo*. The word *ezer* can translate as "helper" but in most of the Old Testament it uses that word as a characteristic of God; that God is an *ezer*. A better translation would be a helper who rescues (someone who is strong, not weak). The Hebrew word *konegdo* means "opposite" or "in front of." A counterpart, someone who is a mirror to you, in other words. This phrase then, should be applied if the situation was reversed (if woman was the only human and there was no male counterpart). In the Hebrew it is the two together who are made to help each other, that without one, humanity is lacking.

Home, according to Genesis 2, are men and women who individually reflect God's image, but also reflect His image in how they work and partner together. Without companions, without counterparts to help/rescue us, we are not fully human: it is not good for a human to be alone. This passage is NOT just talking about marriage in particular; it is indicative of humanity in general. We are not meant to be without community. Humans are most reflective of God's image when we do life with others.

Putting this all together...

What does the biblical picture of the first "home" look like?

How are YOU living out this picture in your own life?

Do you resemble an image bearer of God? Do people look at you and are pointed to Yahweh?

How well are you doing at fulfilling your responsibility to be a caretaker of God's creation?

In what ways are others ("humans," in the Genesis terms) helping you to be fully human as God designed? In what ways are you?

WEEK TWO: WHAT IS HOME?

A BIBLICAL PICTURE OF THE KINGDOM, THE END

Last week we looked at the picture of God's kingdom at the beginning of creation: Home in the Garden of Eden.

What can you recall from the previous study? What does "home" look like?

If we were to compare Genesis 1 and 2 to our world today, what differences or similarities do we see?

How do you think we got from there to here?

If Genesis 1 presents the picture of what perfect home looks like and we now find ourselves somewhere other than that home, how do we get back? That's what we will examine in this study.

Read Genesis 12:1-4

It's the end of the world as we know it (and I feel fine)

After a series of humans choosing to reject their mandate as image bearers of Yahweh and stewards of His creation in partnership with others (in Genesis 3), the world spirals out of control. The first murder takes place in Genesis 4. Quickly warfare takes place and tribal lines are drawn separating "us" from "them". By Genesis 6, the whole of the human race has their hearts bent on evil all of the time. In Genesis 11, people think so highly of themselves that they try to create a tower to the heavens so that their names, and not Yahweh, would be remembered and glorified. Despite all of this, God hasn't given up.

What is God's secret rescue plan to draw humanity back to Himself in Genesis 12:1-4?

How, exactly, do you think this plan was meant to work?

Why does God choose to rescue humanity through a family?

By Genesis 12, God responds to crisis within his creation by focusing in on the family of Abraham. But what God is doing for and through this one family is for all nations in the end.

What do you remember about Abraham's life? How well did he do in being God's image bearer? What about his family? How did the descendants of Abraham fare at living out their call to bring humanity back to God?

Despite constant human failure, God is not deterred. God's rescue plan continues through various people who rise up with God's Spirit and point others to Him: Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Samuel, David, the prophets. With all of these people there are some successes, but many more failures. But God's promise to rescue the world through the one family, continues. The story of the Bible works its way back to a focus on all nations being redeemed within the story of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, bent on fulfilling God's ultimate purpose of restoring all nations to himself. Jesus is one of Abraham's descendants. He was a king in the line of David. A prophet who spoke God's truth to an unbelieving world. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, ALL humanity can be brought home to the Father and experience the joy of being made right with God.

Read John 3:16-21

In this passage, what is God like?

What is the end result for those who believe in Jesus?

Who is Jesus referring to when he says "whoever"? Is it just a certain group of people?

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, is written by the apostle John. John is visited by the resurrected Jesus and is shown the culmination of God's kingdom. In Revelation 5, John is transported before the throne room of God. God is about to usher in His reign in public view, but there is a problem....there's no one who is worthy to open the scroll.

Read Revelation 5:1-5

What descriptions are used here to describe Jesus? How do these titles relate to God's rescue plan that began in Genesis 12?

Continue reading Revelation 5:6-13 and 7:9-10

What in the world is going on in these scenes?

What kind of place is God's kingdom? Is anyone left out? Is any culture more important than another?

What is the identity and role of these people who Jesus has redeemed (see Revelation 5:10)? How does this relate back to the identity and role of humanity that we examined from Genesis 1-2?

At the end of all things, as we find ourselves at home in God's kingdom, will we be sitting on clouds playing harps?

By the time we reach the end of the book of Revelation, we see the final state of humanity—a diverse group of nations, all unified in worship of the Creator. In the Kingdom, those who belong to Jesus are made right with God again. And they are restored to their rightful role as image bearers and stewards of creation. It also means that part of the problem God is working to heal and correct throughout the story of the Bible is the disunity of humankind, people using their differences and distinct gifts to tear one another apart.

This is where we are headed. Home again.

Let's put this all together.

If "home" in the beginning was a paradise where humans acknowledged God as King, where they lived and worked as His image bearers and caretakers, where they partnered with other humans to be fully human AND if "home" in the end is a paradise where humans worship God as King, where they reign as His imager bearers and caretakers and where they partner together with people from every gender, tribe, language and skin colour....then what does that tell us how WE ought to be living in between?

Some hard questions to wrestle with:

In what ways have you viewed others as "less than"? In what ways have you viewed yourself as "less"?

How have you learned from and included people and partnered with people who are different than you?

Where are you currently failing in being God's image bearer? Where do you think you are succeeding?

What have you been doing to care for God's creation? Where have you failed?

How can you start living for Jesus now?

WEEK THREE: AT HOME WITH GOD. FINDING JOY IN OUR CREATOR

Introduction: We find ourselves in between “Homes” – living in between our original design that was lost due to sin and our future perfect home. How do we then live in the middle space?

Read Ephesians 1:15-17 Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesus, a quick history

Jesus is speaking to a community of Christ-followers in the city of Ephesus. From sources such as Acts and Paul's letters, we know a gathering of believers emerged despite external opposition and persecution. Ephesus was a major city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It was known for its wealth and cultural diversity. It would be comparable to a New York or Paris. Despite Jewish antagonism, despite the religious and hedonistic smorgasbord available to them, Christianity continued to grow. Revelation 2 is written, many scholars believe, in around 95AD when the first world-wide persecution of Christians started to break out. This would have been about 50 years after the first church community were planted and about 40 years after Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians.

What differences do you notice between these two passages? How do you think we got from there (Ephesians 1) to here (Revelation 2)?

What does it mean to forsake your first love?

By all descriptions in Revelation 2, it seems this community of believers looked like any healthy church. They work hard for Jesus. They appear to be living out scriptural commands. They keep their faith even though they've faced persecution. They don't tolerate any sort of wickedness in their midst. They send teachers who don't line up with the truth of Scripture out the door. They've undergone suffering but haven't grown weary. Who wouldn't want to be in a church like this?

Is it possible to do everything “right” in your faith but have missed the mark, like those in this church?

Read Matthew 22:25-28

How are the Pharisees an example of a group of people who have forsaken their first love despite appearing to do everything right?

Why is it easier to do things FOR God than it is to simply be a person OF God?

How can we go about loving God as our first priority? How have you done this well?

The Bible gives us many hints on what it means to be people who find joy in God. In Revelation 2, Jesus says if this is you, you begin with repentance. With stopping whatever you're doing and changing course. He then encourages them to do what they did at first.

What do you think that means? What were YOU like when you first put your trust in Christ?

What do you need to repent of in order to make Jesus your first love again?

What can you do this week to find your joy in Christ? What is one thing (let's just start with one) that can help you experience the joy of Christ? (Biblical hints: worship, spending time in God's Word, praying, fellowship with other believers, remembering what God has done for you in the past, fasting, serving).

WEEK FOUR: AT HOME WITH OURSELVES. FINDING JOY IN MY IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Read Mark 12:28-34

When approached by an expert in the Hebrew Scriptures about which commandment (of the 613 that get counted) is the most important, Jesus gives two responses. He first quotes from a passage called the *shema* from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. The *shema*, to this day, is the most important command and most repeated prayer for all Jewish people. It is centered around putting God first, above all things, with all that we have. This would have been a good answer for any Hebrew scholar. But Jesus isn't finished. He tacks on another verse from Leviticus 19:18 which states that we are called to love our neighbour as ourselves. If you follow Luke's version of this event, Jesus goes on to describe our "neighbour" as anyone – even those we consider our enemies (which was a radical thought then and still is today). Jesus couches these two commands together as the greatest "commandment" (singular, not plural). According to Jesus, loving God and loving others work together.

Many of us know this and have studied these words from Jesus many times. But there is something in here we often disregard: the very last line of the last verse Jesus quotes from. Notice Jesus says we are to love God and love others...wait for it...AS we love ourselves.

When you hear the greatest command from Jesus, have you ever stopped to think you are called to love yourself? Why or why not?

Do you think it is even right to love ourselves?

"Love Yourself" is a very new-age-y catch phrase. There's even a profession – "life coach" – that's built up around this idea of teaching you to love yourself. This lifestyle is often about forgetting or even embracing the nasty sides of us and learning to be at peace with everything that you are. "Growth" is not change or transformation, it's about acceptance.

Jesus does want us to love ourselves. We just read it in Mark 12. But loving ourselves takes on a different flavour from what we keep hearing from self-help gurus.

Read Psalm 51:1-17

What does David recognize about himself in this psalm?

Does this passage have anything to do with loving oneself?

David here is in the miry depths of his sinfulness. He's been found out and is immersed in his own wickedness and lostness. He's not very "lovely" here. Yet there is a recognition that something is seriously lacking. He cannot, on his own, love himself, because he knows he is messed up. So he calls out to God for help and forgiveness.

Read Romans 5:1-11

What does Paul acknowledge about humans here?

How does God act toward us, His enemies who are broken because of sin?

What does the truth about Jesus' death say about how God now views us? How does it change how we ought to view ourselves (hint: see verse 11)?

Read 1 John 3:1, 19-22

According to John, who/what defines who we are?

What do we do when our hearts condemn us, telling us we are not good enough?

In Scripture, loving oneself means to know the depths of your sinfulness and inability to rescue yourself on one hand, while also clinging to the truth that despite that, God is absolutely in love with you, sending His own Son so that you can be called His child. Humility and confidence, working together.

How can you hold onto both humility before God and have confidence of your identity in Him? How can this tension lead you to joyful living?

Notice that the final word is never hate or alienation or unforgiveness. So if you currently find yourself feeling that you are beyond hope, that a holy God could or would never love you, please be reminded of these promises in Psalm 103.

Psalm 103

Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy
name.
² Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
⁴ who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and
compassion,
⁵ who satisfies your desires with good
things
so that your youth is renewed like the
eagle's.
⁶ The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.
⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:
⁸ *The LORD is compassionate and
gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.*
⁹ *He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;*
¹⁰ *he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.*
¹¹ *For as high as the heavens are above the
earth,
so great is his love for those who fear
him;*
¹² *as far as the east is from the west,*

*so far has he removed our
transgressions from us.*
¹³ *As a father has compassion on his
children,
so the LORD has compassion on those
who fear him;*
¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
¹⁵ The life of mortals is like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the field;
¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.
¹⁷ *But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those who fear
him,
and his righteousness with their
children's children—*
¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.
¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in
heaven,
and his kingdom rules over all.
²⁰ Praise the LORD, you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
who obey his word.
²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,
you his servants who do his will.
²² Praise the LORD, all his works
everywhere in his dominion.
Praise the LORD, my soul.

God's final word for you is that you belong to Him. You can experience joy in yourself because of what Jesus has done for you and how God never will leave us or forsake us. He is always at work making broken things beautiful. If these are words that you cannot seem to grasp, please talking with your Community Group leader or one of the church elders – we would love to talk with you, encourage you, pray for you, help you and remind you of God's incredible grace in Jesus.

WEEK FIVE: AT HOME WITH FAMILY.

JOY WITH MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST

The very first time God said “it is not good” was in the middle of paradise, when there was no suitable companion for the first (and only) human. In the Ancient Near East, people lived with a community-first mentality. None of the instructions we see on Christian living in the New Testament were written with just the individual in mind; these were instructions on living within community. We are fully who we are meant to be when we live faith side by side with others, not going solo. Let’s dive into God’s Word to discover more about this.

In the New Testament the phrases “one another” or “each other” are used 100 different times. You can roughly divide these passages into four categories: love, unity, servanthood and edification. In other words the most repeated instructions for followers of Jesus is that they are to show selfless love to one another, they are to be of one mind and voice, they are to give and share with and care for one another, and they are to build one another up to be more and more like Jesus.

Further, almost every single instruction/encouragement/command in Scripture is in the plural...meaning it is intended to be done by and within a community, not as lone rangers. But why? Why is this community aspect so important?

Read 1 Kings 19:1-10

Maybe he’s relieving himself...?

This chapter in 1 Kings 19 comes after arguably one of the greatest moments of trusting in the LORD and seeing God show up. In 1 Kings 18, Elijah, the prophet of God, challenges King Ahab and his false prophets to a duel. Ahab had turned away from Yahweh and began following the Canaanite god Baal, surrounding himself with hundreds of these prophets of Baal who continued to lead him and the people of Israel astray. On Mount Carmel, Elijah sets up the duel: let’s build a campfire, but call on our gods to light it. You guys call on Baal, I’ll call on Yahweh. Whoever’s god lights the fire, well that’s the real god. The story goes that Baal isn’t at home. Elijah even asks if he’s relieving himself somewhere. Hilarious. Elijah then has people pour tons of water on his altar (for dramatic effect) and prays to the Lord, who rains down fire, engulfing the whole setup. The false prophets realize they’ve worshipped the wrong god and Elijah has them put to death! Sounds like a blockbuster movie plot.

What happens to Elijah in 1 Kings 19, just after this amazing event?

What do we find Elijah doing and wishing for?

What brought him to this place?

Despite Elijah's suicidal death wish, God shows up again, being present with Elijah. In verse 18 God then reminds Elijah of a very important fact: you are not alone, there are seven thousand others in Israel who have not bowed down to Baal. And God's not finished.

Read 1 Kings 19:19-21

What did God provide for Elijah in these verses?

How did Elisha become the remedy to Elijah's depression and loneliness?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

According to this passage, are we meant to be able to do this Jesus thing by ourselves? Why or why not?

Has there been a time in your walk with Christ where another "part of the body" supported you, encouraged you, cared for you or stood up for you?

How is the picture of Christians living in community more of a sign to the world of the reality of God than a Christian doing faith by his or herself?

Read Acts 2:42-47

This passage is often the "go to" section of what the church at its absolute best looks like.

What things do you see happening in this community?

Some Greek (Because Why Not?)

Verse 46 states that within this gathering they had “glad and sincere hearts”. The Greek word for “glad” is the word *agalliasis* which better translates as “exuberant joy” and the Greek word for “sincere” is the word *aphelotes*, which means “uncomplicated”. The pinnacle of Christians sharing life with one another produces extreme joy, where there is no drama, barriers and complications. This portrait recalls the relationship between the first humans in the Garden of Eden where they were “both naked and felt no shame.” The idea of “nakedness” then meant more than physical nakedness, it meant the ability to be completely yourself in front of another person without fear, judgment or rejection. Christian community, at its best, is being who you are and knowing you are loved and accepted...which results in abundant joy.

What is it about community that brings about joy?

When have you experienced this in your church?

There are many wonderful and beautiful examples in the Bible of doing life in community resulting in joy. But the Bible does not gloss over the fact that God's people often can make something joyful into something ugly and destructive. Later in Acts and in Galatians, the churches are divided over whether non-Jews need to become Jewish first before they can be part of God's family. In Romans we see a church (most likely) that has been divided by ethnicity. In James we read about a church community that gives special preference to the wealthy at the expense of the poor in their midst. In Corinthians, Paul has to rebuke a number of members of the church from issues such as sexual misconduct to getting drunk on communion wine.

Maybe you have experienced the negative side of church community like this.

Yet...why do you think God designed us to find joy in community...even when humans keep getting it wrong?

Read 1 John 3:16-18

Throughout Scripture, we keep seeing this pattern emerge: we find joy and experience deep love in how we care for, encourage, bear with, show compassion toward, welcome, eat with and share with one another. It's a truth we can't escape. We cannot do this Christian life by ourselves. We weren't designed to.

If that is the case, what are YOU doing to love your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Who is someone you can encourage, invite over, pray for or care for this week? (Don't just think of that person...act!)

WEEK SIX: AT HOME WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS.

A JOYFUL LIFE OF WELCOME AND SHARING

Read Acts 11:1-18

Peter here is giving a summary of a longer story that happened in the previous chapter. It's a story about a man and his family who came to faith in Christ. Sounds great. But as we read in verse 2, this presented a major problem.

What was the problem in this text?

What does the vision of the sheet and animals represent?

What happens at the end of Peter's visit with this family?

This narrative is all about one question: Which people are able to experience the salvation of Jesus? Peter, initially, and the other believers who had heard what had happened subscribed to one possible answer to that question: Jesus belongs to "us" (those of Jewish ethnicity) and most certainly does not belong to "them" (those of any other ethnicity). It took a vision (repeated several times) AND a voice from heaven to convince Peter the Good News is for everyone. Peter then shares the gospel with this family, who come to faith and are baptized.

What lesson do you think Peter learned here?

The very last time we hear about Peter in the book of Acts is in chapter 15. Here the church gathers for its first council, debating the subject of whether "they" (non-Jewish people) can be saved. After hearing some arguments, it is Peter who stands up and declares with great gusto that God does not discriminate. We then see how believers begin to go into marketplaces and courtyards and open their homes and businesses to everyone so that all might hear the message of salvation.

Read Luke 14:12-14 and Luke 5:27-32

What picture do these passage paint of what followers of Jesus look like?

How often do the guests around your dinner table look like the guests described in these passages?

Are you doing a good job at welcoming people like this? Why or why not?

When the early church really starts to grow it took place in homes. The biggest explosion of the Gospel didn't happen through a podcast, seminary course or dropping leaflets in mailboxes. It happened at dinner tables. Over dessert. With prayer and conversation and compassion. Many of us these days don't know the names of our neighbours, let alone have invited them over. But perhaps our home is meant to be a place where the kingdom takes root in our neighbourhood.

Read Luke 15:1-7

How do the Pharisees' attitudes (in verse 2) compare with the shepherd's attitude (in verses 5-6)?

What is the point of this passage? Why is it in here?

Was there someone (like a Peter or a Levi or this shepherd) who pursued you and showed Jesus to you?

If the Bible implies that God wants to use us to reach our neighbourhoods and if it also implies that there is great joy in being welcoming and invitational, what is stopping you, preventing you, hindering you from being a Peter or a Levi or like this shepherd?

Action Plan:

Think of one person that needs to hear the good news about Jesus. How can you demonstrate God's welcoming love to them this week? How can you purposefully reach out to them throughout this month? What can you be doing throughout the course of this year to lead them to Jesus?

WEEK SEVEN: AT HOME IN WORK AND IN REST. THE JOY OF SHALOM

At home with work? Sounds like an oxymoron.

Read Genesis 2:15

What is the first human doing in this verse?

WHEN did this take place? Was it before or after sin entered the picture?

What do you think it means that “work” existed in paradise?

Read Genesis 1:28

We examined this passage during the first week of this study. God tasks humans (in their perfect home) to grow and thrive AND work as caretakers of His creation. To both create and procreate. The idea of work ties into the idea of creativity. We work so we can create. We create because we are those who bear God's likeness and God is a Creator. God creates because it is GOOD.

If this is the case, what is the point of our work?

Is labour meant to be a chore you do only to obtain money so you can pay bills and eat? Or in God's design, is work meant for something more?

If work was in the picture before sin and work is meant to reflect God's creativity and work is and produces good, why in the world doesn't it feel that way for many of us?

Does the lack of enjoyment from our work say something about the nature of work or does it say something about us?

Read Colossians 3:15-17

Note that nowhere in the Bible does it give clear directives on what job you should have. It doesn't tell you whether you should stick with a difficult job or switch jobs or to get a job

that lets you live out your dreams. It's not super prescriptive when it comes to what kind of work, what kind of work or the balance of work with the rest of life we ought to have.

But according to Paul in Colossians 3, what DOES the Bible say about work?

How does this passage inform our work/life decisions?

How can you, right now, whether you are working as a student, whether you have yet to enter the work force, whether you are unemployed, whether you are happy in your job, whether you are retired, apply the principles of these verses to your situation?

So in the beginning, humans are made to create (work and make art and craft and organize and build) and to procreate (to produce more humans who will also create and make more humans).

Read Exodus 20:8-11

What is this passage all about? Why, out of all the very important things God could tell His people what they were to be known for, did He say one of the top ten things they should do was rest?

Humans create. They procreate. But they are also meant to re-create. To rest, relax, to enjoy the fruit of their labour.

Why, do you think, rest is so important?

What do you think proper rest actually looks like?

Why are God's people meant to have a regular, built-in time of rest and recreation? Do YOU have a regular and built-in time of rest and recreation? When is the last time you properly rested?

Unlike the nature of our work, the Bible happens to be VERY prescriptive about the nature of our rest. There are countless commands about how to improperly rest (the biblical term for this is "breaking the sabbath"). All of them draw back to the same idea, however: not enjoying and celebrating life and creation. So if you walk too far or cook too much or sweat too profusely or rack up more overtime or fill your calendar or strain yourself or exhaust

your resources or are wasteful or are critical...you are not acting as God's image bearer. God, we are told, stepped back, view His creative work, took it all in, enjoyed it and rested.

Do you think our lack of joy is related to our lack of rest?

The biblical picture is clear: rest isn't a once-a-year holiday. It's a regular and purposeful rhythm in our week. This can be a whole day or weekend where you get refreshed spiritually, emotionally, physically. Or it can be a daily thing; where you take even a few moments to step away and refocus. Whatever rest looks like for you, you are meant to take it.

Challenge for the week:

How can you view your work as joyful and creative and good?

How can you find time to step away from the stress and strain and rush and instead celebrate, enjoy, and get refilled?

WEEK EIGHT: AT HOME WITH THE GOSPEL. BEING A JOYFUL AMBASSADOR

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

What does Paul mean when he says God “reconciled us to himself through Christ”?

What does he mean that God “gave us the ministry of reconciliation” and “He has committed to us the message of reconciliation”?

Whose job is it to be Christ’s ambassador?

Read Matthew 13:44-46

What is happening in these two parables? What are they about?

Is your response to Jesus like the men in these two stories?

What about the kingdom of heaven (the treasure and the pearl in these stories) would warrant someone to...with joy...sell everything they own in order to purchase it?

The Gospel. Just the Gospel.

The Gospel is the story of how God rescued the world from itself. It’s the story that starts with God, ends with God and is all about God as the hero. We are NOT the hero of the story. If anything, we are the villain. Yet, God through Jesus redeems us and turns stony hearts into hearts of flesh. He invites us in as family and promises us life to the full. If we believe this Gospel story, it should invade every part of our life: our thinking, our time, our relationships. Like any great story, it’s not something we ever want to keep to ourselves. Jesus has given you and me a role: villains redeemed who become the messengers that God is still rescuing.

Read Zechariah 8:20-23

The story of the Bible (the Gospel) envisions women and men who have been restored, redeemed, renewed by the love of God...and then turning to those who don’t yet know God and proclaiming God’s goodness in word and in deed.

What would it look like to live in a such a way that Zechariah 8:23 happens to us?

From all these verses you've read today, what do you think it looks like to live for Jesus in the world? Does your life currently match up with that picture? Why or why not?

Why is it that many of us see sharing our faith as a burden rather than a joy?

Why is it that we often think it's the job of the pastor or missionary alone to share God's Word and not our personal responsibility?

How can we change this way of thinking?

When you receive good news...what do you do with it?

How can you remind yourself of the good news of Jesus everyday?

Read Hebrews 10:32-39

What is happening in this passage?

What does the author of Hebrews want this church community to remember (see verses 32 and 35, in particular)?

How, do you think, these Christians could experience joy (verse 34) when they faced rejection and suffering?

So we've established that the gospel message is this: God loves us and rescues us in Jesus. God's desire is that everyone will come into the knowledge of Him. In order to accomplish this, He wants to send us, all of us, as people who are overwhelmed by His love, to be His ambassadors. We see followers of Jesus and churches who take this seriously filled with joy...even when they are rejected or their message goes unheeded.

If this is the case, it means every other thing we find ourselves doing is peripheral. It's not our main task in life. Experiencing Jesus and sharing Jesus is. But then there's work. And bills. And family. And holidays. And car trouble. And Netflix. And friends. All necessary. And important.

Is it possible to do both of these things (live/share Jesus AND work/play/family/friends) well? Do we have to reject one for the other? Or is it possible to experience both at the same time?

Do you know any people that seem to live/share Jesus in the normalcy of life? What are they like and what can we learn from them?

How can you start to invite Jesus into every space of your life? What would it look like to live a Christian life and share Jesus in the spaces you already occupy?

What's one small thing you can try this week to share Jesus?

WEEK NINE: BRINGING IT ALL HOME.

AN ACTION PLAN FOR JOY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Joy is one of those words Christians speak a lot about. It connotes a happiness that lasts despite circumstances. Yet for many of us, joy is just an abstract concept we think we're supposed to feel but often don't. How can we move "joy" from being a category in our minds to a gift we can experience every day?

A Christian music/worship leader named David Crowder wrote a book about a 15 years ago. The book is called *Praise Habit*. In the opening chapter, David talks about a friend who kept bugging him to try out the "best burger I've ever eaten". This friend kept reminding him that this certain hamburger would change his life; that it was the closest food to heaven (if that's even a thing), it was straight from God. After weeks of his friend annoying him, David finally relented. But suffice it to say, he was very skeptical. It's just a burger, David thought. How can a burger remind you of God? Calm down. When David finally ordered the burger, he took his first bite. And in doing so, he found it quite difficult to even describe what was happening in both his mouth and his spirit. It was everything his friend said and more. He then writes these words: "It is more difficult to find the Creator in a barbeque sandwich than in your favorite Sunday-morning song, but when you do, when you begin to find Him in all the stuff of life, everything starts singing. Every moment breaks into song. Every breath becomes sacrifice, and the songs become sweetness. This is living praise."

First, do you think it's possible to experience God in the eating of a hamburger? Is that really a thing?

How would you define "joy"?

Have you ever experienced joy? If so, how can you describe it? If not, what do you think has prevented you?

Read Romans 5:1-11

Tim Keller (pastor and author) points to this passage as the definition of joy. It never uses that word, joy, however. Reading it, how do you think this passage is about joy?

Happiness vs Joy

If you Google “How to Be Happy” you will find a plethora of websites giving you recommendations on how to practice happiness. Here are some of the tips I discovered: smile more often, exercise, get enough sleep, practice good deeds, find a job you love, spend quality time with friends, take time from yourself, don’t worry about life beyond the basics. All of these things certainly contribute to happiness. But what about people who are unable to have access to these things? What if your job is unenjoyable? What if you don’t have friends who deeply care for you? The word “happy” is a derivative of the word “happenstance” or “happening”. It depicts a momentary, circumstantial event or feeling.

In Romans 5, the words “boast” (v. 2, 11), “glory” (v. 3) are the same words in Greek, the word *kauchaomai*. It means to “rejoice” to “exult” to “hold our head high”.

Read John 16:19-24

How is joy accessible in the midst of grief and suffering?

The biblical word for “joy” is the Greek word “chara”. It is a cognate of another significant Greek word, *charis*, which translates as “grace”. Grace means God’s undeserved favour. Which then makes *chara* (joy) the outworking of *charis* (grace). If we know the depths of God’s amazing grace He has lavished on us, we will be full of joy. Knowing that, how does that give light to the following passages:

Matthew 2:7-10

Matthew 28:5-8

Acts 16:25-34

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

1 Thessalonians 1:6

C.S. Lewis says joy is what we experience when we are reminded of God’s grace. It’s a longing we have to be with Christ. So despite death, imprisonment, hardship or suffering, we are able to rejoice knowing that we belong to Jesus and always have access to God’s amazing grace.

Are you more interested happiness (temporary, circumstantial pleasure) or joy (enduring, remains firm despite circumstances)?

Tim Keller reminds us that if your ultimate goal is to be happy, you'll always be chasing it. But joy comes without pursuit. It comes through remembering and through looking forward.

What practices can you put into place each day to experience joy in Christ?

What does joy look like in your workplace? In your home? On the bus? At school?

How can joy be found with other Christians? What place does a singing and praying and sharing stories have in experiencing joy?

Who needs to experience the joy of Christ around you today?