

RECOVERING REDEMPTION

HOW CHRIST CHANGES EVERYTHING



MATT CHANDLER



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THE AUTHOR

MATT CHANDLER serves as the lead pastor of teaching at The Village Church in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. He came to The Village in December 2002 and describes his tenure as a replanting effort to change the theological and philosophical culture of the congregation. The church has witnessed a tremendous response, growing from 160 people to more than 11,000, including campuses in Flower Mound, Dallas, Denton, and Fort Worth.

Alongside his current role as lead pastor, Matt is involved in church-planting efforts both locally and internationally through The Village, as well as in various strategic partnerships. Prior to accepting the pastorate at The Village, Matt had a vibrant itinerant ministry for more than 10 years that gave him the opportunity to speak to thousands of people in America and abroad about the glory of God and the beauty of Jesus.

Matt is also the author of *The Explicit Gospel Bible Study* (LifeWay, 2012) and a coauthor of *Creature of the Word* (LifeWay, 2012).

Other than knowing Jesus, Matt's greatest joy is being married to Lauren and being the dad to their three children, Audrey, Reid, and Norah.

INTRODUCTION

I don't know if you've noticed—I'm guessing you have—but the world is a mess. Things are broken. People are broken. And we run down different paths looking for answers. And this is true for people both inside and outside the church. But the glorious reality of the gospel is this: Christ changes everything.

I don't just mean that He changed history or that He changes our eternal destiny. I don't even just mean that He will ultimately make everything right again in the future. Christ changes every part of your life and mine. Everything. Every day.

That's what *Recovering Redemption* is all about—walking through the questions we should all be asking and learning how the answers transform not only our minds but also our hearts and our day-to-day lives. No more settling for less than life abundant. No more treating symptoms instead of seeking health. It's time to grow up into spiritual maturity, living each day in the hope and freedom of Christ.

How to Get the Most from This Study

1. Attend each group experience.

- Watch the video teaching.
- Complete the viewer guide.
- Participate in the group discussions.

2. Complete the content in this Bible study book.

- Read the introduction for each session.
- Prayerfully interact with all learning activities.
- Be honest with God, yourself, and others about your experiences.
- Apply the principles.

3. Read Matt Chandler and Michael Snetzer's book *Recovering Redemption*.

- Optional chapters are noted in each session for taking you deeper into specific principles, unpacking the biblical truths and practical implications.

4. Commit to the experience.

- *Recovering Redemption* has 12 sessions with three components of personal study for each. Most groups will do this study over the course of 12 weeks, but if your group follows a different schedule, that's OK.
- Don't rush. Allow time for the Spirit of God to work in you through His Word.

SESSION I

THE REALITY: EVERYTHING IS BROKEN

*WELCOME TO YOUR FIRST SESSION OF RECOVERING REDEMPTION.
BEGIN DISCUSSION WITH THE ACTIVITY BELOW.*

Take a minute for everyone to introduce themselves with a quick answer to one of the following questions:

What's the best news you've ever received, and what made it so good?

When have you made a mess trying to do something on your own before finally accepting help?

There's good news, and there's bad news. Always start with the bad news, right?

To fully appreciate the good news of the gospel—the joy and freedom it brings—we must first realize that we're living in the midst of bad news. We're swimming in it. Drowning. And until our eyes are opened to that fact, we don't realize our desperate need for salvation. When we feel the gravity of bad news, the good news is all the more glorious.

Here's the bad news: the world is busted up. The world you and I are living in is not the world as God created it.

What bad news or evidence of brokenness have you seen this week?

TO PREPARE FOR THE VIDEO SEGMENT, READ ALOUD ECCLESIASTES 1:14-15:

*I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity
and a striving after wind.*

*What is crooked cannot be made straight,
and what is lacking cannot be counted.*

WATCH

COMPLETE THE VIEWER GUIDE BELOW AS YOU WATCH SESSION 1.

Gospel means _____.

The world you and I are living in is not the world as God _____ it.

God the Father is the _____ of creation.

God the Son is the active _____ of creation.

The Holy Spirit is the personal _____ of God that brings life to where there is no life.

At that moment outright _____ is declared against the King of glory, and the cosmos fractures.

_____ chaos was introduced when sin entered the world.

All we were meant to cultivate will now _____ against us.

We groan in eager longing, along with creation, for things to be _____.

FOUR PLACES WE RUN TO FIX THINGS

1. _____
You will never be good enough for _____.

2. _____
The fracture in the foundation of every relationship is "You will satisfy me and _____ me."

We find the fullness of life in _____, not in others.

3. The _____
Common grace is God's good gifts to _____.

When we run to the world outside the _____ of what God created things to be enjoyed in, we hamstring and hurt ourselves.

4. _____
Religion says, "I'm going to tilt the scales in my favor by being a _____."

DISCUSS THE VIDEO SEGMENT, USING THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

Although Genesis 1–3 may be familiar, what did you notice for the first time in this message?

Matt described Genesis 3:8 as the most heartbreaking verse in all Scripture. Why is it so tragic?

In what ways do you experience the ongoing brokenness of creation in everyday life? How do you see it at work? In your relationships? With your health?

Matt identified four empty wells we run to in our efforts to fill the cracks in our lives:

- 1. Ourselves.* We strive to create a better version of ourselves to solve our discontent.
- 2. Others.* We run to other people (spouses, children, friends) to complete us.
- 3. The world.* We look to pleasures the world can provide (common graces), such as food or sex, to satisfy our souls.
- 4. Religion.* We try to appease God or earn His favor through religious practices.

Which of these wells do you run to most often?

How have you experienced the emptiness of these wells?

As you go through the next week before our next group experience, try to notice when you're running down one of these crooked paths to dry wells that can never satisfy. Make a mental note or, better yet, write it down. What brought it on? How did you find yourself responding? What were you feeling at the time?

READ SESSION 1 AND COMPLETE THE PERSONAL STUDY BEFORE THE NEXT GROUP EXPERIENCE.

CONSIDER GOING DEEPER INTO THIS CONTENT BY READING CHAPTERS 1–2 IN MATT CHANDLER AND MICHAEL SNETZER'S BOOK RECOVERING REDEMPTION (B&H, 2014).

THE REALITY: EVERYTHING IS BROKEN

The world is busted up. Something's not right. We see that fact all around us. We see it within us.

For many, brokenness works itself out as depression, anxiety, fear, or addiction. Others stay busy achieving, indulging, chasing dreams, climbing ladders, or running away. Whether paralyzed or mobilized by it, we'll all either numb the feeling or grow numb ourselves.

When we feel that gnawing in our guts, that desire for something more—though we're not even sure what that "more" is—something in our souls remembers Genesis 1–2. There's a gaping hole within us that needs to be filled. We're cracked. Everything is broken. And so we groan with all creation in eager longing for restoration.

Our desire to fix this brokenness is the empirical data that we know things have gone wrong and need to be made right.

But we can't fix it, and believe it or not, recognizing that is good news!

1.1

GOD'S CREATION—IT WAS GOOD

And it was . . . good.

What an understatement!

The act of creation itself reads in the original language of the Old Testament with a pulsating cadence, almost like a musical rhythm: God created, it was good, God created, it was good, and everything He created was very good. Perfect harmony, characteristic of the triune Author of life, was written into every nuance of His work. A beauty and balance filled creation. The Hebrew language has a word for this sense of completeness, well-being, and soundness: *shalom*.

Peace.

His world was at perfect peace.

READ GENESIS 1:1–2:3.

Try to picture perfect peace. What does it look like? Sound like? Feel like?

What does this passage tell you about the order of creation—its purpose, goodness, and completeness?

What does this passage reveal to you about God? Think in terms of His nature and character.

What does it reveal to you about humankind and God's intent for us?

In the beginning this planet was once fresh and new. The same planet where you peel open the wrapper on a drive-through dinner while stuck in traffic. The one where you wake up stiff from working out or moaning yourself out of bed with whatever's knotted up overnight. The one where thoughts in your mind sail to dark places while you're standing in the checkout line. The one with terminal diagnoses, addictions, violence, natural disasters ...

"Surely it doesn't have to be this way. This can't be right," you say. But there was a time when the man and the woman never contemplated such things. Nothing in their world was dead or dying. Nothing was ominous or unsafe. Nothing was leaking, running late, unaffordable, or overwhelming. The weather was perfect, work was perfect, marriage was perfect, everything was perfect. Man lived within the perfect freedom and fellowship existing between God, man, and all creation.

That's how it was. That's how He created it.

READ GENESIS 2:8-9, 15-25.

In what specific ways did God provide for Adam and Eve?

How is the Creator providing what you need in life? Think in terms of basic needs such as food and shelter as well as needs in your work and relationships.

The triune God of the universe—Father, Son, and Spirit—existing forever in perfect contentment with one another, overflowed with love and affection onto the canvas of creation.

God didn't need to do it. He didn't need you or anything else. That would imply He was somehow incomplete. God wasn't bored or lonely, needing somebody new to talk to, hang out with, or even love. He wasn't dependent on an ego boost from subordinate creatures. On the contrary, the magnificent Three-in-One, lacking nothing, was delighted to express Himself with the powerful words that brought all things into existence.

How does a picture of God somehow needing to create mankind distort our view of God? Of ourselves? Of the world?

What was your earliest understanding of God? How has your view of God changed over time?

How does an accurate perspective of the triune God change the way you relate to Him? Pray? Worship?

So God did not ever need man. Man and woman always needed God but not because they were originally sinful. They needed Him simply because they were human. He created us from the very beginning to live in a loving, dependent relationship with Him. That's His design.

God formed man from the dust of the ground, breathing life into his nostrils, handcrafted woman from flesh and bone beside man, and He saw that it was good. Sin wasn't there. The Word of God begins where our understanding of the gospel needs to begin: with the peace, wholeness, and glory of creation. In the beginning God created, and it was good.

How does the context of Genesis 1–2 change your understanding of the good news of the gospel? Your understanding of life?

God planted a garden and created Adam and Eve to live and work together in it. Think about the environments where God has placed you to live out His design.

What relationships has He provided? And what implications does God's original design have for your relationships today?

1.2

THE FALL—OUR BROKENNESS

God gave Adam and Eve just one rule. It wasn't complex.

They'd been placed within the pristine wonders of Eden, invited by God's design into a life of no shame, no hiding, no fear, no secrets, no need for sneaking around, nothing at all to worry about. They'd been given pleasant work to do. They'd been given each other, without so much as a stitch of clothes between them. And they'd been given an abundance of options for food, with only one distinct exclusion—the one tree whose fruit, if they ate of it, could be counted on to kill them.

That wasn't heavy-handed. That was a pretty sweet deal.

How can boundaries be loving and lead to freedom?

How do we see obedience and joy being woven into the canvas of a perfect creation?

READ GENESIS 3:1-6.

What is Satan's purpose in temptation? How does questioning God's goodness play into temptation? Questioning God's authority? Questioning what we deserve?

What followed mankind's act of defiance was literally world-changing. Everything screeched violently out of sync from the rhythm and harmony of God's original design. Rebellion had been declared against the King of glory. Everything is broken.

READ GENESIS 3:7-13.

The immediate effects of sin are shame and blame.

How do people hide from God (and each other) because of shame?

Of what are you ashamed? What specific areas in your life are you covering up and wanting to hide from God and/or others?

Shame isn't something of which we have to be convinced. We feel it. We know it's there, and we hate it.

Blame is harder to admit because, by definition, it's a form of denial. It's our go-to defense mechanism. We try to lift the soul-crushing burden of shame off ourselves by passing blame. Notice that in Genesis 3 nobody owned up to what they did. "It was that woman you gave me." "It was that serpent." Nobody's ever responsible. This creates havoc. Relationships are blown up.

Sin isn't accidental. You choose it. Even if considered for only a split-second, there's always an excuse made to justify sin. Think of recurring or seemingly random sin in your life. Whom or what do you usually blame?

Identify a specific person and situation that you've affected by shifting blame. Has blame ever solved a sin problem? How has blame affected your relationships?

Like a bomb, sin rips through our world, rattling the balance of creation and fracturing humanity at our core. Sin and brokenness are inseparable. The Bible boils down the damage report to two universal categories of consequence: futility and pain.

FUTILITY. Paul said creation was “subjected to futility” (Rom. 8:20). That word conveys the idea of being hard-pressed, shoved down, confined, restricted. What had once been peaceful and prosperous has now been turned into strain and struggle. Every effort faces resistance. Every drop of energy can be wrung out of us, and it seems we still don’t have enough to get through the day, the week, or the month.

PAIN. More specifically, the Bible refers to the particular pain of childbirth (see Rom. 8:22). The intense pain of childbirth, both literal and figurative, is a direct result of what sin has brought into our world. Suffering saturates daily life.

We know from reading the aftermath of the fallout in Genesis 3 that the hits just keep on coming. Relational chaos. Work difficulties. And ultimately, death (see Jas. 1:15). It began with Adam and Eve and has been passed down to every generation since, a domino effect of fallen creatures.

What Adam and Eve began, we ourselves have continued—and can’t help continuing. We’ve joined them in rebellion (see Rom. 5:12). How have you experienced this to be true?

Why do you think it’s so hard for people to be transparent and truthful about themselves? What keeps us from coming out of the trees and being vulnerable?

What hope exists in Genesis 3? How do you see God seeking fellowship with Adam and Eve, even after their rebellion? What does this reveal about God’s love for you?

The Bible encourages us to confess our sins to God (see Lev. 5:5) and to one another (see Jas. 5:16). Proverbs 28:13 says,

*Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*

Take a moment now to confess your sins to God. Then write down the name of a godly friend whom you trust and commit to being transparent with that person.

READ PSALM 51.

How would you characterize King David's attitude in this psalm? (If you aren't familiar with the sinfulness over which David is lamenting, you can read 2 Sam. 11–12.)

What glaring differences exist between the response of David (see Ps. 51) and that of Adam and Eve (see Gen. 3)?

What do you learn from David and his attitude toward the seriousness of sin?

PRAY THE WORDS OF DAVID IN PSALM 51. AS YOU DO, BEGIN BY HUMBLY ADMITTING YOUR REBELLIOUS ATTITUDES. DROP YOUR DEFENSES. SURRENDER THE BLAME. CONFESS YOUR SINS TO HIM. THANK JESUS FOR BLOTTING OUT YOUR INIQUITY ON THE CROSS AND, BY DOING SO, CREATING A NEW, PURE HEART INSIDE OF YOU.

1.3

EMPTY EFFORTS—FOUR QUICK FIXES

We're fixers.

None of us can escape the underlying sense of displeasure and disappointment in life. We may not feel it as acutely every day, but it's experienced often enough that each of us rears up with the urge to do something about it, to get out from under the weight, to pick up the pieces, and to fix it.

As we search for relief, we typically run down four primary paths for a quick fix. But they're all crooked, dead-end paths leading to empty wells.

What you'll see in the four crooked paths you're about to examine is that no matter how much progress you may feel you're making, no matter what temporary relief you may experience in distancing yourself from some pain or discomfort, none of the paths ultimately arrive at wholeness. There are no shortcuts. No alternative routes. None of these paths will ever lead to freedom. None of the wells from which you draw will ever fill you to satisfaction. The temporary quenching of your thirst is only a mirage, baiting you to travel further down the dead-end road. The wells dry up, and you hit rock bottom, trapped deep in the hole you've been digging.

We're fixers who can't truly fix anything.

So, it's time for a reality check. No hiding or passing the blame. Get gut-level honest about the four (wrong) places we all run to fix our brokenness.

1. OURSELVES

Hard to believe it, based on our sketchy track record, but we've thoroughly convinced ourselves that the cure for what's wrong with us is a better version of ourselves. Somewhere in our heads is a future person who's the embodiment of self-disciplined, self-defined perfection, that ideal self who'll turn our whole world right side up.

Here's a little diagnostic test: 10 years ago, what did you expect your life to be like at this point? Write as many specifics as possible (personal, professional, relational, recreational, educational).

Did you have a different picture of who you'd be by now? Do you wonder what happened to that person? If you haven't been able to become that new-and-improved you by now, after all this time, what makes you think you're going to become that person by tomorrow? Next year? Ever?

On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 = perfect), how happy are you with yourself? _____

On the same scale, how satisfied are you right now with each of the following areas of your life?

Your time management _____

Your work _____

Your free time _____

Your self-control _____

Your habits _____

Your appearance _____

Your health _____

Your dedication _____

Your ability level _____

Your talents _____

Your success _____

What do your scores tell you about yourself?

We can't redeem ourselves.

List specific ways you try to fix your own life, seeking a better self as the path to happiness and satisfaction.

READ JEREMIAH 17:5-9.

What does Jeremiah say is inevitable for all who rely on themselves?
What's revealed about our hearts?

On the other hand, what's promised for the person who trusts the Lord?

Jeremiah asked a rhetorical question about the heart in verse 9: "Who can understand it?" How can God's response in verse 10 (that He knows our hearts and minds) give us hope in the midst of a bad situation?

2. OTHERS

Every relationship we enter will struggle and will often fail whenever we make the other person into a god who's supposed to make us complete.

Men make terrible gods. Women make terrible gods. Children make terrible gods. Friends, colleagues, teammates, parents, boyfriends/girlfriends—you name it. Whenever you expect people to fill the cracks that are gaping open in your heart, you're moving not in the direction of freedom and healing, not into the experience of being full and satisfied, but down a dark well of conflict and chaos.

The expectation that others can somehow become for us the answer to all our problems is to put an impossible weight on them that they were never intended or equipped to carry. It's going to make life miserable for everybody.

Everyone is jacked up. Everyone has issues. How crazy is it to expect other broken people to fix and rescue you or anyone else?

Others simply can't redeem us.

READ DEUTERONOMY 4:35-40.

Why does God repeat that we must have no other gods before Him?
What does that say about our hearts? What does it say about God's desire for us and our relationship with Him?

READ PSALM 146:3-10.

What logical reasons does the psalmist give for why we shouldn't put our trust in other people, regardless of earthly status? And in contrast, how does the LORD prove His faithfulness?

READ ACTS 4:12.

Who are you tempted to prop up as a god to fix you, giving your life meaning and value? Apply the phrase "no other name" to your own circumstances. Jot down some names—spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, parent, child(ren), friends, pastor—specific people you may rely on for self-worth: There's no other name, not _____ or _____ or _____, by which I can be saved.

3. THE WORLD

Another path we recklessly wander down, thinking the solution to all our problems is waiting just over the next hill, is the one filled with the world's pleasures.

One of the biggest lies about this empty well is that the road is paved only with socially taboo evils. But any of the inherently pleasurable things in this world, given freely as good gifts from a loving Father, can be abused and misused. Settling for anything as sufficient for our happiness, rather than enjoying the Giver of the gift, is idolatry.

When we buy new stuff—maybe with money we don't even have—because it makes us feel we've accomplished something ...

When we take that bite—maybe one more bite—believing it will bring satisfaction to an otherwise mundane or stressful experience ...

When we're dying for sex—maybe with someone new this time—hoping it will calm jittery insecurities ...

We're elevating created things above their Creator.

But the world doesn't have what's needed to redeem us.

READ DEUTERONOMY 6:10-12.

What did God promise the Israelites entering the promised land? What was God's part in supplying for them? What was their part?

What are some ways you've "forgotten" the Lord after He brought you out of some bondage and blessed you with good things?

READ MATTHEW 6:19-21,24,33.

What do these verses reveal to us about money, possessions, and God? What warnings are there for your heart? What promise does God give you?

List specific things in this world that you're tempted to overvalue. What do you chase while contentment seems just out of reach?

4. RELIGION

This one can be the most deceptive path. It knows all the right things to say and do at all the right times. It can be cheered on and admired by well-meaning individuals, small groups, or even churches. It could even have you leading this small group. Religion may be the most dangerous well to draw from, because it can appear to be the life God desires for us. The problem is under the surface. The issue is motivation.

If we're honest, the shocking truth is that religion is just a better version of you (see number 1) with a choir robe on and shouting, "Amen!" You are seeking to create self-worth and acceptance by proving your devotion. You're trying to tip the scales in your favor by doing one more good thing. But your Heavenly Father isn't looking to be impressed by your report card. Your trophies will never earn His approval and affection. He already loves you. Unconditionally.

In your experience how long do your best efforts at devotion quench your thirst for the loving approval of a Heavenly Father?

Religion doesn't work. You can never be redeemed by religion.

READ ISAIAH 64:6-8.

How does Isaiah describe the value of our religious acts?

What does the potter-and-clay illustration reveal to you about your relationship with God? What's your role? How can you be fixed?

READ ISAIAH 1:11-20.

How does God feel about trying to tip cosmic scales in our favor without a genuine relationship? What good does religious activity do?

List specific ways you busily draw from the empty well of religious activity.

Don't worry; there's good news coming. But the truth is that you can't fix yourself. That has to sink in. Feel the gravity of your need.

The answer to your problem isn't at the bottom of any of the four wells we all run to. They hold no lasting satisfaction. Be aware this week of the ways you run down crooked paths to empty wells. Prayerfully remind yourself that you're designed to be completely dependent on your Creator and then trust your loving Father.

READ THE CONCLUDING SCRIPTURE TO GUIDE YOUR PRAYER:

*My people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living waters,
and hewed out cisterns for themselves,
broken cisterns that can hold no water.*

JEREMIAH 2:13

AS YOU PRAY, RECOGNIZE THAT ALL YOUR ATTEMPTS AT REDEMPTION AMOUNT TO FORSAKING GOD AND POURING YOUR BEST HOPES INTO "BROKEN CISTERNS THAT CAN HOLD NO WATER." THIS IS THE FIRST STEP IN A NEW DIRECTION DOWN THE ONLY PATH LEADING TO PEACE AND FREEDOM.

SESSION 2

THE REMEDY: OUR HOPE IN THE GOSPEL

BEGIN DISCUSSION WITH THE ACTIVITY BELOW.

At the end of our previous group experience, we were encouraged to watch out for temptations to go to one of four empty wells—*ourselves, others, the world, or religion*. These are all futile attempts at filling the cracks in our lives.

Which well did you find yourself drawing from throughout week?

What makes the path to that well an easy one for you to wander down looking for a remedy?

What else struck you in your personal study of creation and the fall?

Today is good news! In this session we'll answer the big question raised by the bad news of our reality: is there any hope? There's a remedy.

TO PREPARE FOR THE VIDEO SEGMENT, READ ALOUD PSALM 40:11-17:

*As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!
For evils have encompassed me beyond number;
my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.
Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me! ...
May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!"
As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!*

SESSION 5

GROWING IN HOLINESS: SANCTIFICATION

BEGIN DISCUSSION WITH THE ACTIVITY BELOW.

What struck you in session 4 as you explored the doctrines of justification and adoption? What did you learn about God or about yourself?

How do you wrestle with the fact that we've been made right before a holy God, but our lives still don't always look holy?

When and how did you first become aware of the biblical concept of sanctification? Explain it in your own words.

We've now framed a full picture of what redemption is: the reality, the remedy, the response, and the result. But we know our lives don't always reflect this truth. We have positional holiness before God, but still wrestle with manifest holiness day-to-day. The doctrines of justification and adoption, which are instantaneous and simultaneous, lead us to a third theological term, *sanctification*, which is progressive and ongoing.

TO PREPARE TO VIEW THE VIDEO, READ ALOUD PSALM 51:10-12:

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

WATCH

COMPLETE THE VIEWER GUIDE BELOW AS YOU WATCH SESSION 5.

Positional holiness: when God looks at me, He sees me as spotless and _____.

God wants a manifest holiness, a _____ of our lives where our lives get more and more lined up with how He designed things to work, and we begin to look more and more like _____.

Sanctification requires grace-driven _____.

Vivification is a _____ of the Lord.

The first aspect of growing in visible holiness is setting our minds on the things that are _____ and getting our minds off the things that are _____.

You move toward functional holiness by the _____ of your mind.

Vivification is a training of the mind to think _____ about the Lord.

Mortification is putting to _____ what is sinful in you.

Sanctification is about _____ into the Lord, having our minds _____, and being very serious about putting anything to death that might either be sinful in Scripture or that might hinder my love for the Lord and my delight in the Lord.

HURDLES TO SANCTIFICATION

1. Treating _____

Treating symptoms most commonly reveals itself in _____ strife and conflict.

Treating symptoms reveals itself in _____.

If the _____ isn't changed, managing the behavior doesn't set anybody free.

Sanctification and going after the heart are God saying, "Son, Daughter, I have _____ for you than this."

2. _____ up

There should be, in and among the people of God, a _____ in our weaknesses.

DISCUSS THE VIDEO WITH YOUR GROUP, USING THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

What initial thoughts do you have? What did you learn or see anew?

Matt defined *sanctification* as “the ongoing transformation from one degree of glory to the next by the Holy Spirit of God, making you more and more like Jesus Christ.” He said this requires “grace-driven effort,” moving toward the things of the Lord.

What was your immediate response to the word *sanctification* before watching the video? How would you explain it now?

Two theological words were introduced, *vivification* and *mortification*. In your own words, what was meant by each (see Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:1-4)?

What specific ways have you personally practiced vivification? How is God’s Word involved in giving you life?

Matt used his move to a new house as an example of renewing his mind. How have you developed a new spiritual habit until it became natural?

Colossians 3:5-10 lists some of the things we’re called to put to death (mortify). When you feel that pull toward something that’s clearly sinful, how do you usually handle it?

Matt talked about a couple of hurdles to our sanctification: our tendency to mow over the weeds—dealing with symptoms rather than matters of the heart—and covering up what’s really going on in our hearts. Which of these do you tend toward most?

Before closing in prayer, ask: How can our small group help you in your process of sanctification? How can we encourage you in the renewal of your mind? How can we support you in mortifying what’s sinful inside you?

READ SESSION 5 AND COMPLETE THE PERSONAL STUDY BEFORE THE NEXT GROUP EXPERIENCE.

CONSIDER GOING DEEPER INTO THIS CONTENT BY READING CHAPTER 6 IN MATT CHANDLER AND MICHAEL SNETZER’S BOOK RECOVERING REDEMPTION (B&H, 2014).

GROWING IN HOLINESS: SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification. Learning to turn right where we used to turn wrong.

There are two facets of holiness: *positional* holiness—standing blameless before God with the righteousness imputed to you by Christ—and *manifest* holiness—learning to walk upright as you take up your cross daily and follow Christ.

Honestly, this is often a two-steps-forward, one-step-back kind of stumbling along. But keep this in view: your Heavenly Father knows this and is celebrating each step.

Justification and adoption were both God's work entirely. Sanctification—the visible, tangible, working out of that holiness—requires a joint effort on your part. Positional holiness is a moment of rebirth by God's grace; manifest holiness is a process of spiritual maturation, growing through the submission of your will to God's will.

Going in God's direction doesn't just happen by itself. It takes work. It takes sacrifice. It takes truly believing that what you'll find following His lead is more valuable and more satisfying than what was in the buckets at the bottom of dry wells on dead-end paths.

God has more for you. Believe it. Don't settle for less. Keep going.

5.1

VIVIFICATION: PUTTING LIFE INTO YOUR LIFE

Vivification. You probably haven't seen or used this word in a sentence lately—or ever—but it's one of three key words injected into your vocabulary through session 5. It basically means *to quicken or animate, to bring to life.*

You naturally move toward whatever you're focused on. It has gravity. If you're moving along in one direction, but staring over at something else, you start drifting off course.

Vivification is an intentional focus on godly things that leads you deeper into abundant life. It involves filling ourselves with a renewed way of thinking, based on ultimate realities—things that stir up our love, gratitude, and affections for Jesus.

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-4.

How would your life be different if you consistently kept your focus and attention on things above, where Christ is, rather than on earthly things?

Make a list of "things that are on earth" (v. 2) that often capture your attention.

Make a list of specific "things that are above" (v. 2) to keep in view.

The Bible says you've been given the authority to monitor what you think about. So instead of believing lies, instead of nursing distortions, you can choose to dwell on the truths of the gospel, which you can be sure will always far transcend whatever is trending on social media this afternoon.

We're talking about thinking new stuff. True stuff. The mind is where vivification begins to build steam. By dwelling on what's eternally accurate about God and about

ourselves, we're able to see that our lives are not uncontrolled and uncontrollable, impossible to be corralled, but rather can be brought into alignment with truth. We can make them do what we want them to do—what God created them to do—for our good and His glory.

READ ROMANS 12:2 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 10:5.

How do these two verses add to your understanding of vivification?

What does it look like, practically speaking, to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5)? When do you need to do that most?

In what areas or situations do you find it easiest to conform to the world?

READ JOHN 17:13-19.

What does Jesus say His followers are sanctified in (vv. 17-19)? And what's the result of the sanctification process (v. 13)?

Disciplined time in Scripture—reading, studying, memorizing—isn't legalism. It's smart. If you want to walk in the fullness of life, it makes sense that you train yourself to focus on Christ. Earlier in John 14:6 Jesus spoke of going to prepare a new home for His followers and said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

The Word of God is essential to the daily, ongoing life of a believer. And if God's message is not deep inside you, where you can meditate on it, return to it, and frequently call it back to mind, you won't be able to discern what's really true from what may be an intriguing detour from the Evil One in this world that's no longer your home.

Taking charge of your mind, making sure your thoughts are pointing toward Jesus, is how you remember that your life has a new direction now.

READ HEBREWS 4:12.

In what ways can God's Word help you be transformed?

Do you believe the Bible is God's Word? Let that sink in—God's Word. If that's true, it isn't just a good book. It isn't just pages between covers or words on a screen. Do you believe your Creator, Redeemer, and Father has spoken and will keep speaking to you, His child? If you believe it's God's Word, are you passionately disciplined in spending time to know Him, hear Him, and focus the direction of your life on His way?

When do you spend intentional time with God's Word?

Slow down when you read the Bible. Put yourself into the story so that you can really feel who God is and understand that He will have the same grace for you as for those you read about. This is the kind of thing that fuels affection. It's a training of the mind to think rightly about the Lord, to understand where our new home is so that, out of habit, we don't make a wrong turn to an old house that's crumbling on the inside because it has no solid foundation. Focus on what builds up and brings life. This is vivification.

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:8.

Write this verse as a final reminder of what vivification looks like.

CLOSE YOUR TIME TODAY IN PRAYER, THANKING GOD FOR LEADING YOU TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION, THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND. ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO CONTINUE TO LEAD YOU AS YOU READ GOD'S WORD, AS YOU SET YOUR MIND ON HIM, AS HE RENEWS YOUR MIND.

5.2

MORTIFICATION: PUTTING THE OLD WAYS TO DEATH

Some things just go together. They're inseparable. This is the case with vivification and mortification. You can't do one without the other. Choosing to go one way is choosing not to go the other way. Sanctification requires both—pursuing spiritual life and putting the flesh to death. Putting on the new requires taking off the old.

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-10.

How are vivification and mortification related? Notice the word *therefore* in verse 5 as Paul described vivification (vv. 1-4) and then mortification (vv. 5-10). What's the motivation behind mortification?

There are two sets of sins mentioned in this passage: those in verse 5 and those in verses 8-9. What are the differences between these two lists?

Is one set of sins more serious than the other? Explain your answer.

Remember, there are things that just need to be dealt with, those untamable lions that need to be dragged into the light and put to death. When it comes to how we treat sin encroaching on our spiritual freedom, our tendency is to be way too accommodating with them—and to feel way too confident in our own ability to keep them in check.

If someone else looked at your life, would there be any sins you justify and tolerate as harmless, or could they say you believe the only acceptable sin is a dead sin?

Make a vertical list below of the sins mentioned in Colossians 3:5-9. Then prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to bring conviction about any of these sins in your life. In the space to the right, write thoughts, action steps, or prayers about mortifying these sins.

READ JOHN 16:5-15.

In your own words, explain the Spirit's role in the sanctification process.

Now some things are black and white. The Bible can be super specific. At times we may honestly wish it weren't so clear on certain issues. Other things fall into gray areas.

As you keep maturing in the faith and growing deeper in the sanctification process, God's Spirit will alert you to certain things that, even though they're not morally wrong, are detrimental to your heart and need to be cut out.

There's no Bible verse, for example, that prohibits sleeping until 10:00 on a Saturday morning, killing time with video games or social media, or listening to music from your wilder days. But for whatever reason—for you—there's a noticeable drag on your zeal for Christ when you're involved with these things. These things create resistance and drift, causing you to veer off course or, at best, slow down in your pursuit of God.

Maybe you start to see a connection between a specific activity that isn't addressed and a general characteristic that's described in Scripture. Maybe it's a common grace that, for personal reasons, stirs up your desire to indulge too deeply, distracting you from the Giver of the gift. Maybe there's someone who needs the hope you've found in Christ, but you're too busy to notice or ever cross that person's path. Maybe God just has something better for you, and this morally neutral thing is in its place.

Like it or not, there are some moral absolutes and universal truths.

Like it or not, there are also some things that are relative. They may not be inherently wrong for everyone, but they aren't healthy or helpful for you.

It takes maturity to discern and to personally deal with these issues that are relative. Immaturity either wants to make that thing wrong for everyone (a form of the legalism we explored previously) or justifies it and settles for stunted personal growth (a passive response to conviction). Vivification and mortification delve into even the gray areas in order to grow in sanctification and experience God's best.

READ PSALM 139:23-24 (READ THE WHOLE CHAPTER IF YOU HAVE TIME).

What sin in your life is Scripture absolutely clear about—even if it wasn't listed previously in Colossians 3? Write any specific Scriptures you may know that address sin you're wrestling with.

What things come to your mind that aren't morally wrong or prohibited in Scripture as sinful but are detrimental to your vitality and spiritual growth? What things may not be wrong but drain your focus, time, and energy?

If you need help determining gray areas, did anything immediately come to mind, but your natural response was, *What's wrong with that?* or *Where in the Bible does it say I*

can't do that? Remember, the point is not whether you can do these things; the point is whether there's more joy for you in Christ without them.

What steps will you take to put these gray things to death?

How does putting to death the things of your earthly nature help you more diligently pursue the Lord?

Unlike the instantaneous gifts of justification and adoption, which were automatically deposited in full all at once into your account, sanctification requires a maturation period.

This growth process is a continual shifting of focus from the old to the new. From death to life. From earthly to spiritual.

You simultaneously choose not to turn left but instead turn to right to where you now live. You simultaneously choose not to feed that old desire but rather this new one. You put one to death and walk away from it. You pursue what brings new life.

Vivification. Mortification. They're literally a matter of life and death.

BEGIN YOUR TIME IN PRAYER BY ADMITTING YOUR POWERLESSNESS OVER SIN AND YOUR NEED FOR GOD TO EMPOWER YOU TO CONTINUALLY SEEK HIM, TO RENEW YOUR MIND, AND TO PUT TO DEATH THE SINFUL NATURE INSIDE YOU.

5.3

HURDLES TO SANCTIFICATION

There are hurdles to sanctification. This isn't an easy race. Scripture repeatedly encourages Christ-followers to endure and persevere. So it's not a sprint to perfection. In fact, there's no finish line in this world. We can always take another step closer to God. That's why it's so foolish to pretend that we've arrived, that we're perfect, and then stumble over the hurdles we're about to knock down.

The most common barrier we bump up against in our process of sanctification is mowing over sin.

What makes this the hardest hurdle to get over is that it feels like the right approach. You're dealing with things you don't want in your life. But rather than dealing with heart issues, you identify symptoms and treat those exclusively rather than killing the root. Something ugly pops up. Attack it. Keep everything under control. Things look better on the surface. There may be virtually no trace left of that ugly patch in your life. "Congratulations," people may say. "You've really cleaned up nicely." What a change ... in appearance.

If all you do is mow over your weeds, your work is only going to get harder. You'll constantly be cutting things down, and those weeds will pop up in new places, spreading like wildfire, choking out the good stuff. Just because you're constantly working to keep things trimmed neatly doesn't mean anything is healthy. And eventually that'll catch up to you, ruining everything.

The places where mowing over problems most often occurs are the fields of relationships and addictions. Let's deal with relationships first.

Think about a difficult relationship that's causing you some major headaches and anger. Write the name(s) of the person(s) below.

The easiest thing to do when you start locking horns with another person is to bail. Write them off. Don't answer their calls or texts anymore. Go to a different church. Find a new set of friends. Maybe even a new spouse. But in most cases, while you're fixated on what others have done to hurt or offend you, you're not seeing the need to dig up any roots in your own life. You're mowing over the real issue.

Conflict, by definition, requires two opposing forces.

So, by definition, any conflict you're having with others isn't entirely their fault. You're one of those opposing forces.

When it comes to relational conflict, do you focus on the other person's flaws and weaknesses? How do you recognize your own contribution to the conflict?

Think back over the people you've spent the most time with over the years. Pay attention to the degree of consistency or turn-over. Do you tend to cut off relationships after a short while? Have you skipped around to different small groups or even different churches? Have you bounced in and out of a number of relationships? Are you always in the middle of drama? Do you often feel betrayed? Do you constantly feel unappreciated? Prayerfully consider whether your relational issues are a problem of your heart.

READ ROMANS 12:3 AND PHILIPPIANS 2:3.

What principle do you see here for sanctifying your relationships?

READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-14.

What sanctified character traits cut out the roots of conflict?

Another area where we're prone to mow over the problem is addictive behavior and recurring sin. We're desperate to do whatever we can to stop the behavior. And that's certainly a wise first step in the right direction. But if we treat only the surface issues and evident symptoms without digging in to figure out what's actually spawning the pain from deep inside—even if we successfully rid ourselves of whatever that behavior was—we just trade one thing for another. We swap one thing we hate for another one we can tolerate—for a while. But it'll just be a new weed growing from the same root. And we still won't be free.

What recurring struggle have you been mowing over? How have you seen the root continually pop up in the same way or in new ways?

God wants you free forever from this addiction. What step will you take today to get to the root of the problem?

READ JEREMIAH 6:14.

Covering up is a second hurdle tripping up the progress of your sanctification. It's putting a bandage on a mortal wound. This is the "I'm fine" approach.

It's easy to tell yourself that someone is just being polite when they ask how you're doing, but do you ever open up? Is "Good" or "Blessed" always your answer? Are you deflecting, pretending, and covering up the pain points in your life?

When the fellow believers in your life check on you, asking probing questions to see how you've been applying the promises of God to your most troubling sin areas, you shouldn't feel busted and intruded on. No, it's a regular, encouraging reminder from God, spoken through the caring voice of friends, that He's fighting your battles on all fronts. He's right there with you, doing whatever it takes to strengthen and heal you, giving you the will and ability to obey.

Covering up is just dumb. Remember Adam and Eve trying to hide their shameful nakedness before the all-seeing Creator of the universe? We still think fig leaves and trees will do the trick. We mask ourselves with smiling faces and churchy vocabulary. You're not gaining a thing by covering it up, except keeping yourself enslaved to your

secrets. And if you're being honest with yourself, you know this is true. Do you struggle with sexual immorality? Then confess it. With anger? Confess it. With lust? Just go ahead and confess it. With embarrassing addictions? Yes. Get it out there. The best way to start stripping sin of its power is to drag that dark beast into the light. How could that be any worse than what it's already done and is still doing to you?

READ PSALM 32:3-4.

What are the real results of covering up or pretending you're something you're not?

Is your small group a place where you feel you can be your true self, without covering up or pretending? Why or why not?

Are there any barriers, such as mistrust or broken confidentiality that keep you from completely opening up with your group? Write any of these barriers below.

How can the idea of sanctification—the fact that none of us are there yet, we're all still growing and becoming, we're all still learning how to live out the gospel—help you be honest and vulnerable with your group?

ASK FOR GOD'S POWER TO STOP MOWING OVER AND COVERING UP IN YOUR PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION. USE PSALM 139 FROM SECTION 5.2 AS A GUIDE FOR YOUR PRAYER TO BE FULLY KNOWN.

SESSION 6

KNOWING OUR BROKENNESS: FREE FROM SHAME

BEGIN DISCUSSION WITH THE ACTIVITY BELOW.

What was most helpful in your personal study of session 5? How did you see sanctification with fresh eyes?

Explain and give examples of vivification and mortification.

Toward the end of the previous personal study, you were asked several questions about our group—whether it’s a safe place to be real. Would anyone like to share what you wrote or thought about? (This is a good time not to cover up!)

For the next several sessions we’ll dig deeper into specific, practical examples of sanctification. We’ll start by examining how to break free from two unhealthy cycles, and then we’ll look at developing healthy growth in our lives. The next step toward gospel freedom is a step we take together—being fully known.

TO PREPARE FOR THE VIDEO SEGMENT, READ ALOUD PSALM 25:1-12:

*To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust;
let me not be put to shame;
let not my enemies exult over me.
Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.
Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O LORD! ...
For your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.*