

NEXT STEPS

MODULES 1-3



Over the next year, the Spirit will lead us deep into His Word. Expectantly, we'll walk through green pastures and beside quiet waters. He will restore our souls. As He ministers to you through this study and the members of your group, be prepared to share what our Master is teaching you and to put it into practice. We'll examine the following dynamics of faith.

Scope and Sequence

Module	Weeks	Optional Reading
1) God After Man's Own Heart	1-4	<i>God's Pursuit of Man</i> , Tozer
2) Biblical Fellowship	5-8	<i>Life Together</i> , Bonhoeffer
3) The Beautiful Fight	9-12	<i>Mere Christianity</i> , Lewis
4) Fathered by God	13-20	<i>Fathered by God</i> , Eldridge
5) The Transformational Journey	21-24	
6) Intermission	25-26	
7) Discipleship	27-34	<i>Radical</i> , Platt
8) Cultivating the Character of Christ	35-42	<i>The Spirit of the Disciplines</i> , Willard
9) The "With You" Life	43-46	<i>The Practice of the Presence of God</i> Brother Lawrence
10) The Reason for God	47-50	<i>The Reason for God</i> , Keller

The reading assignments are optional but not required for your group. Your group is entrusted with the decision to either utilize the reading or not. For example, your group may decide to use only one of the suggested books as a supplement to the home study. We trust your judgment.

WEEK 1

Created *FOR* Community

*The LORD has sought out a man after his
own heart and appointed him leader of
his people – **1 Samuel 13:14***

Day 1

Read Genesis chapters 1-3.

Context: The Genesis narrative speaks of beginnings—the beginnings of all things. The creation narrative is foundational to our understanding of not just the creation account but the created relationship and covenant of God to humanity.

The Word of God

Observation: What do you see? What does it say? Mark the key words and thoughts. Record them in this space.

Interpretation: What is the primary theme in these chapters?

Summary: Restate the heart of these verses in your own words.

Implication: How are these verses calling you to live?

Day 2 Deeper Steps - Personal

Read Genesis 1:26-27.

*Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."
27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

What do you think was God's purpose in creating us?

For whose or what benefit is the creation of mankind?

In whose image and likeness were you created?

What difference does it make to know that you were created in the image of the Triune God?

What is God's specific purpose for your life?

Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

There are times when men question their purpose in life. We ask, “Why am I here?” “Is this all there is?” “Isn't there more to life than this?”

You were created with a purpose. You are not a cosmic accident. You are not designed merely for yourself or even for your family. God designed you to be uniquely you. The greatest gift you can give the world is just to be all He made you to be.

The God who created the galaxies in the sky, the depths of the oceans, the mountaintops and valleys that bring us awe—that same God created you. You are God's handiwork, and you are just as incredible as the Grand Canyon or the shores of the most beautiful seas.

The Greek word we translate into the English word “handiwork” is *poiema*; it's the root from which we get the word “poem.” Your life is a work of art, a poem.

Reflect on this passage from Ephesians 2. What is its implication as you consider the ultimate purpose of your life?

How would your self-image and identity shift if you embraced your life as God's handiwork—a work of art—a poem? What would change inside of you? What would change around you?

Day 3

Bolder Steps - Relational

Read Genesis 2:15–25.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

18 The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

19 Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 21 So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the Lord

God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

25 Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame

What did community look like before God created Eve?

Adam is in relationship with God. He walks with God "in the cool of the day," yet God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

What can you infer from this passage about God's intentions for His creation?

Community between Adam and Eve was blessed. There was no separation between them. They lived in complete intimacy with each other and with God. How does the narrative describe their feelings?

Is it possible to live in relationships in which no shame is felt? What dynamics would be present in this type of relationship?

Have you ever experienced this kind of intimacy in a relationship? Describe what this type of relationship looks and feels like.

When you think about the word "shame," what image comes to mind?

In his book *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, John Ortberg gives us a picture of a man living in shame. He writes,

A pastor struggled for years with sexual addiction. Finally, he became totally despondent with himself. He joined an inpatient care group but was mostly silent as others shared.

When he decided not to come one day, the leader found he had fallen back into his addiction the previous night. Against every fiber of his instinct, he came back to the group. He shared how much he despised himself and his hypocritical behavior.

When he saw that others wept for him, the weight of the secret that piled up on him was shattered and his shame was broken.

How do you—or how have you—dealt with shame?

Spend a few moments meditating on Psalm 91:1-2. The Psalmist writes:

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

Give God praise for being your refuge and your fortress. Praise Him for being trustworthy. Praise Him for His invitation to rest in Him.

Day 4 Courageous Steps - Communal

Suggested Reading - Chapters 1-2 of *God's Pursuit of Man* (Tozer)

In Chapter 1, Tozer describes God as the “great Antecedent.” He writes, “Because He is, we are and everything else is.”

Knowing that God is and has always been, that He is the life-bringer and life-sustainer, how can you further trust Him with your relationships, your work, your money, your time?

In Chapter 2, Tozer parallels the world of sport and the life of the Christian. He writes, “By observing the ways of men at play I have been able to understand better the ways of men at prayer. Most men, indeed, play at religion as they play at games, religion itself being of all games the one most universally played.” He concludes that we play at

games—and they are good games—but we experience no transformation. “The changes are form only; they are not in kind.”

Describe a few of the heart changes you've experienced in the last year. What has changed inside of you—what transformation has taken place?

Read Genesis 3:6–24.

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and

they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

9 But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate."

13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

14 So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life."

15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring

and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

16 To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life."

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field."

19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

20 Adam named his wife Eve because she would become the mother of all the living.

21 The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

22 And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

23 So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Separation is the consequence of sin. As you study these verses, how do you see that separation?

How have you experienced separation as a result of sin? If so, what form did this separation take?

Reread verse 8. What do Adam and Eve do after they sin?

Reread verse 9. God doesn't wait for Adam to come to Him. God is always the Divine Initiator. Even in sin, God comes after Adam's heart. Describe God's immediate response.

God asks Adam three questions. Write those three questions here.

1.

2.

3.

Adam responds to each question. God responds to Adam. Even in sin, God responds in love to Adam. God does not relent. What does God do?

Spend a few moments reflecting on these three questions:

“Where are you?”

“Who told you that you were naked?”

“What is this you have done?”

Based on your own life experience, what do these words mean to you?

How does God come after your heart?
What does He say to you?

In what ways do you resonate with Adam's responses?

How does God ask you these same kinds of questions? What is God's ultimate response to Adam — and to you?

It's often said that the chief sin of men is "the sin of passivity." We are like Adam in that we passively stand by and allow sin and separation to occur. We busy ourselves with the material world while disengaging relationally or emotionally from what is going on in or around us.

Much has been written about men being "leaders." But many men can get lost, not knowing how to lead in their marriages, their families, or their relationships. It's much easier for us to lead a company or oversee an outdoor project. The reality is that we don't need a finalized blueprint or a research and development budget to be initiators. We just need to initiate! Initiate in conversation. Initiate in our finances. Initiate with our children. Initiate in sex with our wives. Initiate in praying with our families. Initiate in the spiritual disciplines. Initiate a conversation with God.

Recognizing that God is the Divine Initiator and that He is after your own heart, what are four ways in which you can be an initiator this week? Describe each.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Jesus has come to set everything right. Jesus has come into the world as the Divine Initiator. And He has come after your heart. He has come to break the chains of sin, wash away your shame, and resurrect and restore you to perfect relationship with the Triune God.

Prayer & Care

Read Luke 5:17-26. Consider your personal role as *the one with a need* and think about the needs you have today.

How can your NEXT STEPS brothers “lower you on your mat to Jesus” so He can touch those needs?

Spiritual	Relational	Physical	Emotional

Share how these needs are impacting you. Are you:

•worried •fearful •empty •lonely •weak •weary •heavy •challenged •hurt •other