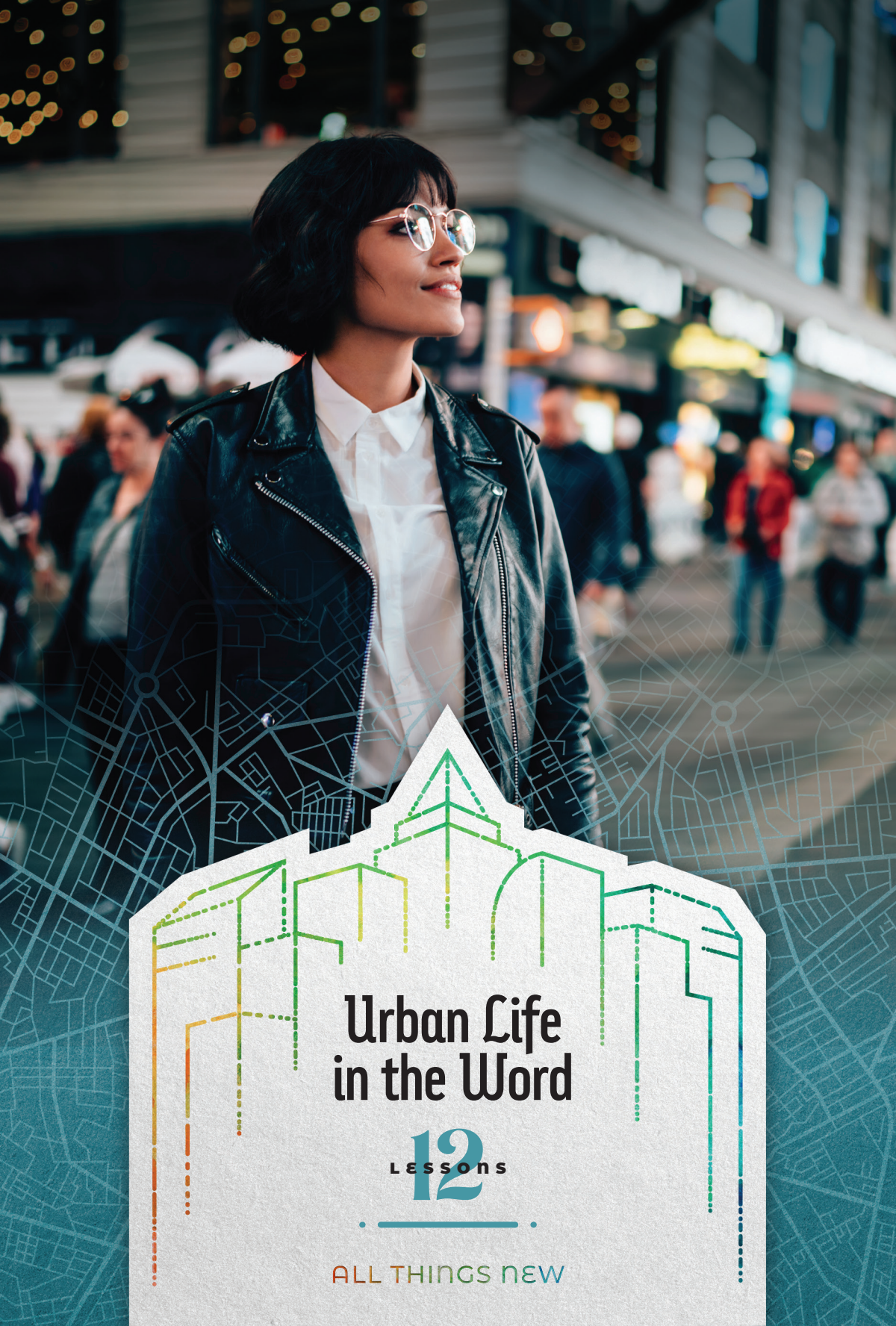

Urban Life in the Word

12 LESSONS

ALL THINGS NEW

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Urban Life in the Word



A TYRANT MEETS GOD

God gave us the Bible because He loves us, and so that we can get to know Him and love Him back.

GET IT

Deep down we all crave connection. We want to love and be loved. We crave friendship, trust, and belonging.

Why?

Check Genesis 1:27 and 1 John 4:16.

We're made in God's image, and God *is* love. That means we're designed to give and receive love. But love requires knowing and being known. Because God is love, He wants us to know Him. Jesus said:

"No longer do I call you servants . . . but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I made known to you" (John 15:15).

> The most powerful being in the universe doesn't want power over us. Instead, He wants to be our friend.

That's wild!

The most powerful being in the universe doesn't want power over us. Instead, He wants to be our friend. And that's why He gave us the Bible.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16).

God is talking to us. If you want to know God, get into the Bible.

PROCESS IT

Consider King Nebuchadnezzar, an arrogant ruler who was humbled by a dream from God.

Read Daniel 2-4 and talk about it.

The dream foretold more than 2,500 years of history in advance, including the demise of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom.

The dream featured a giant statue with a gold head, silver chest, bronze belly, iron legs, and feet of iron and clay. A massive stone shattered the

statue, turning it to dust, and then the stone grew into a mountain.

A captive slave named Daniel interpreted the dream. The prophecy predicted the rise and fall of four major empires:

- Babylon (626–539 B.C.)
- Media-Persia (539–331 B.C.)
- Greece (331–168 B.C.)
- Rome (168 B.C.–A.D. 476)

Rome then split into the nations of modern Europe. The accuracy of the prophecy proves the Bible is from God. If the first part came true, we can trust the last part:

"The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44).

This prophecy reveals that God is going to set up an eternal kingdom that each of us can be part of. It also reveals that God knows everything, including you and me. He knows our flaws, our fumbles, our failures, yet He still loves us. He wants to reach the "tyrant" within each of us—our pride and selfishness—and make us His eternal friends.

After his encounter with God, Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed:

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven. . . . And those who walk in pride He is able to put down" (Daniel 4:37).

Bible prophecy provides solid reasons to trust God. Jesus explained the point of prophecy this way: "I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe" (John 14:29).

EXPERIENCE IT

Tyrants fall, either humbled by God's love or shattered by His justice. When we read the Bible, we must remember that "God is love" (1 John 4:16). This is the key. Every true teaching reveals some facet of God's character of love. Any teaching that contradicts God's love is false. Truth isn't just dry facts. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible unveils God's character so that we can know His love for us and can love Him in return.

We pursue many things—school, money, fun. But we were made for more. Connecting with God, our Creator, is the most meaningful thing we can do. King David said: "I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure" (Psalm 119:162). God's Word is a treasure because it allows us to hear His voice and know His love.



Urban Life in the Word



LOVE × 3

God is a beautiful, blissful, eternal friendship, and we are invited into it.

GET IT

"God is love" (1 John 4:16). Straight up. And love isn't about "me, me, me." It's all about others.

Everybody has a name, and every name has a meaning. Google your name right now to find out what it means, if you don't already know. In the Bible, names are a really big deal. "Adam" means *made from the dirt,* and God made him from the dirt (Genesis 2:7). "Jacob" means *deceiver*, and the dude was a sneaky liar until God changed his name to "Israel," which means *one who wrestles with God and wins* (Genesis 25:26; 32:28).

Names matter!

The first time we meet God in the Bible, God has a name that drops some wild truth on us. Genesis 1:1 says:

"In the beginning *God* created the heavens and the earth."

In Hebrew, the word isn't just "God," like some generic title. It's *Elohim*—a plural name, indicating that the one true God is more than one person. God introduces Himself as a plural reality, not a singular one.

Then it gets even deeper. Verse 26 says:

"Then God said, 'Let *Us* make man in *Our* image.'"

Who's talking to whom? God to God! God is "Us" and "Our." Not "I" and "Me." From the jump, in the Bible, before anything was made, God existed as a divine relationship, not just a solitary self.

PROCESS IT

So come back to the Bible's biggest truth bomb:

"God is love" (1 John 4:16).

If love is gonna exist, you gotta have more than one person. If God *is* love, He can't be a lonely solo act. He's gotta be more than one person, but still just one God. That's why we talk about the Trinity—God the Father, God the

Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit—three distinct persons, one divine family.

The Father is God, but not all there is of God.

The Son is God, but not all there is of God.

The Spirit is God, but not all there is of God.

All three together make up the whole big beautiful reality of God.

Think about the number three. Two people can be tight, but throw a third person in the mix, and things change. We say "Two's company, three's a crowd." That's because we know a third person puts love to the test. When your best friend starts kicking it with somebody new, you can feel jealousy creep in if you're not careful. But if you let that third person in, something beautiful happens. You learn to celebrate your friend being friends with somebody else, and you can accept that third person as your friend too. That's when love stops being selfish.

God's always existed in perfect love—no ego, no jealousy, just pure other-centeredness.

Three is the smallest number where pure love exists. One person? No love is possible. Two people? Easy to get stuck in possessive selfishness. But three? Now each person gets to give love, receive love, and share love. That's the genius of the three, of the Trinity. God's always existed in perfect love—no ego, no jealousy, just pure other-centeredness.

EXPERIENCE IT

Jesus came to our world from "the bosom of the Father," or intimate friendship with the Father (John 1:18). Praying to the Father, He said, "You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). Then He prayed that "the love with which You loved Me may be in them" (verse 26).

What!

We are invited into the inner circle of God's love.

You can't imagine anything better than that.



Urban Life in the Word



BIG FALL, BIG LOVE

We've all messed up big-time, but God still loves us!

GET IT

A lot of people tell our story like this:

Once upon a time there was nothing. Then—*BOOM!*—13.8 billion years ago a huge explosion happened, and everything came from that—stars, planets, us. Life is just a random accident. We're here to look out for ourselves, grab what we can, then die. The end.

Not exactly a feel-good story.

The Bible tells it way differently.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

Six days later there was a big beautiful world with humanity as the climax:

"God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27).

Being made in God's image means we were built to love the way God loves. That's supposed to be our vibe—love alone and nothing else.

But look around. The world is full of evil, pain, and death. We all know something's wrong. Deep down we want good to win and evil to stop. But if we keep it 100 percent honest, we know we're part of the problem. Let's break down how we got here.

PROCESS IT

Humanity fell on three levels: thoughts, feelings, and actions.

It started in the mind. In Genesis 3 the serpent slithered up to Eve and started planting lies about God. According to Revelation 12:9, the serpent is Satan.

First, he made God sound super-strict: "Did God really say you can't eat from every tree in the garden?" Actually, God gave them freedom with one safe boundary (Genesis 2:16, 17).

Second, he called God a liar: "You will not die." God said that would happen if you sinned.

Finally, he painted God as selfish: "God knows that in the day you eat of it [the forbidden tree] . . . you

will be like God." Satan basically said, "God is *not* love. He's a selfish boss trying to control you." Eve bought the lie and ate the fruit, and Adam ate it too.

That lie broke their trust in God. Bad feelings followed, and then straight-up rebellion. Right after they ate the forbidden fruit their connection with God was broken. Then their relationship with each other fell apart too. Blame entered the picture, then shame.

The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). God's glory is His good character (Exodus 33:18, 19). Sin is anything that goes against goodness. We messed up big-time, but God didn't give up on us.

> God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to save us, not to condemn us.

EXPERIENCE IT

Read John 3:16, 17 and talk about it.

God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to save us, not to condemn us.

Now read Matthew 4:1-11 and talk about it.

Satan came at Jesus with three temptations, like a repeat of his attack on Adam and Eve.

The first two: "If You're really the Son of God. . ." Satan was trying to make Jesus doubt God's love, but Jesus stayed locked in with trust.

Third: Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms if He would worship him. That would've been Jesus looking out for Himself and leaving us behind. Jesus refused. His love for the Father and for us stayed solid. So solid that He even died for our forgiveness. As He hung on the cross, He prayed, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). This was the epic act of love that saved us. Jesus fixed our fall. In Him God's love is on full display.

Now comes the big question: Do you believe God really loves you the way Jesus showed?

Yeah, we are fallen big-time. But God's love is bigger!





TRUE SUPERHERO

God loves you more than His own life, and the death of Jesus on the cross proves it.

GET IT

We're all hooked on superheroes—Batman, Iron Man, Superman, Spider-Man. We can't get enough of those stories. Why? Because deep down we all feel it: we're in danger and need somebody to show up and save us. Evil is real, so we keep telling the same story—bad guy rises up, hero shows up, big fight, big rescue.

Those superhero movies are a mix of truth and fiction. The truth is we do need to be rescued. But we don't really need saving from outside danger. The real threat is inside us—sin, lies, shame, that messed-up stuff in our hearts. We need more than a superhero—we need a Savior who can set us free from the darkness living in us.

PROCESS IT

We're fallen, broken, and straight-up sinful. But when sin took us down, God stepped up with a promise:

"I will make you and the woman enemies to each other. Your descendants and her descendants will be enemies. One of her descendants will crush your head, and you will bite his heel" (Genesis 3:15, NCV).

God was talking to Satan in front of Adam and Eve. He promised to send a Warrior through the woman's family line. That Warrior—Jesus—would crush the serpent's head, but He'd get hurt doing it. That was the first hint of Jesus coming as a human and suffering for us.

Jesus didn't show up like our movie heroes with force and violence. He came with real love—self-sacrificing love. He died "for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3).

The prophet Isaiah painted the picture hundreds of years before it happened:

Read Isaiah 53:6-12 and talk about it.

We've all messed up big-time. But instead of leaving us to deal with our sin and guilt alone, God put all our wrongs on Jesus. Innocent Jesus got treated like the worst criminal. He stayed quiet while He was beaten and then nailed to the cross. He took the punishment we deserved.

Why? Because of love.

"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Jesus took our place so we don't have to stay stuck in sin and shame. That's the real superhero move.

EXPERIENCE IT

All those superhero stories point to our need of rescue, but we don't need somebody to beat up the bad guys on the outside. We need Jesus to free us from the sin and guilt that eats us up inside.

Jesus is the Savior we need. Promise made. Promise kept. The apostle Paul put it like this: "For all the promises of God in Him are *Yes*" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

In the light of the cross, God is saying, "I got you."

No more shame.

No more blaming everybody else.

No more cover-ups or addictions trying to numb the pain.

Come to the cross. Look at Jesus hanging there with your sin on Him. Believe in your heart that He did it for you. Give Him your messed-up life and let Him make you new. If that's what you want, close your eyes and talk to Him. Something like:

"Jesus, I know I've messed up. I believe You died for me and rose again. I trust You as my Savior. Forgive me, clean me up, and help me live for You. Amen."

> We've all messed up big-time. But instead of leaving us to deal with our sin and guilt alone, God put all our wrongs on Jesus.

He's waiting. The real Superhero already won the fight. Now He wants you on His team.



Urban Life in the Word



LAW OF LOVE

The Ten Commandments show what love looks like in action.

GET IT

Picture a city like Los Angeles or Chicago, but way better. Every couple stays faithful and deeply in love. Nobody's scheming to take what belongs to somebody else. Everybody tells the truth, respects their parents, values life, and handles conflict with zero violence. No broken relationships. Everybody knows God as perfect love and worships Him from the heart with real joy.

Would you want to live there or run from it? Obviously, that's the ultimate spot—peace, trust, happiness on another level. That's exactly what a community would look like if everybody was living in sync with the Ten Commandments.

Talk about Exodus 20:1-17 and Matthew 22:36-40.

The first four commandments show how to love God. The last six show how to love people. Real love protects relationships. Jesus said the whole law hangs on loving God with everything you got and loving your neighbor the way you love yourself.

Since "God is love," His law is love too. **Check Malachi 3:6, James 1:17, Hebrews 13:8, 1 John 4:8, and Romans 13:10.** God doesn't flip-flop, so His law of love doesn't either.

PROCESS IT

Some folks hear "law" and think control, rules, killjoy vibes. But that's a misunderstanding. James calls it "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). David said keeping God's law makes your heart bigger: "I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart" (Psalm 119:32).

Living inside God's law actually expands your freedom and joy. Who's happier—the honest person everybody trusts, or the liar nobody believes? Who has deeper

> Jesus said the whole law hangs on loving God with everything you got and loving your neighbor the way you love yourself.

love—the couple who stays loyal, or the ones who cheat? Who's freer—the calm person or the one always angry and violent? God's law isn't a cage. It's more like wings to fly into the best possible life.

But here's the problem—we can't keep it on our own. Paul said it raw: "The law is holy. . . . But I am carnal, sold under sin. . . . What I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" (Romans 7:12-15). Sin is breaking the law of love (1 John 3:4). We're curved in on ourselves—selfish by nature. No self-help, religion, or willpower can fix our deep brokenness.

We need a Savior.

Enter Jesus.

He brings "righteousness by faith" (Galatians 5:5). Jeremiah called Him "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jeremiah 23:6). Paul explains that God gives us Jesus' perfect record as a free gift. Even though we're guilty, God, because of Christ, treats us as if we're innocent (Romans 4:17; 5:15-19). That grace lifts the weight of trying to earn God's love.

EXPERIENCE IT

We don't keep the law to get saved. We keep it because we're already saved and loved. It flows from the heart, powered by love, not fear.

Paul used marriage as an illustration. You're no longer "married" to the old way of trying to earn salvation by rules. You're now married to Christ, so you serve in "newness of the Spirit," not in oldness of "the letter" (Romans 7:1-6). No legalism, just obedience from love!

I admit I can't do this on my own. I grab onto Jesus' righteousness by faith and ask Him to write His law of love in my heart. As David prayed: "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8).

I'm all in with God's law. How 'bout you?



Urban Life in the Word



DEEP REST

The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that God alone is our Creator and our Savior.

GET IT

Genesis 1 and 2 tell the amazing story of creation. God made the world "good" on all levels. For the grand finale He made humans in His own "image" and pronounced the finished work "very good." Then He did something to embed in our minds the meaning of it all: God rested on the seventh day.

What?

Why?

God didn't rest in exhaustion, but rather in pure satisfaction. On the seventh day no work was done, because all the work was *already done*. Then came the whole point of it all—enjoyment, fellowship, love. "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Genesis 2:3). It is a special day set apart from the others to remind us of the foundational truth of our existence:

God didn't rest in exhaustion, but rather in pure satisfaction.

"It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves" (Psalm 100:3, a Sabbath song in common worship).

The same holds true for salvation. It is God who saves us, and not we ourselves. Every week the Sabbath recenters us in this truth.

PROCESS IT

Exodus 20:8-11 puts the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments as a memorial of creation.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 puts the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments as a memorial of salvation.

But why include the Sabbath in the moral law at all?

Because the Sabbath is part our moral reality by defining who we are in relation to God and who God is in relation to

us. He is God, and we are not. We are His creation, and we are totally dependent on Him for our present existence and our eternal salvation.

Talk about Psalm 51:10 and Ephesians 2:8-10. Notice the Bible uses *creation* language to describe *salvation*. Creation was all God's work. Salvation is all God's work too.

On the cross Jesus shouted, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). On Friday He finished the work of saving us, on Sabbath He rested in the tomb, and on Sunday He came forth, resurrected. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that salvation is 100 percent God's gift. We can't save ourselves. The Sabbath protects us from legalism and keeps our eyes on Jesus.

This is why the Sabbath belongs to the new covenant. Isaiah 56:1-7 foretold that both Jews and Gentiles would keep the Sabbath as part of God's one covenant family. This prophecy was fulfilled in Acts 13. Paul preached in a Jewish synagogue on Sabbath. Then the Gentiles asked to hear more the next Sabbath. The non-Jewish believers did not schedule Paul to preach to them on Sunday, as if the Sabbath were only for Jews, and New Testament Christians were now worshipping on Sunday. All New Testament believers kept God's Sabbath. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27). It is God's gift to humanity as a whole, to remind us that God is our Creator and our Savior.

EXPERIENCE IT

We naturally try to earn God's love. But Jesus invites us to a different vibe:

"Come to me, all of you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest. . . . Learn from Me . . . . You will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-30, NIrV).

This rest hits deep on the inside. God already loves you. When you believe it, you'll start to love God back. The Sabbath reminds us each week that there is nothing we can do to earn God's favor, because we already have it. Let's make this decision together:

I choose to keep the Sabbath holy. It's my weekly reset button. God finished everything—creation and salvation—so I can rest in His grace. No more grinding to be worthy. I belong to Him because He loves me.

That's deep rest.



Urban Life in the Word



NEW STORY

The human story has been rewritten in Christ. We enter that new story through baptism.

GET IT

"Yes, I have loved *you* with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have *drawn* you" (Jeremiah 31:3).

It is *you* God loves, the very *you* that *you* are. When God saves you, He doesn't erase your personality. He is fixing what sin broke in you so you can be the best version of yourself. He saves you while preserving your freedom—by *drawing* you, not by forcing you. He's not some control freak trying to turn you into a robot. He hates your sin because He loves you and knows it's destroying you.

Talk about Luke 15:11-31.

That boy messed up bad—wasted his dad's cash, partied hard, ended up broke and dirty. But when he came crawling home, his dad didn't shame him. He ran to him, hugged him tight, and threw a party for him. That's exactly how God feels about you. No matter how far you've gone, He's waiting with open arms.

PROCESS IT

Talk about John 3:1-17.

God's got a plan to change your life while keeping your real self intact. Jesus called it being "born again." It's like starting over, going back to the beginning before all the drama and damage happened.

In verse 16, what motivated God to give Jesus for our salvation?

In verse 17, what does God specifically intend *not* to do to you?

Love attracts.

Condemnation manipulates.

God is all about love, not manipulation.

When you get born again, you're still you—just cleaned up with a fresh start. Jesus said you gotta be born of water and the Spirit. That means getting baptized in water and getting the Holy Spirit in your

heart. Jesus got baptized Himself to show us how (Matthew 3).

Paul breaks it down in Romans 6:1-11.

When you go under the water, it's like your old sinful life dies and gets buried with Christ. When you come up out of the water, you rise to new life.

Talk about Matthew 28:19, 20.

To be baptized "in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" is to be immersed in *the character of God*, in the love that the Father, Son, and Spirit enjoy with one another. Baptism in the threefold name of God means you are identifying yourself as a partaker of Their love—diving into the love that flows between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

EXPERIENCE IT

Peter said it straight:

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38, NIV).

The word "baptism" means *immersion*. You go under the water to say, "My old life is gone. I'm with Jesus now."

The word "repent" means you are flipping your script. You are choosing to turn around and go the opposite direction now.

The Holy Spirit then moves in to teach you truth and empower you to live for Jesus.

Baptism is your public "Yes" to God's love. It shows you're all in with Jesus. If that sounds good to you, let's go with this decision:

Yes, I want to get baptized. I'm claiming the story of Jesus as my new story. I'm hyped that God loves the real me and wants to make me better. From now on, I'm growing with Him every day.

When you go under the water, it's like your old sinful life dies and gets buried with Christ. When you come up out of the water, you rise to new life.



Urban Life in the Word



NEW COMMUNITY

Now that you have a new story in Christ, you need a new community to encourage and empower you to heal, grow, and share the gospel.

GET IT

When a baby is born, they come into a family. The same thing happens when you get born again. We step into God's big spiritual family and live in community with one another.

God Himself is all about community. As we have previously discovered, the one true God is composed of three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who live in perfect love and friendship. God made us in His image, so we're wired for connection too. We need each other. The Christian experience is not a solo project. Sin broke our relationship with God and people. Salvation is all about fixing the brokenness.

Jesus called this new family the "church" (Matthew 16:18). It's not just a building—it's a crew of believers living life together with God. **Check 1 John 1:1-4.** John calls the church a "fellowship," *koinōnia* in Greek, which means *community, shared life, connected living*. When you stay tight with God and with other believers, "joy" hits you deep and grows.

PROCESS IT

What does this look like in real life?

Talk about Acts 2:40-47.

The early church was into doing four main things:

1. *Healing*: People were getting "saved"—*sózó* in Greek—which means to be healed, made whole, restored. The church is a place where broken people get fixed up from the inside out.

2. *Connecting*: They stuck tight to the teachings of the apostles, ate together, and prayed. Bible

study, real friendships, and prayer were nonnegotiable.

3. *Sharing*: They shared their stuff. If somebody was struggling, the whole crew stepped up. No one was left to suffer without help.

4. *Attracting*: Because of all this love in action, people were drawn, and the church grew. People saw something real and wanted in on it.

This is church done right.

How we treat each other matters. Ephesians 4:1-16 breaks it down. We are to live in a way that matches our message. Each member of the church is called by Christ to be humble, patient, and gentle, and to pursue peace. And every single one of us gets spiritual gifts so we can build each other up. Nobody sits on the bench.

The church does not exist for itself. We have a job to do. Jesus has called us to show the world who God really is. First Peter 2:9 says we are chosen to "proclaim the praises" of the One who called us out of "darkness" into "light." Our mission is to share the good news about God's good character as revealed in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4-6).

The church is also called to stand up for the world—to defend the weak, feed the hungry, advocate for justice, show mercy, and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Real faith gets its hands dirty helping people. **Talk about Proverbs 31:8, 9; Isaiah 1:17; Luke 10:30-37; Matthew 7:12.**

EXPERIENCE IT

The church should be known for three things: a loving spirit among its members, practical help for the streets, and sharing the gospel.

You can't grow by yourself. You need the church of Christ as your church. Love grows when you give it away. When the church loves the way God loves, the world starts believing the message we preach (John 13:35).

> Love grows when you give it away.

Is it your desire to link up with believers who use their gifts, time, and resources to shine God's love into the world? Then you're in. The church is your new community.



Urban Life in the Word



THREE FINAL MESSAGES FROM HEAVEN

God has three final messages for the world. At the heart of all three is the good news of His unstoppable love for us.

GET IT

Imagine you're in a helicopter looking miles ahead. You spot a bridge completely gone, nothing but a deadly drop into raging water. Your homie is speeding down that same road, no clue. Would you scream a warning? Of course! Love makes you shout, or at least send a text message. That's what Bible prophecy does. God sees further than we do and drops warnings so that we can get ready.

In Revelation—the last book of the Bible—God sends three epic final messages to everybody on earth. We gotta understand them. **Read Revelation 14:6-12.**

PROCESS IT

The first angel's message has five parts:

1. The everlasting gospel
2. Fear God
3. Give Him glory
4. The judgment hour
5. Worship the Creator

The "everlasting gospel" is the forever good news that God loves you "with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). It shows God's true character through Jesus. Even when we were messed up, Jesus chose the cross instead of giving up on us (Romans 5:8). This good news is for everyone.

"Fear God" doesn't mean being scared of God. It means being blown away by how good He is. Real fear of God brings respect, trust, and closeness. **Check out Psalm 25:14, 130:4, 1 John 4:16-19.**

"Give glory to God" means showing how beautiful His character is. When we live right, people see Jesus in us and praise God (Matthew 5:16).

The judgment is good news, too. Daniel 7:21, 22 says it's the time God steps in, wins for His people, and shows His favor over them.

The last part calls us to worship the Creator. That points straight back to the Sabbath—God's sign that He made us and saved us (Exodus 20:8-11).

The second angel's message announces the fall of bad religion.

"Babylon is fallen!" Babylon in the Bible is the symbol of bad religion that mixes truth with lies, looks godly but pushes control and confusion. It's self-exalting, just like the old Babylonian Empire that forced worship (Daniel 3). The first angel's true gospel causes this fake system to crumble. God is calling His people out of the confusion into the true light of His love in Jesus.

The third angel's message warns against using force in matters of religion.

This is the warning: Don't take the mark of the beast. A "beast" in prophecy means a powerful kingdom. This one uses force in religion—something God never does. True worship comes only from love, never from coercion. The mark has to do with worship: either on the forehead (your choice) or on the hand (your actions). It'll be pushed by laws. But God's people stay loyal to Him because they know real love keeps freedom intact.

EXPERIENCE IT

These three messages are all about love. The gospel moves us to live for His glory and worship Him because we want to, not because we're forced. Any system that tries to control people's faith or force worship goes against everything Jesus stood for. Real love always protects religious freedom. That's why liberty of conscience is so important.

I'm choosing to listen to these messages. I accept the everlasting gospel, stand in awe of God, give Him glory with my life, and worship Him as Creator on His Sabbath. I reject all forced religion and take my stand with Jesus.

> God saves me while keeping my freedom intact.

God saves me while keeping my freedom intact. That's the best news ever. I serve Him with my whole heart, not because I have to, but because I want to.

What about you?

You in?





OUR LOVER IS COMING

Jesus is the true lover of our souls, and He's coming back to take us home forever as His bride.

GET IT

Back in Bible days, when a man wanted to marry a woman, he followed a common custom. First he'd woo her—show his love and see if she felt the same. Then came the courtship stage, during which they grew in their love. Once he proposed, he'd head back to his father's house to get a place ready for her. Before leaving, he'd promise, "I'm coming back for you." When everything was set, he'd return, he'd marry her, and they'd start their life together.

John the Baptist called Jesus our "bridegroom" (John 3:29).

Jesus said He came to woo us to Himself:

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32).

Not *push*, not *force*, but *draw*! That's love language. On the cross He showed us how deep His love goes.

Right before He left our world, Jesus told us:

"Let not your heart be troubled. . . . In My Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

He's coming back because He wants us with Him forever. The Second Coming is the wedding day.

PROCESS IT

So when is He coming?

Read Matthew 24:4-14 and make a list of the signs that will precede His Second Coming.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5 and list Paul's signs of the Second Coming.

The church's job is to spread the good news everywhere before He

returns (Matthew 24:14; Acts 1:8).

When Jesus went back to heaven, angels told the disciples, "This same Jesus . . . will come back in the same way you have seen him go" (Acts 1:11, NIV).

Explore how it's gonna go down:

- **How many people will witness the Second Coming of Jesus? Talk about Revelation 1:7.**
- **Why does Paul call the second coming of Christ "the blessed hope"? Talk about Titus 2:13.**
- **What is the major event we hope for that will happen when Jesus comes back? Talk about 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.**
- **How many of the holy angels will attend Jesus at His Second Coming? Talk about Matthew 25:31.**
- **Most important, how will Jesus distinguish those who are the sheep (the saved) from those who are the goats (the lost) at His Second Coming? Talk about Matthew 25:32-46.**

EXPERIENCE IT

This epic love story is portrayed in the Song of Solomon. It's straight fire—two people in love with each other, missing each other, talking about how strong their love is. At the peak of the song the woman says:

"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised" (Song of Solomon 8:6, 7, ESV).

Jesus loves you. Nothing can kill His love. On the cross He proved it. Jesus is coming back for His bride. He's not playing games. He wants you with Him forever.

> Jesus is coming back for His bride. He's not playing games. He wants you with Him forever.

Are you looking forward to seeing Him?

Let's pray this prayer together:

"Jesus, I'm Yours. Come soon. I can't wait to be with You forever."



Urban Life in the Word



GOD IS NOT A MONSTER

Because God is love, He will finally destroy those who stay in love with evil and refuse to let it go.

GET IT

We all know torture is wrong. Back in 1987 the whole world signed an agreement called the United Nations Convention Against Torture. It said that torture is never OK.

Something in us screams that causing endless pain is straight-up evil. If a person has no problem torturing someone, we call them a psychopath. So why would we believe that God is gonna torture millions of folks forever in fire?

One of the most popular sermons in history is called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." It portrays God as a cruel monster dangling people over flames for eternity. That's some horror movie stuff. The Bible teaches that God is just and merciful—even in the way He will finally deal with His avowed enemies.

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PROCESS IT

The idea of hell as a place where bad souls burn forever doesn't come from the Bible. It started in ancient pagan religions—Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome. When the church got mixed up with the pagan Roman Empire, they took on the pagan idea of hell.

Pagan gods, who were really "demons" (Psalm 106:34-38; Deuteronomy 32:16, 17), wanted human sacrifices. But the one true God called that out. **Read Jeremiah 19:5 and talk about it.** God said burning children never even enters His mind. If He hates that, how could He be cool with burning people alive forever?

The eternal torture idea starts with the lie that every soul lives

forever no matter what. It comes from the serpent in Eden: "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). But the Bible is clear—only God has immortality in Himself (1 Timothy 6:16). He gives immortality as a gift to people who accept Jesus. Check out Scripture on the topic:

- "Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Perish, not burn forever!
- "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Death, not torture!
- The wicked will be "ashes under the soles of your feet" (Malachi 4:3). Ashes, not eternally tormented souls!
- They'll be "as though they had never been" (Obadiah 16). Nonexistent!
- They vanish "into smoke" (Psalm 37:20).
- Even the devil himself will be turned to ashes, and "never shalt thou be any more" (Ezekiel 28:19, KJV).

What about verses that say "forever" and "eternal fire"? The Bible uses those words for complete destruction, not endless pain. Jonah was in the whale "forever"—meaning until the judgment was done, which was three days. Sodom and Gomorrah experienced "eternal fire," but they're ashes now, not still burning (Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6). The fire does its job completely, then stops. God's promise is that evil ends. In the new earth there will be "no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain" (Revelation 21:4). That couldn't be true if people will forever scream in pain.

EXPERIENCE IT

People who end up lost have killed the love inside their own hearts. They've practiced evil so long that they can't love anymore. Jesus called them those who "practice lawlessness" (Matthew 13:38-41)—folks who built their whole character around selfishness.

When someone destroys their very ability to love, the only loving and just thing left is to let them cease to exist. Even then it hurts God's heart: "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Torture is not in God's character. And because God is love, one day all evil will be gone for good. That alone makes God worth believing in.



Urban Life in the Word



ETERNAL FRIENDSHIP

The Bible promises a new heaven and a new earth—full of love with zero evil and pain.

GET IT

Picture this: The richest person on the planet offers you a private tropical island with a mansion full of everything you ever wanted—your favorite kicks, food, games, all of it. You'd be saying "Yes!" But then he adds one condition: "You gotta live there completely alone for the rest of your life. No family, no friends, ever." Suddenly your mind would be changed: "Nah, I'm good."

Why? Because deep down you know that life isn't about stuff. It's about relationships. Without them, even the flyest life is empty. With them, everything is good.

That's why the Bible talks about salvation in relationship language. Jesus didn't say, "I'm taking you to a luxury spot." He said:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

We're going to the Father. To the one who loves us most and best. Jesus showed us the Father's heart:

"He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

"The Father Himself loves you" (John 16:27).

The Creator wants to kick it with you forever. He doesn't just love you; He likes you.

PROCESS IT

When God first made people, He put them in a garden called Eden, which means "pleasure." That tells you what kind of God He is. He's the one who invented fun, joy, and good vibes.

He gave us eyes to see colors, ears to hear music, noses for good smells, tongues for delicious flavors, and hands to hold. He made our minds to wonder and our hearts to feel deep connection.

The world was built for us to enjoy Him and each other.

The first two chapters of the Bible show the world before sin messed it up. The last two chapters (Revelation 21; 22) show the world after sin is gone. God is bringing it full circle back to pure pleasure. Eden restored!

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). Then John repeats the best part three times: "The tabernacle of God is *with* men, and He will dwell *with* them. . . . God Himself will be *with* them and be their God" (verse 3).

"There shall be no more curse" (Revelation 22:3). All the broken stuff gets fixed. Animals chill together; kids play safe; no more tears, pain, or death. The earth gets healed. Our bodies get upgraded—strong and perfect, with no sickness. And here's the best part:

"In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

Eternal friendship!

EXPERIENCE IT

God's big dream is simple: He wants to be *with* us.

The New Jerusalem, the capital city of the new earth, is our eternal home with God and one another. The intimacy of the situation is described with one mind-blowing line:

"They shall see His face" (Revelation 22:4).

No middleman. No distance. Just face-to-face friendship with God forever.

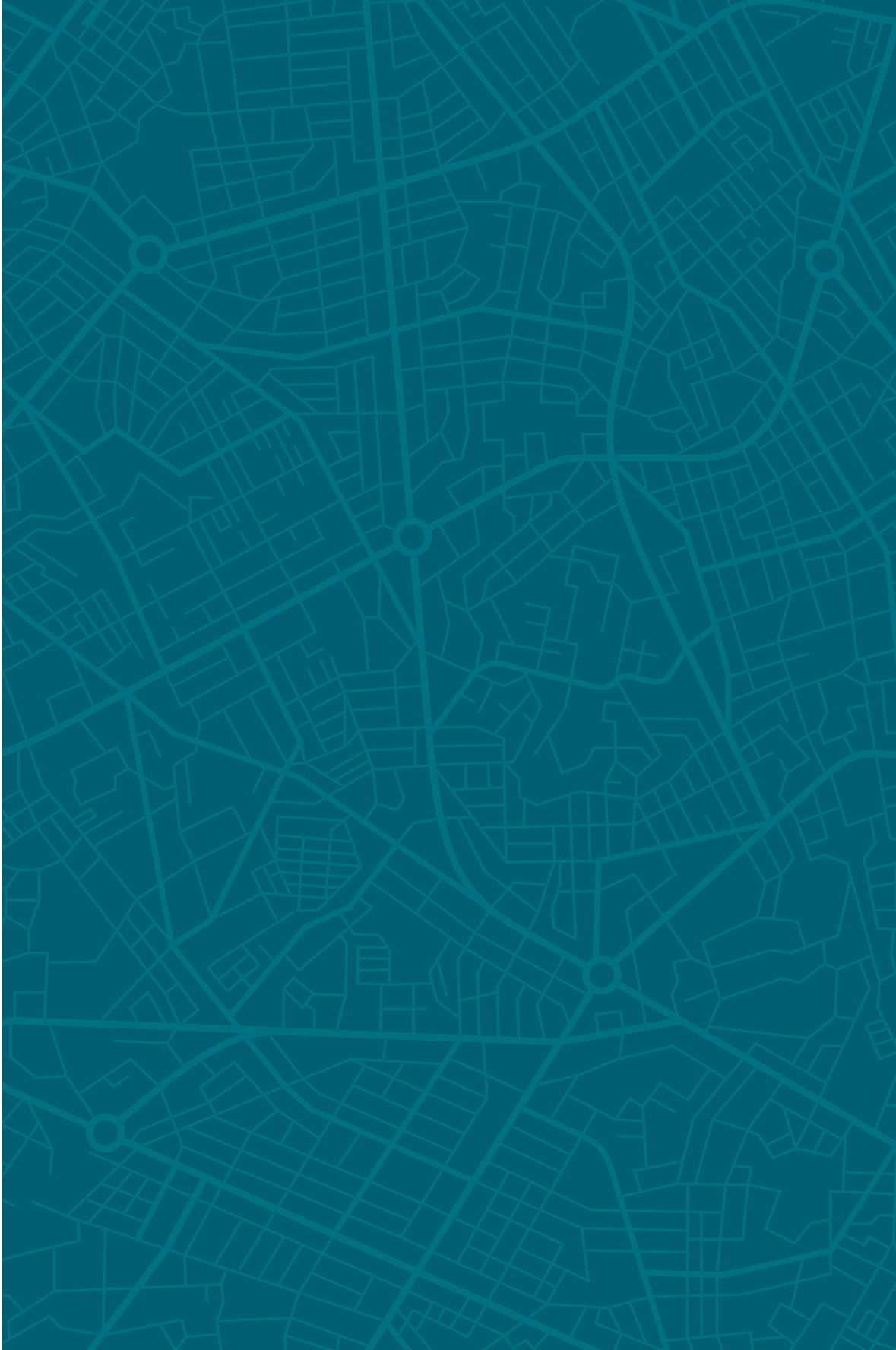
That's what salvation is all about—getting us back to real intimacy with our Creator.

No more pain. No more loneliness. No more sin tripping us up. Just love, joy, and peace.

If you want in on this eternal friendship, tell God right now:

"I know You love me. You want me with You forever. I'm down. Get me ready. I choose You. Amen."

No more pain. No more loneliness. No more sin tripping us up. Just love, joy, and peace.





General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists