

One of Us

12 LESSONS

ALL THINGS NEW

CREDITS

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JESUS

We often hear about historical figures such as Julius Caesar, Socrates, Alexander the Great, and Copernicus. Although the evidence for their lives is limited, few people question that they really existed.

Most historians also agree that Jesus of Nazareth was a real historical person, yet many people remain skeptical of the Gospel accounts.

Consider the evidence: historians accept Julius Caesar's life based on only a few hundred surviving manuscripts, with the earliest copies dating about 900 years after his death. In contrast, thousands of manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark exist, including some dating only 100 years after the original, showing how carefully the text was preserved.

JESUS IN HISTORY

Many people think all information about Jesus comes from the Bible, but several non-Christian writers also mention Him.

Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote for the Roman Empire, mentioned Jesus in his works when he spoke of James, "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ" (*Antiquities* 20.9.1). Josephus was not a Christian, so he had no reason to promote Christianity.

Besides Josephus, Tacitus, who is known as one of Rome's most reliable historians, wrote: "Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of . . . Pontius Pilatus" (*Annals,* Book 15, Chapter 44).

Other writers, including Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, Thallus, and Mara bar-Serapion, are also non-Jewish and non-Christian sources that mention Jesus.

Think about why it matters when someone outside a group confirms that a person existed. Why is this kind of outside confirmation important?

Still, just because outside sources confirm someone existed does not mean every story about them is true. The main challenge is the claim that Jesus is God and rose from the dead. Some people argue that His body was stolen and that the story was made up for power or influence. This means that the question of who Jesus is has always been closely tied to the resurrection, a subject of

debate from the earliest days of Christianity.

With this in mind, if Jesus' body was missing, why did the first Christians believe He had risen instead of thinking someone had taken the body?

To explore this question, it helps to think about a few key points:

One strong argument is not just the resurrection itself, but how quickly people began to believe in it. Many scholars believe that 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 includes an early Christian creed that Paul learned from others. Most agree it was written just a few years after Jesus died, which is too soon for legends to have formed.

Another strong reason to trust the Gospel accounts is that almost all the apostles, except John, were killed for their faith. If they had made up the story, it is unlikely they would have suffered and died for something they knew was false. Their willingness to give up everything for their message suggests they truly believed what they had seen and experienced.

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Another important point is how the resurrection stories are told. If the resurrection was just a legend, the Gospels would probably have described a dramatic scene with Jesus coming out of the tomb in triumph. Instead, the stories are surprisingly reserved, focusing on the confusion, uncertainty, and doubt of the witnesses.

Why did the resurrection, which the first Christians saw as real and life-changing, become the main focus of their message?

THINK ABOUT IT

Thinking about all this, if Jesus really did rise from the dead, what would that say about who He is?

With that answer, and the resurrection story in mind, how would you say the resurrection changes the way we look at Jesus' teachings?

If the resurrection really happened, what questions would that bring up for your own life?

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JESUS, THE PERSON

• KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

John 8:1-11; Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 23:1-5; Matthew 9:36; Luke 19:41; John 18:23

JESUS

When we meet someone for the first time, we usually want to know more than just what they have accomplished. We often wonder what kind of person they are.

Can she be trusted?

How does he treat people?

What is she like when no one is watching?

Do these questions help you really get to know someone?

Such questions as these become even more important when we think about Jesus.

Many people know a little about what Jesus taught. Some respect the impact He had on history, while others are unsure about religion. Still, no matter what someone believes, there is one question worth asking:

What kind of person was Jesus?

Rather than giving us a psychological profile, the Bible shares many stories that help us get to know Jesus.

So instead of beginning with religious ideas or doctrines, let's look at Jesus the way we would any historical figure—by noticing how He spoke, reacted, felt, and related to others.

Instead of beginning with religious ideas or doctrines, let's look at Jesus the way we would any historical figure—by noticing how He spoke, reacted, felt, and related to others.

To start, there are many stories to choose from, but John 8:1-11 gives us a clear picture of who Jesus is:

What do you notice?

Who seems most interested in the woman?

Who seems least interested in her?

What does Jesus refuse or choose not to do?

Back then, men and women did not have the same rights. Surprisingly, even in a religious society people often ignored women, those who were sick, and children. **What in this story shows that Jesus valued this woman differently from the way others did?**

Jesus showed compassion throughout His life. For example, He cared for people who were in danger, stressed, or treated unfairly (Matthew 9:36). Even when He was busy, He noticed and cared for each person (Mark 10:13-16).

What does His empathy tell you about Him?

Another important quality is Jesus' emotional stability and self-control. In stressful moments He stayed calm and tried to protect everyone, helping to ease conflict. Even when He was at risk, He would not allow injustice (John 18:23).

How did Jesus handle justice without harm? Is this approach seen today?

In this story and others, Jesus spoke out against religious corruption and abuse of power. This was not the only time; He also called out religious hypocrisy elsewhere (Matthew 23:1-5). Jesus, who said He was the Son of God, stood against any authority, religious or not, that hurt people in His name.

What do you think about Jesus speaking against abuse in religion?

THINK ABOUT IT

To sum up, Jesus truly loved people and wanted everyone to be free. In Luke 19:41 we even see Him weeping for others.

In Christianity the main point is what Jesus has done for us, not how good we are. It is more about Him than about us.

If Jesus truly reveals God as John claims (John 14:9), what do you think this suggests about God's character?

Would you be open to exploring what it might mean to know Him for yourself?

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THE DREAM AND THE LOST PRESENCE

KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

Genesis 1-3; Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8, 9

THE DREAM

Most stories that captivate us share a common structure, and this familiarity draws us in from the very start—a hero and a villain; something precious is at stake.

Why do these stories resonate so deeply?

Maybe it's because these stories reflect what we've already experienced, connecting our own lives with the stories we enjoy.

In movies the main characters are usually heroes. We are drawn to goodness and beauty, which is why we enjoy happy endings. This longing makes us ask:

Why do humans long for justice?

The Bible shows humanity caught in the middle of a larger conflict between God's purposes and the forces opposed to them. Seeing this bigger story helps us understand the dream God had for people.

Let's start with God's dream for us in Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:8-24. The Bible begins, not with a list of beliefs or rules, but with a story showing that people were made in God's image. This gave them dignity and freedom. They lived in God's presence and were created on purpose, not by accident.

They didn't know fear, shame, loneliness, or violence. Death was a choice, not a punishment. God's dream was full of color, life, loving relationships, and endless possibilities. The world was meant to thrive. Whether it stayed that way depended on people, not on God.

What do you think, after reading this, is the purpose of God for humanity?

THE LOST PRESENCE

When people talk about paradise, they usually think of the garden. But the Bible focuses on something deeper: God's presence.

It describes God walking and talking with people. As beautiful as the setting is, the greatest blessing isn't the garden—it's being with God.

But the conflict shifts to the villain through a single question, which becomes the turning point in the story.

"Did God really say . . . ?" (Genesis 3:1).

Notice that the serpent does not begin with force. He begins with distrust. He's not pointing to the form, the fruit. Instead, he's pointing to the substance—God can't be trusted. Does God truly want what is best for humanity? God's enemy presents independence as better than relationship, claiming that freedom and communion can't be part of the same equation.

> Where there was joy, peace, and awe, now there is fear, shame, and separation.

What accusations against God appear in this conversation? What do you think about them?

The story continues; read Genesis 3:2-10. The most tragic moments occur when Adam and Eve hear God approaching, as He so often did. Before, His presence was welcome. Now they hide. Where there was joy, peace, and awe, now there is fear, shame, and separation.

What is causing this sudden change in Adam and Eve's mood?

THINK ABOUT IT

The result is a broken relationship. Something has come between people and God, within themselves and between each other. The conflict isn't just outside anymore—it now lives inside them.

The Bible's story starts with God making a home and inviting people into His presence. Losing that presence wasn't just about breaking a rule. It was a choice to give up the relationship they were made for.

Could the struggle people experience within themselves reflect this deeper conflict?

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THE PRESENCE

KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

Exodus 25:8; John 1:14; John 2:19-21; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Revelation 21:22

THE PRESENCE

These days we can connect with people around the world in seconds. We join online meetings and keep in touch with hundreds of contacts, yet sometimes we feel more distant than ever.

Sharing information quickly is not the same as truly being present. When people face tough times, what often matters most is having someone who cares by their side, not just someone offering advice.

This idea of presence also shapes our picture of God. **If God is real, where is He?**

In the previous study we saw how Adam and Eve ran away from God. **So how does God respond when we distance ourselves?**

After Israel's rescue from Egypt, God gives instructions to the people:

"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8).

The main point here is not the building, but the idea of presence. The sanctuary was meant to show that God wanted to live among His people.

This stands out because many ancient religions viewed their gods as distant from daily life. But the God of the Bible moves toward people instead.

What does this verse suggest about God's attitude toward humanity?

What motivates God to desire dwelling among us?

A long time after this, John, one of Jesus' best friends, says this about Him:

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

Here John repeats the idea from Exodus, but takes it further. God becomes one of us and enters our world. Instead of showing anger, He shows endless love and chooses to live with us.

God becomes one of us and enters our world. Instead of showing anger, He shows endless love and chooses to live with us.

How would it change your picture of God if He personally entered human history?

But that is not the end of the story. For God, simply having a house nearby or even becoming one of us was not enough.

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Throughout the Bible God keeps moving closer: first living in a sanctuary, then coming into our world through Jesus, and now sending His Spirit to live among us. The direction is always the same: God closing the gap. It is not about a tent, a building, or a place. It's about us. This shows God's steady character, a God who never leaves us.

If God truly wants a relationship, how does that shape your view?

THINK ABOUT IT

The story of God and humanity ends like this:

"I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Revelation 21:22).

So the story comes full circle. The Bible begins with God walking with people in Eden and ends with God walking with us forever. It starts with separation and ends with eternal presence. We move from hiding from God to God living with us again.

If God's desire has always been to be present with humanity, what might be keeping us from His presence today?

And what would change if we allowed Him to move closer?

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BREATH

• KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

Psalm 23; Matthew 11:28-30; Exodus 33:14; Mark 2:27, 28

BREATH

Our culture struggles to rest. Life keeps us busy and always on the move. We are always working, producing, consuming, scrolling, comparing, planning, responding, and performing, which leaves little time to pause. Sometimes, even rest feels like just another thing to improve, whether it's a wellness routine or a meditation session.

Many people feel tired in their bodies, overwhelmed in their emotions, and unable to slow their minds. Silence can feel strange, and being still is not something we are used to.

Why do we find it so difficult to rest, and what causes the guilt many people feel when they stop?

The Bible shows that rest is more than just taking a break from being busy. It is a deeper gift that is tied to being with God.

One of the most famous poems in the Bible speaks directly to this modern relentlessness. Read Psalm 23. **What elements in this reading give you peace?**

Notice that danger and darkness are there too. For the sheep, rest comes from having the shepherd close. **Why do you think trust and rest go together?**

Jesus says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Jesus does not give self-help tips or promise a perfect escape. He simply says, "Come." You do not have to perform; you just need to be willing to receive.

What kinds of burdens do people carry today that are invisible to others?

Why do many people attempt to prove their worth through performance or accomplishments?

In your opinion, what kind of rest is Jesus inviting people to experience, and how is it

different from ordinary rest?

From the start of the Bible's story, God gave people a gift:

> It is often the case that religious people turn blessings and gifts into burdens and obligations.

a day of rest. In Hebrew both rest and Saturday are called the Sabbath. It is 24 hours to slow down and focus on what matters most—our purpose and loving relationships with others and with God. Jesus reminds us, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

What reasons might God have for creating rest as a gift for humanity?

By Jesus' time, rest had often become reduced to religious obligation and rules. It is often the case that religious people turn blessings and gifts into burdens and obligations.

Here Jesus brings the focus back to what God wanted. The Sabbath was meant to be a gift, not a burden. It is a weekly reminder that you are more than what you do, your worth is not something you earn, life is more than just getting by, and rest is part of being human.

THINK ABOUT IT

Each week we have a chance to refocus our hearts. It is a time to trust again and to be with the God who says, "Come to me."

Psalm 23 speaks of a Shepherd.

Jesus speaks of rest.

The Sabbath speaks of freedom.

What if true rest is not found in escaping life, but in learning to trust the One who walks with us through it?

What if the deepest exhaustion humans carry is not physical, but spiritual?

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THE PROMISE

• KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

Isaiah 9:2; Psalm 16:10; Matthew 8:16, 17; Acts 2:31

THE PROMISE

People today are more skeptical of promises than ever. Whether it's advertising or politics, trust is hard to come by. Sociologists say our culture feels unstable and always changing.[1] Values shift, jobs vanish, and institutions seem less reliable. Many feel that nothing is permanent.

We lose hope in people who break their promises. This is part of a bigger problem: trust is hard to find in today's world. Every promise needs trust, and believing one means relying on someone even when you can't see proof. Now that trust feels fragile.

Promises help us look forward. They show that someone is committed to being faithful. Philosophers say that promises are a way people push back against chaos and stick together when life is uncertain.[2]

A powerful promise stands at the heart of Christianity. The Bible says this promise points to someone who would bring lasting change. Christians later saw these ancient words as referring to Jesus, connecting old prophecies to their central belief.

> Every promise needs trust, and believing one means relying on someone even when you can't see proof.

What, then, is prophecy?

Some people think prophecy is just about predicting the future or cracking secret codes. Others connect it to dramatic end-of-the-world events.

In the Bible, prophecy deals with both the present and the future. Prophets talk about injustice happening now, but also about where history is headed and how promises shape what happens.

You can think of biblical prophecy as a story that's starting to unfold. It's like seeing a movie trailer—the scenes aren't complete,

but they hint at something bigger that's on the way.

With this in mind, what makes a promise or prophecy believable?

Think about this: the promise of Jesus' coming was mentioned more than 300 times. Here's one example:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. . . . And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

This verse was written when politics were unstable. People wanted peace, just as many do now. What's surprising is how hope shows up in this situation.

Change does not come through imposition of power.

Change does not come through political domination.

Change does not come through technological progress.

Change comes through a child.

Isaiah says real change would come through someone whose life shows peace and healing. This was a new way for people to think about power and hope.

In the Bible, peace—*shalom*—means more than just calm. It's about being whole and thriving in every part of life.

So what kind of peace do people really need in today's world?

THINK ABOUT IT

An ancient biblical text says:

"You will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay" (Psalm 16:10).

Early Christians saw this verse as closely linked to Jesus, especially His resurrection. To them, the promise of the "Prince of Peace" went even beyond death.

Christians believe that the resurrection shows that the future is full of hope, not emptiness. God hasn't left people behind. Because of this promise, history moves toward hope instead of loss.

What if the Prince of Peace didn't just promise a new future, but actually made it possible?

1 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Oxford, England: Polity Press, 2000).

2 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

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SERVICE

KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

Isaiah 52:1—53:12; Philippians 2:6-8; Luke 22:25, 26; Matthew 20:28; John 13:1-16

THE SERVANT LEADER

You wake up early and hurry out to beat the traffic. There's no music—just the voice of a CEO you admire. You listen closely and take mental notes. We often admire people who seem confident, build a strong image, and show their worth through results. In politics, business, fame, or social media, leadership is usually measured by power and performance. But we also get tired of scandals, manipulation, corruption, ego, and burnout.

Think about your own experience. What parts of leadership do you enjoy, and which ones are hard for you?

What if we are meant for more than just surface-level success? What if our purpose is something completely different?

Isaiah 52:15 shows us something different. Chapter 53 talks about a mysterious servant sent by God. Who is this servant? He is very different from the kings of His time. People back then, and even today, often think of leadership as power and influence.

> Jesus sees and loves people. He does not wait for us to come to Him, and He is not far away. Jesus is the servant who comes to you and stays near.

However, God sees things from a different perspective.

Jesus sees and loves people. He does not wait for us to come to Him, and He is not far away. Jesus is the servant who comes to you and stays near. A real leader is not above others, but is willing to come close to them.

Now let's look at Philippians 2:6-8. What do you think made Jesus leave heaven and come to be with us? If He is God, how would you describe the picture of God?

When Jesus came, many people thought He would be a political or military leader. He did not use fear or force to lead. Jesus did not try to rule with power or authority. Instead, He chose love, and real love helps people flourish.

Let's look at the difference in leadership. Read Luke 22:25, 26 and Matthew 20:28. What kind of leadership is Jesus showing compared to others?

Isaiah 53 explains Jesus' purpose and goals, which are not for Himself but for us. While kings often rule for their own benefit, God chooses to focus on us. Jesus came to give of Himself, not to promote Himself.

"But he lifted up our illnesses, he carried our pain" (Isaiah 53: 4, NET).

"Because of his wounds we have been healed" (Isaiah 53:5, NET).

This goes against what most people expect. The servant does not stay away from human suffering, but steps into it. Jesus experienced pain, rejection, injustice, and weakness.

Think about this different picture of leadership. If serving others is often seen as a weakness in our culture, why do you think God chooses to lead this way?

THINK ABOUT IT

Read John 13:1-16. In this story we begin to see Isaiah 53 lived out in real life.

Jesus shows who He is by doing what only servants would do. Judas was there, and Jesus washed his feet as well. The main thing about Jesus' character is love, which is the sign of His leadership. As followers of Jesus, we need to remember that Christianity is not just about loving Jesus; it is also about loving people like Judas. Now it is our turn to help others flourish.

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THE SON OF MAN VERSUS THE EMPIRE

• KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

Daniel 7; John 5:27; Matthew 25:31; 26:64; John 18:36

THE SON OF MAN VERSUS THE EMPIRE

Most of us do not use the word "empire" to refer to any current world powers, and yet we still live surrounded by systems that compete for our loyalty and shape the way we think. Some empires grew through conquest, while others relied on economics, ideas, or religion. Empires set the standards for what matters to people, such as security, progress, order, and national pride. Still, many of these systems end up causing fear, oppression, and dehumanization.

Today, even if we do not call them empires, big systems still shape our lives. Politics, the economy, technology, media, and culture all compete for our attention.

Which systems or environments in your own life resemble empires, and what makes them feel that way to you?

Daniel 7 begins with an unsettling vision.

The wild sea and strong winds bring out four fierce, strange, and scary beasts. One eats, another crushes, and another rules over others. Then a small, proud horn shows up and attacks the rest.

The "little horn" especially represents this spirit of arrogant power:

"This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully" (Daniel 7:8).

Why do you think power so often becomes destructive? Can you think of examples—personal, social, or historical—in which control or pride damaged people?

The little horn represents more than just one power. It shows the spirit of empire—systems focused on control, twisting the truth, and crushing anyone who disagrees. This issue is not only political but also deeply human and spiritual.

But then the vision shifts in a big way. History is not left to

chaos. Violence is not ultimate. The beasts are not eternal.

Daniel sees another figure approaching:

I saw "one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven" (Daniel 7:13).

Son of Man means "human one." Unlike the beastly empires, this figure is truly human. He shows a different kind of kingdom and ruler. In the Gospels, Jesus uses this title (John 5:27; Matthew 25:31; 26:64).

Why do you think Jesus preferred the title "Son of Man" instead of titles focused on power or status?

The kingdom of the Son of Man brings back true humanity. He does not use armies, and His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). When Jesus is offered power in this world, He declines it.

Daniel presents two completely different ways of living.

The kingdoms of the beasts dominate and control, imposing their will through force and fear. The kingdom of the Son of Man is defined by service, humility, and hope.

The kingdom of the Son of Man is defined by service, humility, and hope.

The empire tries to control, starts wars, consumes, crushes, and tramples others. The kingdom of Jesus seeks restoration.

The empire seeks control over conscience. The Son of Man seeks transformation of the heart.

The Bible says the future does not ultimately belong to the beasts. It belongs to the Son of Man.

THINK ABOUT IT

What would your relationships, workplace, family, or city look like if people lived with the spirit of the Son of Man instead of the spirit of empire?

What kind of world would exist if people truly lived this way?

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REAL LOVE

• KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 John 4; Matthew 22:37-40; John 13:35

REAL LOVE

Love is something we all seek and, at the same time, fear. We fear it because it is risky, because of bad experiences, or because we have given up on the idea that real love exists. Society has walked away from love references from the past, but it is lost in a pessimistic search for satisfaction and happiness.

What if real love is actually simpler than we think?

Most people want to be truly known and loved, but many relationships today feel fragile or broken. We often avoid commitment and are afraid to be vulnerable.

Think honestly about your own experience.

Why do you think people long for love so deeply, yet struggle to trust it?

What fears or disappointments make love difficult?

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Paul does not describe love as just attraction or strong feelings. Instead, he explains how love shows itself in real relationships.

Love is patient when people are difficult. Love remains kind in adverse circumstances. Love does not look for attention or try to control others. Love stays truthful and faithful. Love keeps going even when relationships get complicated.

> It is not just that God loves, but that love is at the very heart of who God is.

This view of love is very different from how people often see love today. Our culture usually shows

love as something that just happens and is all about feelings: "If I feel it, it is real. If the feeling disappears, love disappears too."

Paul describes love as more about commitment than just getting what we want. This kind of love can be beautiful and, at the same time, scary. Real love asks us to let down our guard and be open.

Which aspects of this description of love feel most attractive to you?

Which parts feel the most difficult or countercultural today?

John, one of Jesus' closest friends, wrote that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). God perfectly matches Paul's description of love. It is not just that God loves, but that love is at the very heart of who God is.

This idea changes how many people see God. God has been portrayed in history as distant, controlling, harsh, or uncaring. But the Bible shows a God who comes close to people with love.

John also writes:

"Perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

Fear often controls human relationships: fear of rejection, fear of abandonment, fear of being exposed, fear of not being enough,

Real love gives us a safe place instead of fear, a place where people don't need to hide, struggle, or suffer.

What would change if relationships were shaped more by trust than fear?

THINK ABOUT IT

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

Jesus teaches that the clearest sign of His kingdom is love—a love that is willing to serve, forgive, and support each other through weakness and failure.

In our world today, this kind of love stands out as very different.

What would change in your relationships, family, workplace, or community if people loved this way?

How could this kind of love help heal fear, loneliness, or brokenness in today's world?

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REAL COMMUNITY

• KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

Acts 2:42-47; Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; John 17

REAL BELONGING

Most people today feel invisible. People often say, "If you don't post it, it does not exist." Even though we are more connected than ever, many still feel alone. More ways to communicate have not solved problems such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness.

Still, we all want to belong. It is not just about being around others or being counted as part of a group. We want to be truly known and accepted, without having to put on a show.

Belonging is a deep human need. More than anything, people want to feel seen and welcomed. We all look for places where we do not have to prove ourselves all the time, places where we can be real.

Why do we so deeply crave belonging?

What defines authentic community today?

With these questions in mind, let's look at Acts 2:42-47.

The word "fellowship" comes from the Greek word *koinonia* (κοινωνία). It means deep sharing, partnership, and real participation. *Koinonia* is more than just being together. It is about sharing life in a deep way and being truly connected. It is a mutual belonging, generosity, friendship, support, and a spiritual connection.

The early Christians in these verses did not build their community around an institution. They shared meals, helped each other through their struggles, prayed together, and lived their daily lives side by side. They were not just listeners or followers of religious ideas. They became a family shaped by love and being there for each other. In the Bible, community is not just a crowd. It is a place where people truly belong.

What part of this community appeals to you?

What does modern society lack that this community had?

To see why community is important, look at the start of the Bible. God says, "It is not good for the [human] to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). This stands out because everything else in creation is called "good," while being alone is not.

> In real community, when one person suffers, everyone feels it. When one person is honored, everyone celebrates together.

We were made for relationships—with God, with other people, and with the world around us.

Paul uses the image of a body to explain community. He says people are like different parts of one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Each part is unique; every part is important. No one can say to someone else, "I do not need you."

This idea runs counter to the strong focus on individualism in today's culture. We were not made to live apart from others. In a real community, when one person suffers, everyone feels it. When one person is honored, everyone celebrates together.

What does this image say about the importance of belonging?

THINK ABOUT IT

Looking at these examples, we see that God wants a community in which people are connected by love, unity, and care for one another.

This does not mean everyone has to be the same or lose what makes them unique. Real community is built on real connections. It is about learning to love each other even when we are different.

How is authentic community different from a crowd?

What makes people feel safe enough to belong?

One of Us



REAL YOU

• KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

Isaiah 62:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 21:5

IDENTITY

We spend some part of our lives trying to figure out who we are, looking for identity in success, relationships, image, or experiences. Zygmunt Bauman, a well-known sociologist, pointed out that we often choose among different identities, adopting versions of ourselves shaped by what others expect, what we want, and what our culture tells us. The question of identity is at the heart of this struggle.

Today we have the freedom to shape our identity, but we also feel a lot of pressure to keep defining ourselves. This push and pull between freedom and pressure affects our search for who we really are, making the idea of true identity more important than ever.

What do you think most shapes the way people see themselves today?

We also often wish for a fresh start. Maybe we want to move on from past mistakes, live like the people we see online, or break out of our routines. Deep down, something keeps pushing us toward a new beginning and a version of ourselves we can feel good about.

> With all these different versions of ourselves, it is easy to feel lost.

This longing for a new identity shows up in both ancient and biblical history. In ancient Mesopotamia names showed a person's experience or purpose. In the Bible God often gives someone a new name when He calls them for a special purpose. This shows that a name is more than just a label; it reflects who

someone is and the story they are living.

What do you think God intends when He says: "You shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give" (Isaiah 62:2, ESV)?

With all these different versions of ourselves, it is easy to feel lost. The Bible views identity differently. It is not something we have to keep searching for or making on our own, but something God gives us.

Purpose is a big part of this story. It is important for shaping our identity. When Jesus started to live out His purpose, He did something that might seem unusual to us: He was baptized. Baptism is a Christian ritual with many meanings, but at its core it is about starting a new story about who you are.

Paul adds to this idea by speaking of something deeper than merely trying to change ourselves: "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Becoming a "new creation" does not mean acting as if the past never happened or inventing a false version of ourselves. It means we can truly be renewed on the inside.

What parts of our individual identities often feel broken or in need of a fresh start?

THINK ABOUT IT

At the end of the Bible, the book of Revelation gives us a powerful promise:

"Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5, ESV).

Based on this promise, the gospel tells us that renewal is possible. We can have a new beginning, a new identity, and a new way to live.

Maybe becoming the "real you" means focusing less on making yourself and more on letting God shape your identity—letting Him make you into who you are meant to be.

What would it mean for you personally if God could truly make things new in your life?

What parts of your identity, story, or inner life need a reboot today?

One of Us



FRIENDS DON'T LIE

• KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

John 14:1-3; Revelation 21:4; John 3:16; Revelation 22

THE PROMISE KEEPER

Voices today urge us to focus on the present moment. The future can feel uncertain and unstable. Climate anxiety, wars, economic crises, rapid change . . .
These elements cause many to hesitate in hoping for more.

At the same time, people are often skeptical of anyone claiming to know the future. We live in a world full of conspiracy theories and false predictions. People often distrust religion for similar reasons.

Because of this negative view of the future, many people look for meaning in short-term experiences. Even when life seems busy or full, there is often a quiet feeling that something is missing. In times like these, it helps to pause and think.

Is it possible to have a future with hope?

What kind of future gives people hope?

With these questions in mind, let's move to John 14:1-3. Here the scene shifts to a moment when Jesus speaks to His disciples shortly before His death. They are anxious and afraid of losing Him. Into that uncertainty Jesus says:

> Jesus talks about a future in which there is no more separation, and fear and uncertainty do not win in the end.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. . . . My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me" (John 14:1-3).

Jesus talks about a future in which there is no more separation, and fear and uncertainty do not win in the end. He speaks in a personal way: ". . . that you also may be where I am" (verse 3).

What stands out to you in Jesus' promise?

Do people continue to imagine a better future? Why?

The Bible ends with a picture that connects to Jesus' promise. In Revelation 22 the world is made new. God lives with people. There are no more tears, death, pain, or sadness (Revelation 21:4). The last image in the Bible is one of love restored, with God filling the emptiness in us.

The Bible does not promise that people will save themselves through technology, progress, or power. Instead, it says that God has not left us, and that everything is moving toward being made whole again.

These passages focus on the idea that Jesus keeps His promises. In John 14 He says He will come back. In Revelation 22 Jesus repeats these final words:

"Yes, I am coming soon" (verse 20).

The Bible starts with people losing their home in Genesis, but it ends with that home being restored.

THINK ABOUT IT

Maybe our desire for safety and belonging points us to a deeper story. Perhaps we feel there is a world we were meant for, and Jesus' promise could answer that longing.

What if hope is not just an illusion, but a promise?

With that in mind, the next question is whether Jesus is someone we can trust. If He really keeps His promises, then hope can be stronger than fear, and trust can be greater than disappointment.

What kind of life would grow from believing that?

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists