

LESSON 1

WHY STUDY RELATIONSHIPS?

Exercises

The Neverending Crowds

Jesus' ministry revolved around people. Our Messiah—God in the flesh, the all-powerful Lord of Creation—chose to live among us. Day after day, Jesus reached out to others, even when He felt tired.

- ▶ Let's look at just one slice of Jesus' time on Earth. Read the following passages in **Matthew 13-14** and mark the correct ending for each sentence.

Matthew 13:53-58 – When Jesus taught at His hometown *synagogue* in Nazareth, the people there . . .

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> trusted Him because of His family reputation. | <input type="checkbox"/> did not believe Him. | <input type="checkbox"/> did not even remember Him. |
|--|---|---|

Matthew 14:9-13 – After hearing that His relative John had been killed by King Herod, Jesus . . .

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> preached against the king. | <input type="checkbox"/> spent time with His friends. | <input type="checkbox"/> went to a quiet place alone. |
|---|---|---|

Matthew 14:13-21 – When Jesus saw a huge crowd that had followed Him around the Sea of Galilee, He . . .

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> blessed them and got back into the boat. | <input type="checkbox"/> felt compassion, healed their sick, and fed them. | <input type="checkbox"/> condemned them for ignoring His grief. |
|---|--|---|

Matthew 14:22-23 – When Jesus was finally alone, He chose to . . .

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> hike a mountain and pray. | <input type="checkbox"/> walk along the sea. | <input type="checkbox"/> travel back to His hometown. |
|--|--|---|

Matthew 14:24-27 – Meanwhile, Jesus' disciples got caught in a storm. So Jesus . . .

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prayed for them. | <input type="checkbox"/> found new followers. | <input type="checkbox"/> walked out to them on the sea. |
|---|---|---|

Matthew 14:28-36 – After Jesus calmed the storm and made it back to shore, another crowd surrounded Him and tried to . . .

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> attack Him. | <input type="checkbox"/> touch His robe. | <input type="checkbox"/> offer Him food. |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|

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Understand that Jesus was both fully God and fully human—meaning He always did the right thing, but He also felt pain and weariness, just like us.

▶ In Matthew 13-14, how did Jesus show His Godhood?

▶ In those same passages, how did Jesus show His humanity?



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Answers will vary. Jesus showed love, and He performed miracles like feeding the crowds and walking on water.

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- ▶ In those same passages, how did Jesus show His humanity?

Answers will vary. Jesus got tired, weary, and sad. He needed rest.



Weakness and Faith

Some parts of Jesus' ministry don't make sense, at first. If Jesus was God and could do anything He chose to do—like feed thousands of people or walk on water—why did He let Himself be tired or hungry?

▶ Read **Hebrews 4:14-16** and complete the following summary statements.

- Because _____ is our **priest**, we should cling to our belief.
- He understands and empathizes with our _____.
- He was _____ just like us, but He did not sin.
- Now we can go confidently to the throne of _____.
If we ask God for help, He'll give us what we need.

Jesus became human to show us empathy and hope. He suffered the same kinds of stress and pain we do, but instead of falling into sin, He proved that there's always a way to do right and show love, no matter the situation.

In Christianity, weakness is nothing to fear or condemn. After all, compared to God, we're all weak and helpless.

▶ Read **2 Corinthians 12:9**, where Paul shares something Jesus told him. Summarize Paul's view of human weakness.

Our weakness reminds us that we need God. To see God work through us, we just need humility and faith.

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- Now we can go confidently to the throne of **grace** _____.
If we ask God for help, He'll give us what we need.

Jesus became human to show us empathy and hope. He suffered the same kinds of stress and pain we do, but instead of falling into sin, He proved that there's always a way to do right and show love, no matter the situation.

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- ▶ Read **2 Corinthians 12:9**, where Paul shares something Jesus told him. Summarize Paul's view of human weakness.

Answers will vary. Paul believed that his weakness gave him an opportunity to see the strength of Christ.

Our weakness reminds us that we need God. To see God work through us, we just need humility and faith.



▷ Look back at **Matthew 14:24-32** and mark the correct answers.

• **Out on the sea, what was Peter willing to do (v. 28)?**

- Throw a rope out to Jesus
- Row the boat closer to Jesus
- Walk out on the water to Jesus

• **Peter trusted at first, but what distracted him (vv. 29-30)?**

- Jesus' instructions
- The wind and the waves
- The shouts of the disciples

• **After taking hold of Peter, what did Jesus ask him to think about (vv. 31-32)?**

- How anyone could walk on water
- Why he doubted
- The danger of storms

We're all like Peter. We have a little faith, but we can get distracted. It's in our nature to fear and to doubt—and in a way, that's healthy. Caution keeps us from stumbling into danger. Storms *should* be a little scary.

But if we want a good relationship with God—and other people—we must learn to trust and follow Jesus. We might take little steps at first, careful of the waves, and we might even start to sink. But as we keep our eyes on Jesus, walking toward Him, He will keep us in His hands (John 10:29).

▷ The writer of Hebrews pictures our faith as a race. Read **Hebrews 12:1-2** and finish the following summaries.

- As believers, we should _____ every sinful distraction.
- We should run this race with _____.
- And we should look to Jesus, the _____ of our faith.

We can't force ourselves to have more faith. We need God to build that up inside us. We can only seek Him, follow Him, and watch Him fulfill our trust. He will lead us to a better, closer relationship with Him, which will help us build better, closer relationships with other people.



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Self-Reflection

- ▶ Think about the relationships you consider the most important. Write down three people—close or distant—that have a big impact on your life.

- _____
- _____
- _____

- ▶ What about relationships seems difficult? What could keep you from connecting to others in healthy ways?

- ▶ Think about one relationship that sparks some worry or fear. How would you like to improve your relationship with this person?

- ▶ As you work through this book, what are some relationship skills you'd like to learn?

- ▶ Finally, write at least three relationship questions you'd like answered by your study this year.

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Meditation

▶ Read **Hebrews 11**.

- What things cannot be proven—that is, what beliefs can we accept *only* by faith (vv. 1–3, 6)?
- What did God do through the faithful people listed in this chapter?
- What do we have that these Old Testament believers did not (vv. 39–40)? What truth has God given us to make our faith stronger?

Vocabulary

- **Relationship** – A meaningful, recognizable connection between one person and another
- **Prophet / Prophetess** – In Scripture, someone with a message from God; a person who shares God's truth, sometimes about the future
- **Disciple** – A student who follows a teacher; in Scripture, one of Jesus' followers
- **Grace** – In Christian tradition, undeserved goodness, favor, or blessing from God
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LESSON 2

GOD OUR CREATOR



Exercises

God's Image in You

Important to your relationships is your concept of *self*. You can't relate to people well unless you first have an idea of who and what you are.

- Think about how other people your age form their identity. What things do they base their identity on?

Different people construct their self-concept in different ways:

- Some people depend on their family.
- Others point out what makes them different or unique.
- And some define themselves by what they do.

These ideas are all part of us, but as believers who trust Christ, we can find a new and even better self through God.

In the Beginning

- Read **Genesis 1:27** and complete the following:

- God created _____ in His own image.
- God created both _____ and _____.

God gave us His image, even if we don't fully understand the idea. But Scripture does explain that we have a spiritual dimension to our being—something that points to a higher reality.

Just like a painting is more than simply brushstrokes on a canvas, we are more than atoms and cells and organs. Our thoughts can, in a tiny way, reflect the thoughts of God Himself. We can know truth, beauty, and a joy that transcends the physical world. Most importantly, we can know God.

Respecting God's Image

Yes, we have tarnished God's image with our sin. With our hatred, our lies, and our selfishness, humanity has twisted this likeness into something often grotesque. But the image is still there, and we should honor it out of respect for God Himself.

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Yes, we have tarnished God's image with our sin. With our hatred, our lies, and our selfishness, humanity has twisted this likeness into something often grotesque. But the image is still there, and we should honor it out of respect for God Himself.

▷ After the flood, as Noah and his family prepared to rebuild society, God gave them some instructions. Read **Genesis 9:1-7**.

- What did God tell the people to do (v. 1)?

- What would be the penalty for murder (vv. 5-6)?

- This punishment seems paradoxical, so what's the reason for it? What makes murder so bad (v. 6)?

▷ To dishonor God's image, we don't even need to do something so extreme as murder. Read **James 3:8-10** and complete the following summaries:

- No one can seem to control the _____.
- Ironically, we can use this to bless _____
_____ and also _____
the people made in His image.
- From the same mouth comes both blessing and cursing. This should _____.

How can we better honor God's image—in ourselves and in others? By imitating Jesus. He is the perfect image of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), and He showed us how a human could act exactly as God intended. If we love like Jesus loves, we too can reflect God to others. We can bear His image proudly, and we can help other people discover His blessings.

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Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the world.

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-
-

▶ After the flood, as Noah and his family prepared to rebuild society, God gave them some instructions. Read **Genesis 9:1-7**.

- What did God tell the people to do (v. 1)?

Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the world.

- What would be the penalty for murder (vv. 5-6)?

Death

- This punishment seems paradoxical, so what's the reason for it? What makes murder so bad (v. 6)?

God made humanity in His own image.

▶ To dishonor God's image, we don't even need to do something so extreme as murder. Read **James 3:8-10** and complete the following summaries:

- No one can seem to control the _____.
- Ironically, we can use this to bless _____
_____ and also _____
the people made in His image.
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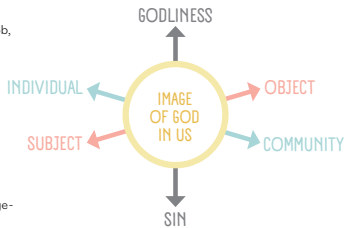
How can we better honor God's image—in ourselves and in others? By imitating Jesus. He is the perfect image of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), and He showed us how a human could act exactly as God intended. If we love like Jesus loves, we too can reflect God to others. We can bear His image proudly, and we can help other people discover His blessings.

Identity Conflicts

Many people experience crises of identity throughout their lives.

- We wonder about our own likes and dislikes, needs and wants.
- We wonder how we'll present ourselves to the rest of the world.
- We wonder about the kinds of people we'll build our lives around.
- We wonder what to choose for a job, career, or course of study.
- We wonder how people will remember us after we've died.

Most of these conflicts boil down to three tensions of identity, illustrated to the right. As we learn to recognize these tensions, we can better navigate conflicts and establish a meaningful identity as image-bearers of God.



Tension 1: Godliness vs. Sin

This will remain a moral conflict our entire lives: will we follow Jesus or will we follow sinful desires? No matter how old or wise we get, we'll always struggle with sin, at least in some way. The minute we think we've conquered sin, we've fallen to perhaps its oldest expression—pride.

▸ Read the following passages and match each sentence to its best ending.

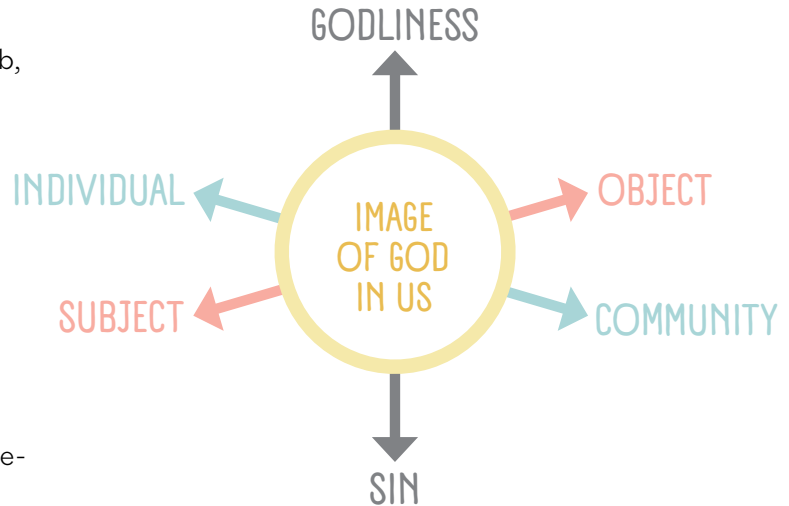
Romans 12:2 – We should not conform to the world around us, but rather be . . .	A. a new creation.
2 Corinthians 5:17 – If we are in Christ, we are . . .	B. an example to follow.
Ephesians 5:1-2 – We should imitate God just like . . .	C. beloved children.
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Tension 2: Subject vs. Object

We have both *objective* and *subjective* dimensions:

- **In a way, we are objects.** We have human bodies vulnerable to weakness, sickness, and injury. Much of our environment is outside our control. We didn't choose our parents, our biological makeup, or our birthplace. These things all shape our identity.
- **And we are also subjects.** We are self-aware beings with a mind and a will. We can choose how to respond to our challenges, and we can use our gifts for good or evil. We can shape our own identity.

▷ Read the following passages and complete the summaries:

- **Psalm 139:13-14** - Here David writes that God formed his body in his mother's womb—and that he was _____ and _____ made.
- **1 Peter 2:16** - We believers should live as free people, using our freedom not as an excuse to do evil, but to serve _____.

If we view ourselves only as objects . . .	If we view ourselves only as subjects . . .
We hold a materialist worldview, thinking we're animals made of organs, cells, and atoms—and nothing more. We succumb to determinism , believing our choices are the result of biological, social, and environmental factors. We have no freedom and therefore no responsibility.	We fail to recognize the effects of our culture and environment. If we're not aware of our unique background and influences, we may become egocentric , expecting everyone to act and think exactly like us. We may also become detached from physical reality, thinking we can <i>do</i> or <i>be</i> anything we choose.

This tension between *freedom* and *limits* is not a moral conflict between good and bad. Wise Christians will recognize both dimensions and choose to do right, no matter the circumstances.

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If we view ourselves only as objects . . .	If we view ourselves only as subjects . . .
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Tension 3: Individual vs. Community

Finally, there's always some tension between our individual *integrity* and our communal relationships. We all have unique strengths, needs, and experiences, but we also find belonging in groups.

- **We are individuals.** God has a unique purpose and plan for each of us. We don't always need to follow the rest of the crowd. We must do right even when no one else will. By God's grace, we can stand alone against a hostile culture.
- **We are also members of communities.** No one is truly alone. God gave us families, churches, and communities, and these relationships strengthen us. By learning, serving, failing, and succeeding in these groups, we find belonging and purpose.

▷ Read the following passages and complete the summaries:

• **Daniel 1:8-9** - After Daniel was kidnapped from his homeland and taken to Babylon, he still followed God's law and refused to _____

_____.

• **1 Corinthians 12:12-14** - Here Paul pictures the church as a body with many _____, all of which can work together, no matter our background.

If we view ourselves only as individuals . . .	If we view ourselves only as members of a community . . .
We may withdraw from others, considering only our own wants and needs. We may struggle to find any purpose or meaning higher than ourselves.	We may ignore our own needs. We may go along with whatever the crowd chooses—good or bad—and spend our lives trying to copy whatever group we're in.

Again, this is not a moral conflict. In some ways, we must think and act alone, depending only on God. But often we should relate and respond to people around us. Godly wisdom can help us apply these perspectives at the right time and place.

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Self-Reflection

▸ Describe yourself below using the fewest, most important words possible.

<p>My Heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where I came from• What I've done• Who I used to be <p>See Genesis 1:27 and Romans 3:9-18.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>My Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where I am now• What I do now• Who I am now <p>See Romans 5:6-10 and 8:14-17.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>My Destiny</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where I'm going• What I hope to do• What I hope to be <p>See 1 John 3:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 13:11-12.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

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- Who I am now

See **Romans 5:6-10**
and **8:14-17**.

My Destiny

- Where I'm going
- What I hope to do
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See **1 John 3:2-3** and
1 Corinthians 13:11-12.

Meditation

▶ Read **1 John 3**.

- For believers, what part of our destiny is certain (vv. 2, 23-24)?
- If we choose to abide in Christ, what will we put away (vv. 4-6)?
- If we choose to follow Christ's example, what will we do instead (vv. 11, 16)?

Vocabulary

- **Yahweh** – Term used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to God; means "I am"
- **Covenant** – A strong, binding promise, often between two parties
- **Sovereignty** – In Scripture, God's absolute control over all things, despite acts of evil and rebellion against Him
- **Holiness** – In Scripture, a word to describe God's unique perfection and exaltation
- **Sin** – The rejection of God and His goodness; disobeying God's commands
- **Materialism** – The view that all things can be explained by physical processes and that no spiritual realms exist
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LESSON 3

GOD OUR SAVIOR

Exercises

The Ministry of Jesus

- You may already know a lot about the teaching and miracles of Jesus, but to refresh your memory, look through the following passages in Matthew and match each sentence to its best ending.

Matthew 4:17 – Jesus told people to turn from their sins because . . .	A. a man who was paralyzed.
Matthew 5:1-12 – Jesus taught that God’s kingdom belonged to . . .	B. He would die and rise again.
Matthew 7:12 – Jesus challenged people to do for others . . .	C. hypocritical false prophets and teachers.
Matthew 7:15-17 – Jesus warned His followers against . . .	D. <i>parables</i> —that is, brief stories with a lesson.
Matthew 9:1-8 – To show His power, Jesus healed and forgave . . .	E. the God of Israel.
Matthew 13:1-3 – Jesus often taught using . . .	F. the kingdom of heaven was coming soon.
Matthew 15:29-31 – When Jesus healed many people, they praised . . .	G. the Messiah, the Son of God.
Matthew 16:21 – Jesus warned His disciples that . . .	H. those who showed love, humility, gentleness, and mercy.
Matthew 26:63-66 – When arrested and questioned by the high priest, Jesus acknowledged that He was . . .	I. what they wished others would do for them.

To minister means to serve, and Jesus surprised everyone by dedicating His time on Earth to service. He was supposed to be a king, but He acted like no other king has. Day after day, as His followers slowly realized His identity as Messiah and Son of God, He continued to show gentleness and humility—even taking time to wash His disciples’ feet on the night before He died.

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To minister means to serve, and Jesus surprised everyone by dedicating His time on Earth to service. He was supposed to be a king, but He acted like no other king has. Day after day, as His followers slowly realized His identity as Messiah and Son of God, He continued to show gentleness and humility—even taking time to wash His disciples’ feet on the night before He died.

	Jesus healed and forgave . . .	
<i>D</i>	Matthew 13:1-3 – Jesus often taught using . . .	F. the kingdom of heaven was coming soon.
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- ▷ Read **John 13:12-17** and summarize why Jesus served His disciples in such a menial way.

We can't do everything Jesus did, and our own ministry will look very different. But everything we do should reflect this same kind of love.

The Sacrifice of Jesus

As the Creator God Himself, Jesus designed the laws of right and wrong. He alone decides whether we are perfectly righteous or we deserve eternal punishment. Yet because He loves us, He bore all the punishment that we deserve. He chose to take all the consequences of sin on Himself.

- ▷ Read **Matthew 27:24-61** and in the following table, briefly describe the suffering that Jesus endured for our sake.

v. 26	<hr/> <hr/>
vv. 28-30	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
v. 31	<hr/> <hr/>
v. 35	<hr/> <hr/>
vv. 37-44	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
vv. 46-50	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

In this passage, we see just a glimpse of what we deserve without God—pain, derision, and separation from Him. But as we read this horrific account, we can begin to appreciate God's love for us. We see how far He went to redeem us back to Himself.

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Jesus set an example of the kind of humility and care that His followers should show each other.

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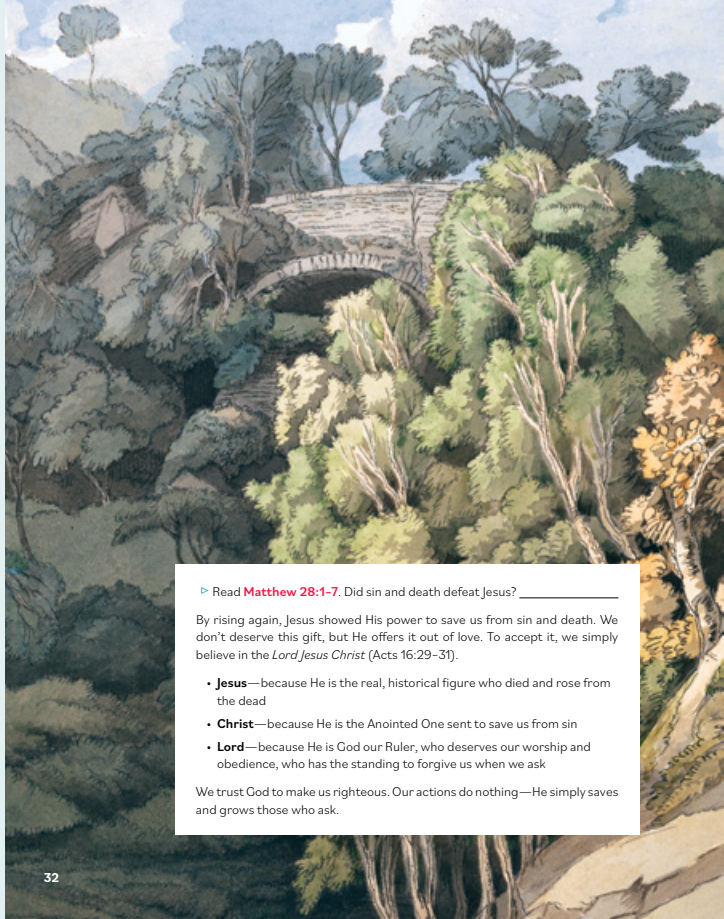
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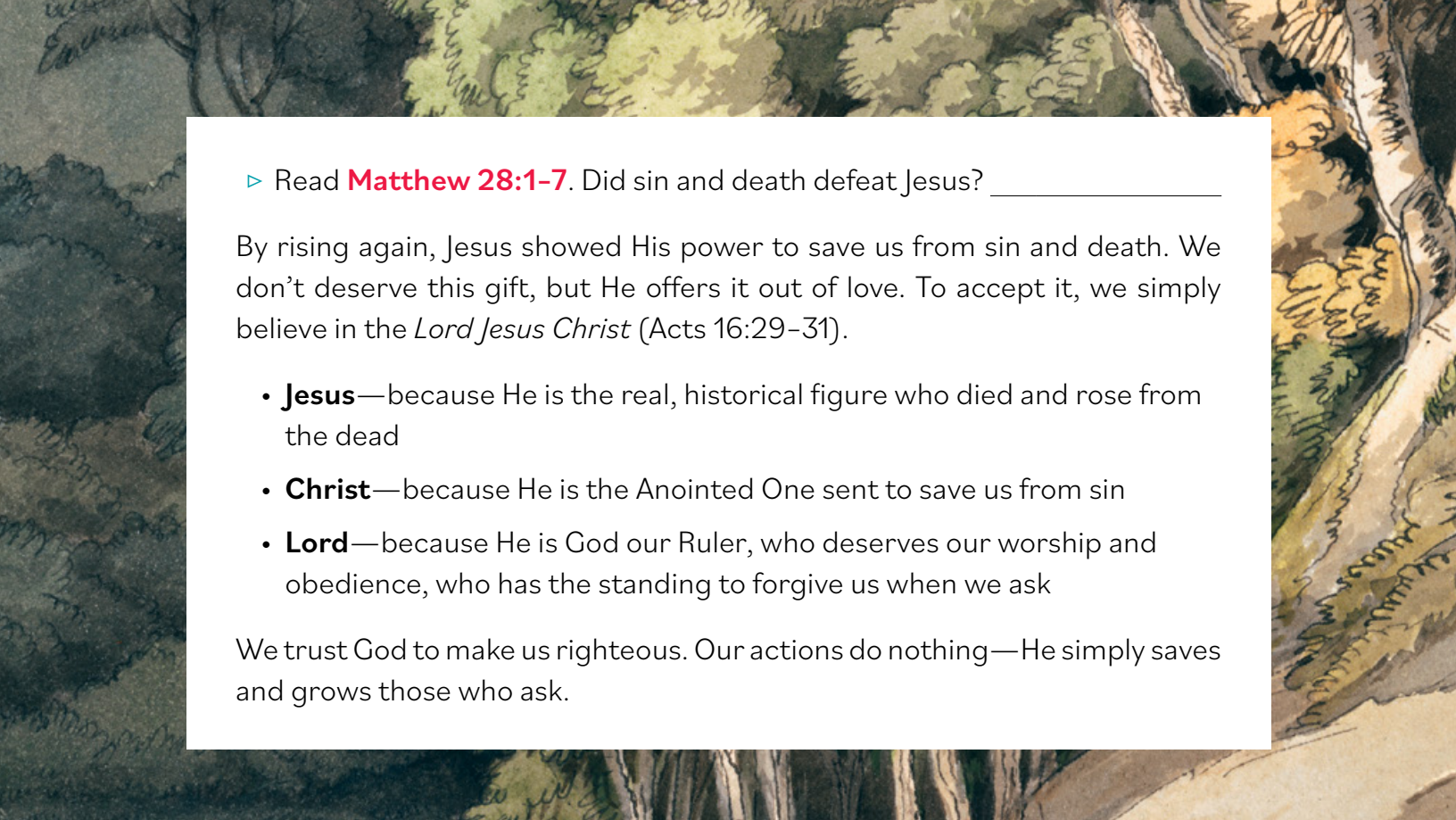


► Read **Matthew 28:1-7**. Did sin and death defeat Jesus? _____

By rising again, Jesus showed His power to save us from sin and death. We don't deserve this gift, but He offers it out of love. To accept it, we simply believe in the *Lord Jesus Christ* (Acts 16:29-31).

- **Jesus**—because He is the real, historical figure who died and rose from the dead
- **Christ**—because He is the Anointed One sent to save us from sin
- **Lord**—because He is God our Ruler, who deserves our worship and obedience, who has the standing to forgive us when we ask

We trust God to make us righteous. Our actions do nothing—He simply saves and grows those who ask.

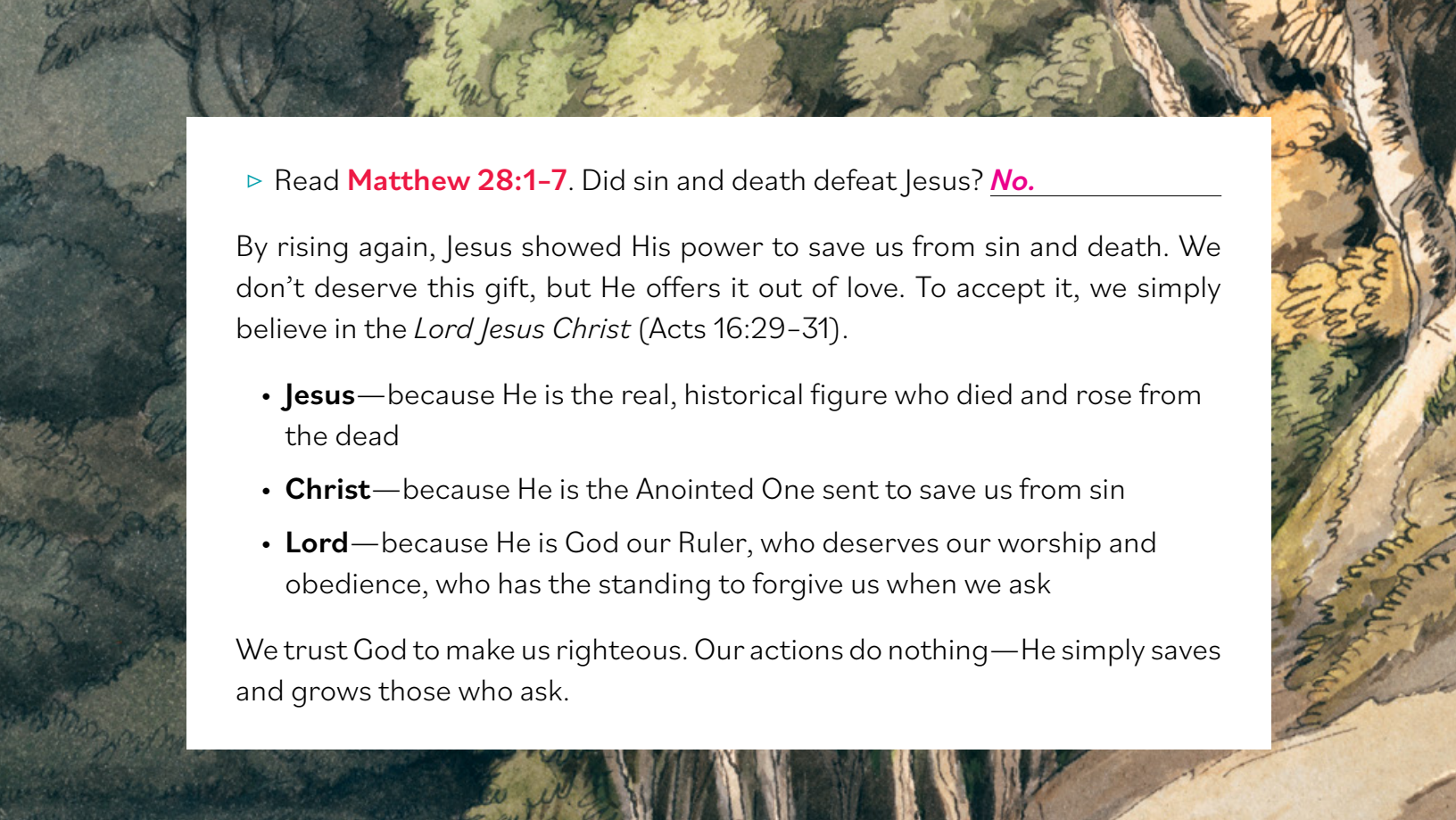


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Self-Reflection

For this section, take some time to think about your spiritual journey thus far. Answer the following questions as best you can, even if you don't remember some of the details. No one's story is the same, so don't worry if your memories don't sort neatly into the questions below.

- ▶ How would I describe myself before accepting Christ?

▶ Who helped turn me toward God?

▶ How did I accept Christ? What prompted the decision, and what followed?

- ▶ How do I enjoy helping others now? What am I good at? What skills would I like to develop in the future?

▸ What struggles in my life most concern me now? What things still don't make sense?

▸ Where can I go for advice? What resources has God given me? Who can listen or help?

By answering these questions, you've begun to meditate on God's work in your life. Your story has just begun to take shape, but even now you should be able to see God's grace on display.

Meditation

▸ Read **John 17**, which records Christ's prayer the night before His death.

- What was Christ's primary purpose in coming to Earth (vv. 1, 6)?
- Who was Christ praying for (v. 20)?
- What was His motivation? What blessing did He want for us (v. 26)?

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Vocabulary

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- **Messiah** - An "anointed one," or someone chosen to fulfill a special purpose; in Scripture, the Savior Jesus
- **The Trinity** - A word referring to three equally divine Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—existing as one unified God
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